

**SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CAPITAL: EMPOWERMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
IN THE MOUNTAINS OF ESCAZU, COSTA RICA**

BY

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Over the last half century, "world development" has become a major goal of humanity. This objective has been supported by numerous evolving theories and has been attempted by abundant practices. Development aid has gone from "developed" nations to serve "underdeveloped" nations in this quest, but the goal of development has remained elusive. Although much energy has been exerted by many to advance world development, the overall results still seem dismal. Poverty, hunger, and environmental destruction continue to loom before us. Conventional development, which sought to remedy these ills by stimulating economic growth, often wrought environmental destruction and human misery in its wake. Critiques and counter-theories emerged in search of alternate roads to development, but mostly to no avail. Thus, the last of the development perspectives of this century, under the vague rubric of "sustainable development", has stressed the need for reconciling all the previous contradictions of development, so that economic growth be reconciled with environmental protection, the objectives of the State with those of civil society, and the needs of present generations, with those of the future. Sustainable development appears to be our last hope for truly achieving improved life conditions for the vast majorities. At least it sets the groundwork for no longer making it acceptable to compromise vast sections of people's "lifeworld", such as their cultures and their environment, to satisfy a singular aspect such as national economic growth. The global consensus of sustainable development as the accepted development paradigm seems to be saying that "if sustainable development can't achieve what we are striving for, nothing will."

In this dissertation I will examine the intimate workings of civil society in its attempts at sustainable development. This study focuses on the efforts of a small community organization in Escazú, Costa Rica between 1989 and 1998 to protect and improve local life quality in a context where the ideology of sustainable development prevailed. I examine how strategies of sustainable development were forged, what resources, including economic, social and cultural, were mobilized, and finally, how the ideology of sustainable development with its emphasis on reconciliation actually helped or hindered reaching the goals of social, environmental and economic sustainability.

Entering the Field

In 1989 I received support from the University of New Mexico to carry out exploratory research on peasant environmentalists in Costa Rica. I only had two months during the university summer break to carry out my exploratory work. Fortunately, only a few days after arriving in Costa Rica, a round table-seminar on Environment and Community Action was announced in the newspaper. When I arrived in the evening, three of the six panelists were seated facing an almost empty auditorium except for two other people and myself. After waiting half an hour past the scheduled time, five other people arrived. After some brief murmurs the panelists offered to go ahead with the round-table despite the meager audience, out of respect for those of us who did have an interest in the subject. One member of the audience suggested that it was probably not a general lack of interest in the subject, but rather a greater interest of most people in attending a conference on world peace being held at the same time and where the Dalai Lama was guest speaker.

This was my first fieldwork encounter with efforts that began to appropriate and implement the concept of sustainable development. Despite the absence of half of the panelists (two government institutions and one private organization), the conference began to reveal some of the local undercurrents that informed the concept of sustainable development. Moreover, it opened an important door for me to continue investigating the subject well into the following decade as a full-fledged participant and observer. The three panelists were a representative of the government institution DINADECO (National Directorate for Community Development), a representative of the newly formed MEC (Costa Rican Environmentalist Movement), and a representative of the community organization CODECE (Committee for the Defense of

the Mountains of Escazú). This last was quite a surprise for me, on encountering an experience of this sort in my home town of Escazú.

I should clarify here that I am Costa Rican. However, after the first two years of my life, my father was hired by the United Nations, spending the next twenty years mostly outside of Costa Rica along with his family. Except for home visits every two summers, one year in high school in 1973, and three years of graduate school in tropical ecology at the University of Costa Rica between 1984 and 1987, I had not lived in my native country. By 1989, when I began exploratory fieldwork in anthropology, my parents had already been in Costa Rica for seven years, retired and dedicated to restoring adobe houses and growing coffee. Back in the house where I was born, in my home town of Escazú, I never stopped feeling somewhat of an outsider, despite the uncles and aunts and large number of cousins that lived close by, and the numerous people who recognized me at least through my family name.

Thus, I was anxious to hear of the experiences of environmental protection and community action in Escazú. The first panelist to speak was Luis Diego Ugarte of the MEC, who presented a summary view of the global situation in which responsibility for the current environmental degradation was placed on "the system" where 25 percent of the world's population used 70 percent of the world's resources. "Exploitation and environmental degradation are not errors of the system, but actual symptoms of it." He explained that the goals of MEC were to work not only for environmental protection, but for the construction of a "social ecology" that would encompass social, economic and cultural factors. MEC hoped to achieve this through the participation of the municipalities, the gathering of updated information, and finally by means of environmental education. But according to Ugarte, MEC had already met with partial defeat when they undertook a project of environmental education in the community of San Francisco de Tres Ríos, and encountered suspicion and lack of interest on the part of the local people. "This response," said Ugarte, "was the best illustration that what in fact was most needed was environmental education." (Field notes, June 28, 1989).

It occurred to me that the problem encountered by MEC lay in the fact that its members went into communities other than their own, with intentions to teach global perspectives that had no obvious relevance to the everyday lives of these people. MEC's well-intentioned efforts at informing and educating the people to improve local participation were threatened by a lack of a deeper understanding of what actually mobilized people. My impression at the time was that if MEC continued in this vein, it was destined to fizzle out, leaving its idealistic members disillusioned with the apparent indifference of the common people. Ten years later, not surprisingly, what remains of MEC is scarcely a memory.

The second to speak was Carmen Durán of the governmental institution DINADECO. According to Durán, current environmental problems were mainly because "our civilization has separated itself from Nature". Also to blame was the "avarice of a few people, the lack of conscience of a few industries, and ignorance on the part of the campesinos (small farmers)". Of the important achievements claimed by DINADECO in matters of environmental protection, was the installation of public garbage cans in numerous communities. Duran's discourse, as a government representative, defended "the system" that Ugarte attacked. If the system had deficiencies, it was intrinsic to "civilization" and thus irreversible. Otherwise, the problems were mostly due to the exceptions arising from the deviance of a few elite individuals and industries, and the ignorance of the productive masses. The practice of DINADECO was consequent with its discourse, patching up the irregularities of a system that supposedly worked. (Field notes, June 28, 1989).

My impression of Duran's presentation was that it was a simplistic pro-status quo response to Ugarte's attack on "the system". Although both positions still seemed to be imbued with a mostly environment-development dichotomy, already surpassed, at least rhetorically, by the concept of sustainable development, each revealed positions that I would later find distinguished contending perspectives of sustainable development.

The third case was offered by Romano Sancho in representation of CODECE. He presented the experience of a grassroots community organization, its inception and its near four-year struggle to protect the watershed and rivers that provided the community with most of its water. Because this case was in Escazú, I took special care to take complete notes on all Romano said. He explained how sometime in 1985, he and his wife Paulina, and many other residents of San Antonio de Escazú, began to hear loud bangs resounding in the mountains. They wondered what neighboring towns might be celebrating fiestas with such an abundance of fire-crackers. Soon enough, campesinos who went looking for their cows let out to pasture in the mountains reported that tractors were carving a road up to the summit of La Cruz. The bangs

were the sound of boulders crashing down the mountain. Great sections of the mountain were dumped into the streams below. The reservoir on Río Agres, the confluence of several of the affected streams, was filled with mud and the people of the surrounding villages no longer received any water.

In response to this, Romano, along with a group of concerned community members, created CODECE to fight for the defense of the Mountains of Escazú and the rights of the local people. Their first battle was against a Spanish priest, Father Revilla, who was responsible for the tractors in the mountain. Revilla's project was to build a monument in the Mountains of Escazú to celebrate the 500 years of Christianity's victory over heathen America, and a basilica for Christian pilgrimage. After winning this battle, many other struggles ensued where CODECE fought against numerous threats to the environment of the mountains and the welfare of the people.

Romano admitted that CODECE had created many enemies, mostly among those interested in destroying the mountains for private gain, and their accomplices in the government at the national and local level. Had it not been that CODECE was made up of a wide array of concerned community members, including farmers, home makers, students and professionals, CODECE would probably already have succumbed to the pressures of its adversaries. What resulted, however, was quite the contrary. CODECE had become a model community organization of Costa Rica, continuously engaged in struggles to defend the environment and well-being of the local people.

According to Romano, what CODECE had experienced in dealing with the legislators and the judicial system, as well as the indifference they encountered in the local municipal governments, highlighted the difference in interests between the communities and the political/governmental bodies.

"These operate under entirely different criteria," he explained, "one of which is a different time-frame. Governmental bodies, even though they are local municipal governments, operate under electoral criteria, and thus within a political time-frame. For them, the universe has an existence of four years. Communities, on the other hand, operate under social criteria and act within a cultural time-frame, that being of at least three human generations long. Obviously, mutual interests are hard to come by. Fortunately," Romano assured, "governmental organizations are not monolithic, and present cracks in their systems, cracks which can be exploited."

In addition to the legal battles taken up by CODECE, Romano mentioned the work the organization was carrying out in reforesting the Rio Agres watershed with the participation of farmers and students from the schools of San Antonio and Escazú. The other area that CODECE emphasized was that of education. "Our project is meaningless," Romano explained, "unless we simultaneously carry out an educative effort." This effort was aimed at the landowners in the Mountains of Escazú, at students, and at members of the community. "We have emphasized," said Romano, "that for the project to be successful, it cannot go against them [the local people] or even proceed without them, but that it requires their participation. And the reactions have been very positive." (Field notes, June 28, 1989).

Romano's presentation impressed me. CODECE seemed to be actively involved in complex issues that included environmental protection and community empowerment. Moreover, his analysis of this relationship offered insightful elements I had not yet encountered in the academic literature. Most of all, however, I was thrilled to learn about the existence of such an organization in my own home town. I arranged with Romano to attend their biweekly meetings, Tuesday nights at 7:00 at the Juan XXIII School of San Antonio de Escazú. Although he seemed somewhat suspicious of my intentions, not recognizing me as one of the residents of Escazú, he asked me my name and cordially invited me to the meetings.

I arrived a little before seven and sat on one of the concrete benches along the fence of the school, biding my time, gazing at the Great Metropolitan Area that spread out illuminated in the valley below, contrasting sharply with this town that was still eminently rural. San Antonio de Escazú is nestled among the peaks of the Mountains of Escazú. Adobe houses were still common there, as were other traditional traits more and more difficult to find in much of Costa Rica. San Antonio still had ox-powered mills or "trapiches" where locally grown sugar cane is pressed to make the raw sugar that traditionally has been a staple in the diet of Costa Ricans. Also in San Antonio one commonly saw men riding their horses to and from their work in vegetable fields and coffee plantations, these being the major crops grown in and around the town.

By 7:30 I was about to leave, when a Jeep stopped in front of the school with Romano and a few other people inside. A tall thin man, dressed in city clothes got out and unlocked the chain of the school. Some of the young men and women waiting around greeted him as "profe" (teacher). Romano went into the

school and opened up a room for the meeting. When I walked in, he seemed very glad to see me, unlike the first impression I got from him. He introduced me as the son of Francisco Montoya to the other members that were present. Apparently, he had found out more about me. One of the members, Rodolfo León, a large heavy-set man with a baritone voice and a thick mat of black hair, black mustache and calloused hands, could not place my father, but vividly recalled my grandfather. "Oh yes, don Pancho with the stiff leg who grew chayotes, of course I remember him." The man referred to as Profe also came to the CODECE meeting. He was Francisco Mejía, nicknamed Pito, and was the secretary of CODECE. A young woman, Maritza León, unrelated to Rodolfo, also attended the meeting. (Field notes, July 18, 1989).

Maritza briefly read the minutes of the last meeting. Then they discussed the jobs that were pending before the community reforestation project could be initiated. I tried to take notes inconspicuously.

"Goicoechea, who has 300 hectares," Maritza read, "has conceded five hectares to be reforested. On these five hectares that border the rivers, we can plant 2000 trees, that's 400 trees per hectare. Carlos Monge and Vin Calderón have also said we can reforest part of their land. We'll do the reforesting every Sunday in August, and in September we'll go back to clean up the weeds around them. The Forestry Directorate of the Ministry of Agriculture has agreed to donate the trees. We have asked for Jaúl, Dama, Murta, Aguacatillo, Duraznillo, and María. We don't want Cedro as it is too tempting to cut down with the high prices it has on the market."

"The plan is to invite members of the local organizations to participate: the Red Cross, Tertulia, the Boy Scouts, the Association for Development of El Carmen, the Sports Committee of Escazú, as well as individuals. Padre Walter of the Church of Escazú has agreed to announce this project during mass. A letter explaining the program has to be written and delivered to these organizations."

"Felipe," Romano addressed me, jolting me out of my anonymity, "you can take the letter to the Red Cross in Escazú. Tomorrow I'll bring the letter by your house." (Field notes, July 18, 1989).

Delivering this letter was the first "duty" I undertook for CODECE. Little did I imagine that this simple act of collaboration would lead me to a decade-long involvement with the Association and its efforts at implementing sustainable development.

On Sunday, July 30th, we met in front of La Guardia Rural at about 7:30 am. The Boy Scouts had some 5 boys participating. The Red Cross also had 5 young men there. Five women came along, one of which was a Peace Corps volunteer. There were also another 8 boys and girls. Already gone ahead of us were 11 men, most of them farmers from the area. In total, there were about 40 people. The walk up to the site of reforestation took nearly two hours. On the way, some of the children and women recounted the legends told of Pico Blanco, of which there are many.

On the way up, private plantations of cypress (*Cupressus lusitanica*) abounded, under which there was little if any undergrowth. The species most promoted by the National Forestry Directorate were pine, cypress and eucalyptus, none of them appropriate for hillside reforestation in the tropics. Comments by the farmers as they passed these plantations revealed that they are aware of this. "Cypress," they said, "has a terrible shade. It burns the soil. Sure, it grows straight and fast, but it depletes the soil." At a point about half way we met up with the others who had started out earlier. One of the men was loading a horse with 50 trees to carry to the site. The trees donated by the Forestry Directorate were not the promised array of species, but only a single species, Jaúl (*Alnus acuminate*), all 300 of them. Fortunately, Jaúl is a fast-growing native to the area and appropriate for hillside reforestation as it permits a lush undergrowth that protects the soil from erosion. One of the minor peaks of the area was called El Jaular, and on one of the slopes of La Cruz a private plantation of Jaúl seemed to be thriving.

The reforestation site had slopes steeper than 45 degrees, very susceptible to erosion. The hope was that the Jaúl would quickly establish themselves and begin a process of forest succession. Some men with long narrow shovels dug the holes. The other men, women and children planted the trees. It took less than two hours to plant the 300 trees. By 11:30 am we were finished. Romano gave a short speech thanking the participants and reminding everyone of the importance to the endeavor. Then everyone ate their lunches. Candies were passed around to the children, and a little bit of rum for the adults. On the way down by another route we stopped at a relatively flat field nestled in the mountains, known as Llano San Miguel, where we played a mejenga, a soccer game among the men and boys.

A few days later, I met with Romano at his house in San Antonio to talk about the future plans of CODECE. "The ultimate goal," he said, "is to buy this land, so that the community owns it, and make it into a Community Forest for tourism and education. But for now, there are several things on the agenda.

First, there is the prospect of setting up a small legal office, the funds for which are about to be granted by the Inter American Foundation.

"Then, there is the inventory of the flora and fauna of the area that 10 biology students from the University of Costa Rica will begin this month and continue during the entire year. Their work will include field surveys, where each of them is a specialist in different areas. They will also conduct interviews with the people of the area, especially the older people who know of species that exist or have existed in the area. At the end of the project, we will put out a publication with all the information gathered, giving credit to all those who contributed their knowledge, to demonstrate that their knowledge is also important and worthy of publishing, even though it wasn't learned at a university."

"We also have plans to build our own green-house so as not to have to depend on the Forestry Directorate. In a green-house set up in the mountains we could grow native trees from native seeds. The transport of the trees for reforestation would be minimal, and they would already be acclimated to the area. We are seeking funding for this through the Canadian Embassy." (Field notes, August 5, 1989).

While I spoke with Romano in his house, humble in its construction, though spacious, located in the foothills between La Cruz and Pico Blanco and next to the Rio Agres, the group of biologists returned from their first monthly ten-day expedition. While Romano helped them unload, I stayed talking with his wife, Paulina while she prepared more coffee for the other guests. She showed me a video camera that they planned to take on the next Sunday of reforestation. Those shots, along with several others already made, would be edited, she said, into a program that would be shown nationally on TV. Paulina also offered to give me documentation on CODECE, but unfortunately was unable to find the folder among the many books and papers that weighed down a bookshelf on the wall.

After a third cup of coffee and several hours of talk, I left, making sure we exchanged addresses to keep in touch. I explained I had to return to New Mexico to resume my studies, but that I would be interested to continue participating in CODECE and possibly have it as a case study for my dissertation.

I spent the following summers in Costa Rica, becoming more and more involved in the activities of CODECE. In April of 1992, I returned to Costa Rica to begin my long-term fieldwork. By then CODECE was equipped with an office of its own, a secretary and a legal assistant on a part-time basis, financed by the Inter-American Foundation. Much of the work revolved around law suits against individuals whose actions threatened the integrity of the environment. Since my first encounter with CODECE, there had been great international ferment around the topic of sustainable development, preceding the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, known as the World Summit in June of 1992 to be held in Rio de Janeiro on the 500th anniversary of the European conquest of America. By this time, CODECE had changed its name to fit its revised mission. Instead of the Committee for the Defense of the Mountains of Escazú, it was now the Association for the Conservation and Development of the Mountains of Escazú. The following is a study of my long-term involvement with CODECE and the efforts of sustainable development it attempted in and around the Mountains of Escazú.

Outline of this Study

In Chapter 2, I present my research methods, beginning with that of participant observation. I describe the principle settings in which I was able to be a participant-observer, and point out its major advantages and disadvantages. I explain that it is through participant observation that I was able to gain an intimate understanding of the world of sustainable development. It was through the method of interviewing, however, that I obtained most of the tangible data that I employ in my analysis. I describe the nature and extent of the interviews I carried out, pointing out some of the difficulties I encountered. Much of the information I gathered was at meetings and through archival research of CODECE's documentation it kept on itself. I also mention several other research methods that complemented this study.

Because I carried out this study in my "home" town, I address the issue of being a "native anthropologist". I point out that the term is relative, and describe the different instances in which I was either an "insider" or an "outsider". Yet, in the end, I consider that being more of an insider was helpful for me to gain access to different areas of information. The fact of doing ethnology in my home town does not dispel the issue of power differentials recognized today in ethnographic work. I address this issue in some

detail. Finally, in this chapter I describe the process I underwent in going from data to theory, and point out the main areas of inquiry of the study.

In Chapter 3, I describe my theoretical framework. I begin briefly outlining the emergence and spread of the ideology of development. Here I point out some of the contradictions that appear with the ideology and practice of development and include critiques by writers who have tried to explain these contradictions. I present the ideology of sustainable development as an attempt not to explain, but rather, to erase these contradictions. Despite its general seductiveness, however, the concept has many problems. In bringing together previously irreconcilable differences, sustainable development has become a catch-all concept and is used to justify contradictory tendencies. For the case of Costa Rica, I point out a current schism in the ideology of sustainable development which I separate into "mainstream" and "critical" perspectives. However, I explain that there is a continual production and appropriation along this divide which blurs the differences. This, I suggest, makes mobilization of civil society more difficult. Nevertheless, I point out that mobilization is attempted by taking hold of various forms of economic, social and cultural capital, which I describe in some detail. Ultimately, I hypothesize that it is mainly through the appropriation and implementation of social and cultural capital that empowerment for sustainable development is achieved. I conclude this chapter by raising the question, and offering my opinion, on how to measure sustainability.

Chapter 4 is a brief description of the national context in which the events of this study occur. In chronological order, I present the most pertinent developments in legal, social, political and economic matters to affect local efforts of sustainable development.

In Chapter 5, I recount the birth of CODECE. Much like a "creation myth", I suggest that this tale not only presents the initial mobilization process, but itself is employed to mobilize the participation of civil society. This use of discourse to consolidate this collective social capital is only one of various strategies that the people of CODECE employ to create a "social movement". I describe the various forms of social capital and cultural capital that members of CODECE make use of as ways to exercise power in achieving their collective goals of environmental protection and well-being of the local communities.

In Chapter 6, I deal exclusively with CODECE's legal battles for sustainable development. Conditioned by an eminently legalist national context, CODECE directs much of its energy within this venue. I describe CODECE's attempts at appropriating the institutionalized cultural capital of the legal structure, including its early efforts at enforcing the laws that protect the Mountains of Escazú, and analyze the contradictions that result from these efforts. CODECE then attempts to generate more appropriable institutionalized cultural capital by introducing new legislation that would empower the local communities. I present other efforts by CODECE to make use of institutionalized cultural capital to obtain legal empowerment for the people, and describe the obstacles they encounter. These include the impermeability of legal structures, the opposition of powerful interests, and the difficulties of mobilizing the people.

Chapter 7 deals with CODECE's efforts of generating embodied cultural capital by transforming the local culture in favor of a critical perspective of sustainable development, and through this strengthening the community's social capital and its possibilities of local empowerment. Through efforts to create a Communal Forest in the Mountains of Escazú, CODECE seeks to instill in the local community a sense of ownership over their mountains and a sense of responsibility for their protection as elements of a common identity for social mobilization. The major challenges CODECE encounters are the appropriation of particular elements of this critical perspective by mainstream social actors, who seek to employ them for private gain. In this chapter I point out the dangers and opportunities that arise out of this "lending and borrowing" across the critical/mainstream divide in relation to implementing a critical perspective of sustainable development which places local empowerment at its core.

In Chapter 8, I follow CODECE's efforts to create a national social movement by making use of social capital at a national level with the aim of further empowering the local community. These efforts include participation in COPROALDE, a network of organizations with projects of "alternative" development, and the creation of CONAO, a National Council of NGOs and Grassroots organizations for Sustainable Development. In this chapter I especially emphasize the importance of social capital as a means of empowerment, and contrast it with the dangers of focusing exclusively on economic capital as the motor for sustainable development.

Chapter 9 is a confrontation of CODECE's efforts of sustainable development with the situation of the campesinos in San Antonio de Escazú, in an attempt to measure the extent to which sustainable

development has been achieved or approximated. It is also a confrontation of ideologies, where the concept of sustainable development has something to gain from the ideology and practice of campesinos. Here traditional expressions of social and cultural capital emerge not only as means of sustainable development, but as end in themselves to be sustained. In this chapter I seek to re-introduce crucial elements into the "critical" perspective of sustainable development.

In the concluding chapter, I discuss the potential of social and cultural capital as means to community empowerment and the implication this has for a revised understanding of sustainable development. I situate this study as one example of labor within the critical perspective of sustainable development and discuss the issue of the appropriation by the mainstream of this type of labor. Finally, I offer recommendations to others who may identify with a critical perspective for sustainable development. These recommendations derive from the contributions of this study to the theories of social capital, cultural capital and empowerment, and their implications on civil society, social movements, and community sustainable development.

CHAPTER TWO

RESEARCH METHODS

Participant Observation

The ethnographic enterprise of studying people while living among them and then writing about them with some pretense of authority has long been questioned and problematized within the field of anthropology (Hymes 1969; Rabinow 1977; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Clifford 1988; Said 1989; Burawoy et al 1991; Foley 1995; Limón 1997). With the research method of participant observation, one studies people in their everyday lives in their own space and time. Participant observation places the researcher face to face with the subjects of study, creating a lived relationship between them. Eventually, the researcher will represent the subjects in an ethnographic account from what he or she learns from this relationship. Participant observation is the principal research method employed in ethnographic studies, which are typically long term and in depth studies. The advantages of participant observation lie in this sustained intimate contact that allows researchers not only to understand the actions of subjects, but to understand how the subjects understand their own actions. One might think that this is no different than what occurs in everyday life, and so ask why this has been problematized. Are we not all participant observers in everyday life, constantly developing face-to-face long-term relationships with the people around us? And is it not so that from these sustained relationships we come to understand our fellow humans, and transmit our interpretations of them to others in our everyday conversations? The virtue of participant observation is that it is, indeed, very much like everyday life.

However, unlike everyday life, participant observation is a research method of a social science that purports to advance understanding and offer explanations of social realities to a wider community. Ethnographies, unlike everyday conversations, carry the seal of science, and the responsibility that this entails. Representations put forth in everyday conversation are not held up to the light of falsifiability, nor are these interpretations accepted to be none other than idiosyncratic opinions. Ethnographies, however, are interpretations and representations "under oath", so to speak, broadcast publicly, precisely to be scrutinized for their verifiability in the advancement of science.

The disadvantages of participant observation derive from the same source as its virtues. Burawoy (1991:2) warns that "too close contact with participants can lead to loss of objectivity or to contamination of the situation." Because participant observation as a paradigmatic research method of the social sciences is so akin to everyday life, and is infused with inevitable subjectivity from start to finish, its capacity for objectivity is questioned, as indeed is the capacity of social sciences to be scientific. This questioning became ever more poignant with the recognition of the subjective nature of even the hardest sciences (Capra 1975; Gleick 1987). At the interface between the natural sciences and the humanities, social scientists, and anthropologists in particular, have grappled with the objectives and methods of their field (Marcus and Fischer 1986; Geertz 1988; Rosaldo 1989). I concur with Burawoy (1991), that this intermediate positionality offers the possibility of gaining understanding and providing explanation. Understanding, or

the hermeneutic dimension, is achieved by direct participation in social situations through dialogue with social actors. Explanation, or the scientific dimension, is the achievement of the observer through a dialogue between theory and the data. Both dimensions are a product of the research method of participant observation.

My principle research method was that of participant observation. Starting with my first exploratory visit to the field in 1989, when I learned about CODECE, an environmentalist organization in my home town of Escazú, I became a participating member, less out of design, than by the initiative of the leadership of CODECE, who quickly incorporated me into the activities of the organization. During the following summers, I renewed my visits to Costa Rica and maintained my sporadic role of participant observer within the organization. When I began my extended field work in April of 1992 I easily fell into the role of participant observer in CODECE. Having financial assistance from a Fulbright scholarship and from the National Science Foundation for my research, I was able to collaborate fully with CODECE as an unpaid volunteer. To the obvious question as to how or why I volunteered so, I explained that my research involved environmentalist discourse and practice, and that working with CODECE provided me with important data I would use to write my dissertation. My disposition to work almost full time in CODECE at no cost, and my academic training in tropical plant ecology and cultural anthropology were assets that the leadership of CODECE was eager to make use of.

As a participant observer-cum-voluntary worker in CODECE I partook of the daily life in the office of the organization, discussing issues, writing proposals, programming events, participating in the activities we organized, attending events to which CODECE was invited, and representing CODECE at meetings. I also partook of the daily life that extended beyond the office of CODECE, visiting fellow members of CODECE as friends at their homes, hiking together in the mountains or swimming in rivers, harvesting corn and celebrating cook-outs, drinking beer, dancing, playing music, and talking about life.

I maintained this role of participant observer in CODECE during the two years of my field work until August of 1994 when I returned to New Mexico where my wife had remained, and where I hoped to write up my work. However, my long absence had irrevocably undermined our marriage, and so I found it best to return to Costa Rica, where I felt I had established important personal and professional relationships worth maintaining. By February of 1995 I again assumed the role of participant observer, this time however, in a paid position as coordinator of COPROALDE, a federation of NGOs involved in projects of "alternative development", of which CODECE was a member. During this time I remained an active member of CODECE and was elected into the Directive Junta in December of 1996 for a period of two years.

The question of "contamination" by too close or too prolonged a contact with the research subjects undoubtedly arises here. This is a danger that every participant observer must grapple with and attempt to avoid. I tried to step back from my role as a participant deeply involved in the discussions and work within the organization and take a more "detached" observer position. I was also aided, however, by the structural position I held within the social space of my research. In COPROALDE, as I had to coordinate the interests of ten different member organizations, I was forced to keep a self-evident objectivity regarding my links with CODECE in order not to bias my decisions in its favor. This helped me to maintain a detached perspective while continuing to be intimately involved in the work of CODECE. Moreover, as coordinator of COPROALDE, though I had to direct all the assemblies and meetings, I had a voice, but no vote. Furthermore, there was always a tension between requiring me to represent COPROALDE and allowing me to make "political" decisions on COPROALDE's behalf. This central, though liminal, position always kept me aware of my "outsider" status, favoring the observer over the participant during my time in that organization.

Interviews

While participant observation undoubtedly served as the main source of understanding of the social space and actors of my research, it was the extensive interviewing I carried out that provided me with the most tangible data for my theorizing. Starting in 1989 I used open-ended interviews as a means of collecting first-hand data. Once I began my extended field work in 1992, I also spent much of my time interviewing, mostly rural residents around the Mountains of Escazú. My sampling method was haphazard and biased by my own movements in seeking out potential interviewees. I would start out early in the

morning hiking up into the farming areas around the Mountains of Escazú, and when I came upon a farmer in his field, I would begin a conversation, and ask him about his crops, his land, his family, what he thought about the mountains, about the meaning of development and progress. I would briefly mention that I was a student doing research in these mountains, to which it was often more difficult for me to end the conversation, than it was to get them to start talking. I took notes in a 6" by 8" spiral notebook and taped most of these interviews, with the few exceptions that I saw it was more of a distraction than an aid. I obtained 38 taped interviews and 12 that I recorded in notebooks either during the interview or afterwards from memory. The majority of the taped interviews lasted more than the 90 minutes of my tapes. However, the tape usually ran out at approximately the same time my attention span did, and so, often the tail end of the interviews remained unrecorded.

Recognizing that this particular method of interviewing posed a serious bias, namely that those who worked the fields were almost exclusively men, I made an effort to gather the perspective of rural women as well. To this end I decided to visit rural women at their homes, choosing to concentrate my efforts in the town of San Antonio de Escazú, where being a native of Escazú myself, I felt this type of visit would be easier. Because I considered the presence of a woman interviewer would enhance the amount and quality of information I could gather from rural women, I hired a female research assistant to accompany me and help me with these interviews. These interviews were also taped, but contrary to those of men in the field, these were structured and usually lasted about an hour each. Of these I obtained 20 interviews.

Meetings and Archival Research

Another important source of data were the numerous meetings I attended as a member and representative of CODECE from 1992 to 1998 and as coordinator of COPROALDE from February of 1995 to December of 1997. The number of these were too numerous to count. Of the majority, however, I either kept minutes, took notes or taped. These meetings included internal work meetings of CODECE, ordinary and extraordinary Assemblies of the Association, biweekly meetings of the Directive Junta, meetings between CODECE and the Municipality, Ministers, ex-Presidents, Deputies of the Legislative Assembly, community organizations, other NGOs, and donor agencies. In COPROALDE the meetings included assemblies of all the member organizations, biweekly meetings of the Coordinating Council, meetings with other NGOs, with campesino organizations, with government institutions, and with donor agencies. I have drawn heavily on the notes of these meetings, although I collected much more material than I have actually used in this work.

Archival information was the other major source of the data I used in this study. This information was mostly in the form of CODECE's monthly reports and minutes of meetings that occurred prior to my arrival in the field. From its birth, members of CODECE kept ordered records of all the activities the Association engaged in, minutes of all the meetings, acts of all the assemblies, and notes on the different subjects they discussed. This voluminous written material aided me in reconstructing the historical aspects I had no first hand knowledge of. I also accessed this same type of material to some extent in the case of COPROALDE.

Rural Diagnostic Survey

At the end of 1996 while I was still the coordinator of COPROALDE, CODECE hired me as a consultant to carry out a rural diagnostic study of the farming community of San Antonio de Escazú to include social, cultural, productive and economic aspects, in order to guide CODECE's planning with this sector in the following years. I accepted with the proviso that I could use this research for my own dissertation, as well. By this time I had remarried, and my wife, Alejandra García, also an anthropologist, worked together with me on this diagnostic study. The method we employed was a detailed structured interview that lasted no less than two hours, and often more than four. We interviewed 58 farming families, approximately one third of the total number of farming families in San Antonio de Escazú. We decided on the sample based on two major sources. The first was a list of farmers affiliated to COOPASAE, the farmer's co-operative of San Antonio, and the second source that directed our sample choice was Jaime

González, a farmer affiliated to CODECE, who gave us a list of all the farmers he knew, many of which were not on the COOPASAE list, and provided us with directions for all the farming families we were able to contact. The results of this diagnostic study served to confront the outcome of much of the work CODECE had carried out in favor of this sector for over a decade, with what might be considered the actual sustainability of this sector.

"Native" Anthropologist

Much of the ease I experienced in being taken in as a participant observer, in interviewing people, and in having access to organizational documents derived, I believe, from my condition as an "insider". When the members of CODECE quickly included me in the duties of the organization, this, I felt, was in great part due to the fact that Rodolfo León, a farmer and member of the Directive Junta of CODECE recognized me as the grandson of Pancho Montoya, a local farmer he admired and respected. When Paulina Chaverri, also a member of the Directive Junta of CODECE, and university graduate in history, suggested that I write a proposal for one of the projects of CODECE, which then opened all of the organization's archival records for me to access, this depended in great part also on my "insider" condition as fellow university graduate. When I interviewed local farmers, mostly the older farmers, reference to my grandfather opened the way for more fluid conversation.

Despite this relative "insider" status, I squirm under the rubric of "native" anthropologist, which I consider is a reification of an identity that is multiple, strategic and never static. I believe that identity is context-specific and is constantly being negotiated. Kirin Narayan, herself an ethnographer who bears the label of "native anthropologist", deconstructs the concept, arguing instead for the "enactment of hybridity" in the construction of ethnographies. By this she means that even beyond the condition of "people who are mixed from birth", ethnographers are "minimally bicultural in terms of belonging simultaneously to the world of engaged scholarship and the world of everyday life" (Narayan 1997:24). To enact this hybridity, is to "take responsibility for how our personal locations feed not just into our fieldwork interactions but also into our scholarly texts" (Narayan 1997:35).

In contrast to my "insider" status, I was also clearly an outsider. The same Rodolfo León, who in 1989 welcomed me into CODECE's meeting, in 1992 was suspicious of the stranger who came to him as he farmed his land, when I arrived with notebook in hand, and questioned me brusquely if I was an agricultural engineer from the Ministry of Agriculture, or, in general, a professional, being wary of all of them. "Not long ago," he said, "an agricultural engineer came by to give me some professional advice, and all he left me were his foot prints all over the row I had just planted." With other farmers, too, the "distance" between "campesinos" and "professionals" had to be negotiated and bridged. Among rural women I was, in addition, a gendered outsider. So I hired a female research assistant to accompany me when visiting homes of other women. In communities not within the county of Escazú, I was just as much an outsider as any Escazuceño might be. I was even referred to as "el gringo" when I carried out fieldwork in the indigenous community of Quitirrisí in the Mountains of Escazú. Even within CODECE, an environmentalist community organization of my home town whose goals I shared, for some I was an outsider because of my political history. Several of the members of the CODECE leadership had played leading roles in the Leftist movement of Costa Rica during the 1970s and early 1980s. Although by my age and university background I would have either to have participated or, at least, have been familiar with the Leftist movement in Costa Rica, my presence in the country during that period was minimal, and hence my links to or familiarity with any national political activities was likewise limited. This outsider status, I speculate, was what made some people hold back their personal histories from me.

My point with these examples is that, despite carrying out fieldwork in my home town, my case supports Narayan's argument against the fixity of the distinction between "native" and "non-native" anthropologists. Instead of a paradigm emphasizing a dichotomy between outsider/insider or observer/observed, she proposes that at this historical moment anthropologists might more profitably be viewed "in terms of shifting identifications amid a field of interpenetrating communities and power relations" (Narayan 1997:23).

Power and Ethnographic Representation

The question of power relations in the ethnographic enterprise has been amply recognized (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Clifford 1988; Van Maanen 1988; Burawoy 1991; Lather 1991; Abu-Lughod 1993; Foley 1995; Zavella 1997). Most authors agree that the power differential in the ethnographic confrontation lies mainly in representation. Van Maanen (1988:1-4) states that "ethnographies are politically mediated, since the power of one group to represent another is always involved." Furthermore, he points out that an ethnography "carries quite serious intellectual and moral responsibilities, for the images of others inscribed in writing are most assuredly not neutral." Burawoy (1991:5) considers that "insofar as the relationship between participant and observer is that between power unequals, to that extent the dialogue is distorted." Douglas Foley, who wrote an ethnography in his home town, explains how in an attempt to "dialogue" about his ethnography with the people represented therein, he circulated the manuscript for them to review. However, when one reviewer challenged Foley saying "If I said, No don't publish this, would you stop?", Foley acknowledged that he would publish it "whether people liked it or not", arguing that "no amount of open "dialogue" over the text will completely abolish the power difference between the outside investigator and the community being studied." (Foley 1995:207).

Neither should fear over the inevitability of misrepresentations paralyze ethnographers, preventing them from writing anything but disembodied theory, nor should simply acknowledging power inequalities lead ethnographers to complacency in the belief that being sensitive to power magically erases its inequalities. Ethnographers have long agonized over this dilemma and have tried to disperse their authorial power through various narrative techniques and forms of collaboration with those being portrayed. Van Maanen (1988) describes four general categories of ethnographic narratives: realist tales, critical tales, impressionist tales, and confessional tales.

I admit that, as with the tag of "native" anthropologist, I am uncomfortable with labeling my ethnography under a particular narrative technique. To the extent that I am able, I have tried to represent the people in this ethnography and their words, as accurately and realistically as possible, recognizing, of course, the subjective nature of this enterprise. To this extent, this is a realist tale. I have also attempted to be critical, in the hopes that my critique might in a small way inform theory and practice regarding future efforts of common people to improve their lot in life. Thus, this is also a critical tale. Because the vast majority of the information I collected during the past ten years has been left out of this narrative, and because I have had to select only the briefest accounts to suggest the entire picture, this ethnography may also rightfully be regarded as an impressionistic tale. Finally, because this is a story of my home town, a story of an organization of which I became an active and committed member, and a story of efforts, including my own, to improve the quality of life of "my community" (because that is how I perceive it), to that extent, this is also a confessional tale.

Regarding forms of collaboration with those being portrayed, Foley (1995) presents one of many alternatives by having the actors he writes about review his ethnography. In my case, I have done the same, not with all the actors involved, but with the few who read English. Van Maanen (1988:25) points out that "to produce an ethnography requires decisions about what to tell and how to tell it. These decisions are influenced by whom the writer plans to tell it to." The fact that this ethnography is written in English, in part undercuts one of my purposes that it inform the future work of CODECE and similar organizations in Latin America, in general. The fact that it is written in English, in fact perpetuates a situation I have criticized in this ethnography: the unequal appropriation of labor by those with greater power from those with less. The English speaking world is in many respects -economic, political, technological, industrial, informational- more powerful than the Spanish speaking world. My decision to write in English instead of Spanish -both equally difficult for me- was based primarily on issues of convenience for the process of dissertation approval at the University of New Mexico in the United States. A second reason, however, also supports one of my theses in this ethnography: the availability of diverse forms of social and cultural capital to those with less "power" as means to transform the world. By writing in English, the language of international communication and the world of information, I appropriated this form of cultural capital as a way of reaching a wider audience or expanding my social capital, than I could have hoped for by writing in Spanish.

In general, this ethnography is directed at those people who are active in endeavors to improve the quality of life of local communities, whether it be in environmental, social or economic terms. It is directed

at development theorists who have been for or against "sustainable development". It is also directed at a literate public in general interested in means of community empowerment.

From Data to Theory

Research methods include how data are collected, but also how they are processed, how observations are turned into explanations, or data into theory. Burawoy (1991:26) points out that in the last fifty years, the social sciences have witnessed a proliferation of theories in the form of "deductive grand theory, middle range theory, or the empirical generalizations of grounded theory". While he considers that the generation of theory from the ground up was perhaps imperative at the beginning of the sociological enterprise, he urges us, instead to "reconstruct" existing theories in an attempt to consolidate and develop what we have already produced. I can think of at least two ways to enter the field in pursuit of theory reconstruction: one is to choose a body of theory to test in the field; alternatively, one can first decide what, where and whom one wants to study, immerse oneself in empirical work, and then search for relevant theories that address the issues, and "reconstruct" these theories where they present ambiguities or contradictions that are revealed by the data.

My research topic was driven principally by my desire to carry out fieldwork in my home country, by my interest in the relationship between rural communities and the environment, and by my hope of discovering strategies of harmonious coexistence between people and the land. To guide my research in the field, I prepared myself with theory on cultural ecology, political ecology, peasant studies, development theory, discourse and ideology. But as almost inevitably occurs in the field, the questions that arose summoned a somewhat different body of theory. Peasant studies remained relevant, however deconstructed the concept had become for me when confronted with the actual people who called themselves campesinos. My concentration on the activities of CODECE, a community organization-cum-NGO, summoned social movement theory and theory on civil society. The explosion on the world scene, and especially on the national scene, of sustainable development as the dominant paradigm of development, shifted my focus from a somewhat "black and white" perspective of conservation and development, to a more "shades of gray" vision of the complex interrelationships between these two tendencies. Finally, while discourse and ideology remained important aspects to analyze, I found that these formed only part of a constellation of tactics and forces that interpenetrated the field of action under my gaze. Instead, what seemed to infuse the entire field of action I studied were issues of empowerment and the uses of diverse forms of economic, social and cultural capital as sources of empowerment.

I had originally proposed to compare the environmentalist discourse and practice between mestizo and indigenous campesinos, hoping to detect where significant differences lay in their relationship to the land. This choice of research topic carried with it presuppositions as to the probable locus of environmental conservation and destruction. Ethnic identity, cultural and historical differences, and the degree of insertion into a market economy were the premises I planned to compare. But once in the field, the prevalence of power struggles shifted my interest away from this more horizontal comparison of mestizo and indigenous campesinos, both relatively disempowered sectors, and moved my attention instead to an analysis along a more vertical gradient of differential power to look at a wider array of actors that impinged on the efforts of a community organization to both conserve the environment and promote development to fit the needs of the local community. These actors, which included campesinos, the State and its institutions, NGOs, private enterprise, and international cooperation agencies, I found were more widely relevant than the two major actors my original research proposal hoped to study. Moreover, in terms of contributing to theory and policy, I believe my change in focus was for the best.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

When I began my extended fieldwork in 1992 the concept of sustainable development had begun to take precedence over a purely environmentalist discourse among sectors of society critical of the environmental, as well as economic and social ills conventional development had permitted. I found that diverse social actors employed a wide array of strategies to implement alternate, and often contending, conceptions of "sustainable development". What soon became most interesting to me were precisely these struggles and strategies of a particular "community" immersed in a context of allies and adversaries along a vertical continuum of differential power. Besides campesinos, which were the subjects of my original research proposal, there emerged other key social actors, such as community organizations and NGOs, who in turn were conditioned and confronted in their work by the State, private enterprise, and international cooperation agencies.

The reality in the field made me shift my research perspective from a horizontal comparison of the environmental discourse and practice between different sets of campesinos, to a more vertical study of the strategies of sustainable development of one community organization in a local and national context of differential power. This, in turn, summoned a more political, practical and theoretically interesting series of questions. It brought to the fore the issue of the hegemony of sustainable development as the dominant development paradigm. It problematized the role of civil society in creating social movements. It suggested the theoretical and practical importance of social and cultural capital as means of empowerment in achieving sustainable development. But in addition, it revealed contending strategies of community disempowerment. Ultimately, this shift in research perspective also permitted me to understand how a local campesino community measured its own version of sustainability and the means they employed in trying to achieve it.

The Hegemony of Development Ideology

Once I settled in Costa Rica in April of 1992 to engage in long-term fieldwork and became a participant observer among a group of "critical environmentalists", I found that the "environmentalist" impulse represented only half of the equation of their critical calculations. There was also an impulse towards "development", which represented the other half. In fact, shortly after my arrival, the concept of "sustainable development" was launched at the "Earth Summit" in Rio de Janeiro as the dominant discourse that purported to reconcile both impulses of conservation and development. Much has since been written about sustainable development, both in favor and against, but the fact is that it has become the established guiding concept of both conservation and development not only in Costa Rica, but in most of the world. Sustainable development as the paradigm of conservation and development that has gained most adherents and has moved more people to action in the last decade, stands clearly on the shoulders of the previously established hegemony of development theory and practice.

After World War II, the desirability of world development, and its achievement through economic growth was born as a full fledged hegemonic ideology. By ideology I mean a perspective or explanation that naturalizes what is actually a human construct, and in so doing legitimizes action to maintain this view (Hamilton 1987; Schull 1992). An ideology becomes hegemonic when one out of many alternative perspectives or explanations of a particular aspect of reality becomes the only accepted, obvious or natural one. After World War II, the United States emerged as the dominant power in the world capitalist system. The need to expand its markets and investments made world development a necessity. Economic development was taken up as a primary goal of rich and poor countries alike. The United Nations was created to promote world development, and the World Bank and International Monetary Fund were created to finance this impulse. During the 1950s, the industrialized countries viewed their role in world development, essentially as one of "enlightened charity" (Brandt 1980:18). The goal of development aid was to pull "underdeveloped" nations up to the level of "developed" nations by promoting industrialization and urbanization, the penetration of modern technology in agriculture, rapid growth of material production, and

the transformation of archaic rural structures by the widespread adoption of modern education and cultural values (Escobar 1995:4).

Contradictions to this ideology and its policies soon emerged. During the decade of the sixties social and political upheavals swept the Western world. Old models of authority, order, and progress were questioned. In 1964 the Non-Aligned countries from Latin America, Africa and Asia, brought together by sentiments of anti-colonialism, formed the Group of 77 to bargain for the interests of "developing" nations. The problems of underdevelopment, they argued, came not from psychological or cultural deficiencies as was commonly suggested (McClelland 1964), but from unequal terms of trade and lack of distributive justice (Cardoso and Faletto 1979). Other critiques of the ideology of development also emerged. Instead of seeing underdevelopment as a prior stage of development, determined by a lack of appropriate values, and a prevalence of traditional structures that impeded modernization, Dependency Theory explained underdevelopment as the necessary structural counterpart of development (Frank 1969). The desirability of development, however, was not questioned in these critiques. In this decade, United States development aid, in part took heed of Third World critiques, but mostly responded to historic events such as the Cuban Revolution. In order to prevent -the "domino effect" of the spread of revolution by a dispossessed peasantry, the United States promoted policies of agrarian reform in the Third World. This included primarily the distribution of land, while maintaining an emphasis on technical assistance and the introduction of modern technologies.

In the early 1970s, various emergent factors affected rural conditions in the Third World. Metropolitanization, the growth of financial markets, and the expansion of a consumer society continued to impoverish the rural family whose sons and daughters were abandoning the family farm. On the other hand, industrialized agricultural production expanded, causing large-scale environmental destruction, creating a rural proletariat, and flagrant rural inequality. Despite the outflow of development aid for large scale economic projects, conditions of underdevelopment prevailed. At the end of the decade, rural poverty was understood as being more than merely economic. Rather, it included social, political, cultural and institutional aspects, as well. The World Bank, under Robert McNamara, adopted a "reformist" approach concerned with unemployment, income distribution, appropriate technology, integrated rural development, and basic needs. Policies of Integrated Rural Development (IRD), which stressed growth with equity, were included in national development policies. The driving impulse was to target the poor with specific projects. These projects, however, were mostly "top-down, site-specific and time-bound", resulting in many cases being irrelevant to local communities, or at best, having a limited area of impact, and offering only short term gains (Lewis 1988:6).

In the 1980s, the foreign debt crisis exploded in Latin America, resulting in a precipitous fall of external financing. Moreover, Reaganomics and "trickle down theory" were on the rise. Under the direction of the IMF, Third World States had to undergo severe processes of Structural Adjustment, downsize State governments, and give economic and financial balances precedence over questions of equity. These aspects contributed to deteriorating social conditions in developing countries. In the South the decade of the eighties was called "the lost decade" for development. During this period all the traditional indicators, economic as well as social, worsened. Per capita incomes fell, unemployment increased, de-industrialization occurred, demand for Third World products fell, the South faced declining terms of trade, and interest rates and debt service payments increased (South Commission 1990).

Besides the worsening of traditional indicators, many other shortcomings of conventional development became evident. "Top-down" development gave way to "bottom-up" approaches (Chambers 1983; Hirschman 1984; Morss and Morss 1986; Uphoff 1988). A mostly male-focused development practice began to turn toward the participation of women in development (Buvinic and Lycette 1988, Deere and Leon 1987). The destruction of native cultures, the evident degradation of the environment, and depletion of natural resources around the world, provoked theories of "Ethnodevelopment" (Bonfil et al 1982), "Ecodevelopment" (Sánchez and Sejenovich 1983), and brought forth the concept of "Sustainable Development" (UICN 1980; WCED 1987).

Sustainable Development: Erasing Contradictions

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