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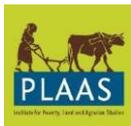


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Environmental populism in Central America: the politics of the pineapple expansion and its discontents in Costa Rica¹

Andrés León Araya

Abstract

Since the mid-1990s the Costa Rican government has developed a very complex legal framework, institutional infrastructure and discourse around the idea of “sustainable development.” According to this idea, the Costa Rican development model tries to combine economic growth with the protection of nature. However, in the same period of time the area of cultivation of pineapples has increased over 1000%, leaving an increasing number of environmental (pesticide use, water pollution, deforestation), labor (working conditions, poisoning) and land conflicts in its wake. The Costa Rican government has had a very active role in this expansion, for example negotiating trade agreements and securing financial and technical support. Regarding the increasing opposition to the pineapple industry’s expansion, the government’s strategy has been twofold: discursively, towards the “public opinion,” it extols its importance in terms of economic growth and employment creation, at the same time that it repeats its commitment to the protection of nature and the enforcement of the environmental protection laws. In practice, the institutions in charge of enforcing these laws receive minimal resources, the court rulings tend to favor the companies, and the police represses the communities and workers whenever their protests “step outside” the legal system. Loosely following Erik Swyngedouw discussion on climate change, I argue in this paper that this political strategy is a form of (authoritarian) “environmental populism.” That, on the one hand, depoliticizes the discussion on the pineapple industry and renders invisible the processes of dispossession that made the expansion of the crop possible in the first place. And, on the other hand, justifies an increasing level of intervention and control of the rural communities, as part of the national development strategy.

Introduction

In the last three decades Costa Rica has managed two quite impressive feats in terms of land use. On the one hand, since at least the mid-1990s, the country’s protected wildlands have more than doubled their extension, reaching 2,938,066 hectares in 2017, which accounts approximately for one fourth of the national territory (Corrales 2017). On the other hand, in the period between the last two agricultural censuses (1984 and 2014), the amount of land dedicated to the production of export oriented monocultures (coffee, banana, sugar cane, pineapple and palm oil) grew nearly a 60%, reaching 324,626 hectares. Initially, these two tendencies might seem contradictory. However, they must be understood within the discursive, and practical, political framework of “sustainable development” that the country has been following since the 1990s, and for which it has received significant international praise (Evans 2010; Campbell 2002; Nygren 1998).

Based on the idea that economic growth and the conservation of nature can be achieved together, if only the proper technological and managerial fixes are applied, the sustainable development discourse has had an enduring influence in the way that the development question is approached on a global scale in the last few decades. To the point that Leslie Sklair (2001) made the claim in the early 2000s that the present was dominated by “the sustainable development historic bloc”. Comprised by a set of corporate executives, bureaucrats, politicians, professionals and mass media, this historic bloc

¹ Explanatory note: this is a preliminary paper, based on an ongoing research project and prepared specifically for this conference. As such, most of the arguments presented are very rough around the edges and contains a set of ideas and questions that I am still working through. For this reason, some of the argument may appear as either tentative, or straight out speculative.

promoted the idea that it was only, or mainly, through the market and consumption that nature could be preserved for the future generations (Igoe, Neves, and Brockington 2010).

Different authors have taken issue with the way in which the sustainable development discourse depoliticizes the discussions on nature. By presenting topics such as the conservation of nature or climate change as problems that can be solved through techno managerial fixes, it renders invisible the unequal distribution of resources and power that are inherent to capitalism and that place different actors in uneven positions regarding the processes of both nature degradation and capital accumulation (Swyngedouw 2010; Igoe, Neves, and Brockington 2010; Wanner 2015; Nygren 1998; Kenis and Lievens 2014). Further, that discourses such as the one of sustainable development, or green economy or green growth are "...another form of a 'passive revolution' to co-opt and neutralize counter-hegemonic challenges to neoliberal capitalism and its entrenched interests, such as arguments about limits to economic growth based on environmental grounds and the earth's limited carrying capacity." (Wanner 2015:23)

While I agree with these arguments, in this paper I would like to go in a different direction. As I mentioned before, in Costa Rica, as in other countries of Latin America (Zimmerer 2011), the last few decades have seen the growth of both the land dedicated to export oriented monocultures, and protected wildlands. Regarding the expansion of monocultures, the most spectacular case has been that of pineapples, whose surface in hectares increased in over 1,500% between 1984 and 2014, making Costa Rica the largest exporter of fresh fruit in the world. The expansion of this crop has left a myriad of conflicts in its wake. From water contamination, all the way through to deforestation and appalling labor conditions, the pineapple industry has come under fire from different directions. However, as I will argue in this paper, the contentions around the crop have been contained within the framework of sustainable development. As a result, a new agrarian political economy has been imposed on a set of rural communities by force, but within the formal contours of democracy.

The paper is organized into four parts. First, I will briefly explore the sustainable development framework, as it takes form in Costa Rica, to show how it has become a sort of common sense from which the development question is approached. Next, I will characterize the process of expansion by dispossession of the pineapple industry, from the 1970s onwards, and show how it was effaced by the sustainable development discourse. Thirdly, I will present three short vignettes that show how the expansion of the crop has been contested on different scales. Finally, I will analyze the material presented from two different perspectives: first, the turn towards authoritarianism that the country's political culture has been experiencing in the last few decades, and second, the connection between the discourse of sustainable development and Neal Richardson's notion of "export-oriented populism," and Erik Swyngedouw's "environmental populism."

1. Sustainable development as common sense

As I mentioned in the introduction, since the 1980s, Costa Rica began to incorporate the sustainable development discourse as its main approach to the development question. This meant that the quintessential goal of capitalist development, economic growth, should be combined with the conservation of nature, understood mainly as the preservation of resources for the future generations. Since sustainable development is not the main topic of my discussion here, I will be very brief. According to Alonso Ramirez's (2017) study on market-based conservation in Costa Rica, it is impossible to separate the country's process of structural adjustment² from the stabilizing of the sustainable development discourse: "While initial policy measures were centered on developing non-traditional agricultural exports (NTAE), these policies' intensification of historical problems of unproductive deforestation led the adjustment to change its approach towards a new form of capital articulation through commodified and financialized forms of 'conservation commodities'" (p. 65).

² I will develop this topic below.

With policies such as the establishment of payment for environmental services (PES) and the fostering of agroforestry systems, the idea was "...to promote forest cover as a means of safeguarding the goal of macroeconomic stabilization achieved by the adjustment" (p. 65). This was a multiscale process, in which the protection of nature was to be advanced through the creation of new types of commodities, such as PES. Also through the promotion of tourism into the rural areas, as a way of remedying the effects of extensive cattle ranching and monoculture expansion (Nygren 1998). In this way, the argument followed, nature would stop being seen as idle and unproductive, and become a valued resource that could improve the wellbeing of the rural communities, at the same time that attracting foreign investment.³

This idea that the degradation of nature was the result of the lack of valuation of resources such as the forest or land, would become instilled into most of the conservation institutions, public policies and laws that were created during this period. However, it would be a mistake to think that there was or is, a single way of understanding the interaction between economic growth and conservation in Costa Rica. First of all, there is a clear division in Costa Rica between the ministries and other public institutions closer to "development," such as the Foreign Trade Corporation (PROCOMER) or the Ministry of Agriculture and Husbandry (MAG); and those closer to "sustainability," such as the Ministry of the Environment and Energy (MINAE) or the National System of Conservation Areas (SINAC). This split is partly programmatic,⁴ but also practical, as more resources (human and financial) given to the development institutions, rather than the sustainability ones (Obando 2017; Ramírez 2017).

Also, as Anja Nygren (1998:204) argues, even within the supposed consensus regarding sustainable development, there are struggles between different "...state institutions, international aid agencies and nongovernment organisations, pursuing different goals and responding to different ideologies..." She located four such ideologies in the country: 1. Environmentalism for nature, in which the central idea was the "protection of the country's natural forests and conservation of its wildlife and diversity" (p. 205). 2. Environmentalism for profit, where "...sustainable development means economic revitalisation, where private enterprises and multinational companies are encouraged to invest in ecotourism, forest extractivism and biobusiness, in the name of making the country's biodiversity an economically profitable commodity and loading the country's environmental beauty with international market value" (p. 207). 3. Alternative environmentalism, in which the Western divide between nature and culture is the reason behind the destruction of nature, and it is in indigenous knowledge where the necessary answers and healing can be found. Finally, 4. Environmentalism for the people, where "...environmental protectionism [environmentalism for nature] is not an adequate mechanism for promoting environmental care. At the same time, they question the social sustainability of Environmentalism for Profit... and so the features of sustainable development have to be sought more in social forestry and small-scale agriculture." (p. 214).

Nygren points out that the environmentalism for profit is the dominant perspective in the country, with the support of both capital and most government institutions, and that whenever environmentalism gets in the way of profit it can be moved into the background. At the same time, it is quite obvious that these understandings of sustainable development are very different and more importantly, point into

³ According to Igoe, Neves and Brockington (2010:488), "Much of the power of these ideas is derived from a currently dominant ideological context where it is believed that the attribution of economic value to nature and its submission to 'free market' processes is key to successful conservation. The details of this logic are as follows. Once the value of particular ecosystem is revealed, for example an ecosystem's ability to store carbon, the ecosystem acquires economic value as a service provider or as a nonconsumptive resource, as in the case of eco-tourism. The ecosystem thus putatively becomes a source of income for local communities, creating further capitalist-development opportunities."

⁴ For example, while PROCOMER's website does not mention once the environment in its strategic pillars, the MINAE makes the explicit claim that there are in charge of protecting the environment, in search of reaching an equilibrium with the productive activities of the country.

quite distinct political directions. The question is then, how they continue to be understood as part of the same field, regardless of their contradictions?

I find Gramsci's ideas on "common sense" quite useful in this direction. According to the Italian Communist, the common sense is a set of immediate, unconnected facts just taken for granted and non-critical assertions on reality and the "way in which things are," where "...in a whole range of judgements common sense identifies the exact cause, simple and to hand, and does not let itself be distracted by fancy quibbles and pseudo-profound, pseudo-scientific metaphysical mumbo-jumbo" (Gramsci 1971:348).

Common sense is conservative in the sense that it gives the idea that things are "naturally" as they are, and thus, becomes crucial to the question of hegemony. For Gramsci domination in capitalist societies can never be seen as a simple matter of coercion, for consensus must also be created. Hegemony, in a sense, is the particular ways in which coercion and consent are articulated and sometimes equilibrated in different space-times to shape the relations between dominant and subaltern groups in an effort – never entirely successful or complete– to secure and reify a particular status quo (Buci-Glucksmann 1980).

This is why common sense is so important, as it plots a sort of roadmap by which everyday life is read and understood. However, and this is crucial, common sense is far from an even or homogenous formation. Rather,

To some degree, we all live in a commonsense world, just not the same one... We all continually channel the stream of events that wash over us into familiar narratives, making sense of what would otherwise appear as random. The knowledge we draw on to do this is derived both from the particular circles in which we move, and our own life experiences as these are mediated by the narratives available to us. Over time this knowledge comes to constitute a solid, emotionally persuasive core against which we test both what happens to us, and how others explain the world to us... At any historical moment, even within the same place, there will be multiple narratives, some closely connected and overlapping, some conflicting and contradictory, but all of which are, to some rational being, self-evident truths. (Crehan 2016:47).

I would argue that in Costa Rica, particularly from the 1990s onwards, a sustainable development common sense began to take form. This common sense was not built from scratch, and has as its foundations the historical apparent truth that the country's progress and identity is tied to agricultural export crops; basically coffee (Quesada 2008). As well as the assertion made by many historians that a general sense of the importance of the conservation of nature was already present in the Costa Rican liberal reforms of the 19th Century! (Viales Hurtado 2001; Evans 2010).

It would be during the government of José María Figueres ⁵ (1994-1998) that this two apparent historical "truths" were fused together with the widespread idea of the Costa Rican exceptionality,⁶ in what the president called the "*desarrollo sostenible a la tica*"; literally sustainable development, Costa Rican style. Basically, the *desarrollo sostenible a la tica*, was the combined implementation of the general tenets of the sustainable development model, with the deepening of the neoliberal reform, fashioned as a continuation of the country's exceptional history.

⁵ Son of one of the "founding fathers" of the Costa Rican state, José Figueres Ferrer, José María Figueres Olsen was president of Costa Rica between 1994 and 1998. His presidential campaign was marred by allegations of corruption and involvement with the murder of a young drug trafficker.

⁶ Much of Costa Rica's national sense is built around the idea of its exceptionality in relation to the rest of the Central American region in terms of the lack of armed conflicts and higher levels of social development. However, as different authors have also argued, this discourse has become a powerful tool to co-opt and defuse counter-hegemonic movements that may threaten the status quo (Jiménez 2005; Acuña 2002).

In terms of the neoliberal reform, during his government Figueres signed with the World Bank the third Structural Adjustment Project, which included a set of very unpopular major cuts in the public sector, as well as the liberalization of the banking sector, which ironically had been nationalized by his father. He also prioritized foreign policy, signing a Free Trade Agreement with Mexico, and having a very active role in the creation of the Central American Integration System in 1995.

Regarding sustainable development, this became the discourse in charge of stitching together foreign and domestic policy, as well as the idea of continuity and change in the development model. Echoing the Brundtland Report of 1987, *desarrollo sostenible a la tica* was officially defined as the search for "...more general welfare in the present, while we take care of the great equilibriums that make or development possible in the long run." Which equilibriums? 1. Political-institutional, looking to extend democratic decision making; 2. Of the social structure, trying to breach the internal inequality gaps; 3. Economic, to reach long periods of sustained economic growth, and; 4. Environmental, looking to harmonize social and economic life with the natural world. (Monge 2015:7).

One of the places where we can see the idea of the equilibriums more clearly, is in the changes made to Article 50 of the Political Constitution in 1994 that implicitly came to introduce the principle of sustainable development into the country's legal fabric:

The State will procure the greatest well-being to all the inhabitants of the country, organizing and stimulating production and the most adequate distribution [*reparto*] of the wealth.

All persons have the right to a healthy and ecologically balanced environment. For that, they are legitimated to denounce the acts that infringe this right and to claim reparation for the damage caused.

Much more could be said on this topic, for my interests, it is enough to point out that it is during this period that the government began to actively promote and brand the country abroad as a "green" touristic destination. Also, that it is during the 1990s that much of the Costa Rican current conservation framework, including institutions, laws and policies, was created. Or rather, that it is during this period that the discourse of sustainable development became the framework defining the contours within which development could be spoken and thought about in the country. However, this sustainable development common sense is not limited to arena of the state and public policy. Through the inclusion of environmental topics in the curricula of both school and high school courses and the creation of media campaigns oriented towards sensitizing the population regarding the importance of taking care of resources such as water and electricity, it has circulated and has a widespread presence in most of the country's social groups, but a particular effectivity among the urban middle classes.⁷

However, as mentioned before, common sense is never homogenous and contains and presents contradictions in different levels. For example, at the same time that Costa Rica is presented, and understands itself as environmentally friendly country, it is also one of the main importers and consumers of synthetic pesticides per capita in the world (Galt 2014). Or the contradiction between a development model that is supposed to be social, ecological and economically inclusive, but openly promotes of a set of monocultures that have resulted in processes of dispossession and growing inequalities in the country's countryside.

⁷ The last State of the Nation Report (PEN 2017:233) presents the results of a survey on people's perceptions on the environment. According to these results, "for the majority of the population surveyed, protecting the environment is 'as important' than, for example, improving the education, health services or public safety, reducing poverty or corruption and creating jobs." An interesting finding is that "91% has heard about climate change or global warming. The majority (78%) considers that this phenomenon is cause by humans and that it is affecting the planet."

2. The expansion that never was: erasing dispossession from the pineapple expansion

In early 2017, a study conducted by a group of public institutions using satellite images and coordinated by the UNDP, claimed that between 2000 and 2015 nearly 6,000 hectares of forest had been lost to the expansion of pineapple production in the country. According to this study, during that period of time the amount of land dedicated to this crop had quadrupled itself, reaching a staggering 58,000 hectares in 2015; a number glaringly higher from the 37,000 hectares that the agricultural census had reported just three years before (Araya 2017).

This data was used by environmentalist groups such as the Costa Rica Ecological Federation (FECON) to push forward their claim that the expansion of pineapple was gravely affecting the country's ecosystems, as well as poisoning the water sources of many communities in the rural areas (Araya 2017). It also forced the National Chamber of Pineapple Producers and Exporters (CANAPEP) to issue a response to what they saw as an attack. In a newspaper article that appeared less than a month after the aforementioned study was made public, Abel Chaves, president of CANAPEP, argued that it was inexact to talk about an expansion. Rather, that according to their own analysis, the so-called expansion was the result of the migration to pineapples of producers that historically had grown other crops such as coffee, citrus trees, macadamia nut, rice, beans, sugar cane, among others. He furthered his claim by reminding that according to the State of the Nation⁸ between 2000 and 2014 Costa Rica's forest cover had increased from 1.2 to 1.4 million hectares. Concluding, for Chaves, "the word expansion has been used politically in the case of pineapples. There has not been an expansion, only the utilization of agricultural land [*de vocación agrícola*] that was being used to grow other crops." (Rojas 2017).

In itself, this is a very vexing response. If you have more hectares dedicated to growing pineapples in places where they used to none, how can there not be an expansion? However, when read from the perspective of the sustainable development framework that was presented in the previous section, it becomes much more logical. There was no expansion because, on the one hand, the national forest cover had increased in the same period; and, on the other hand, because the land upon which the industry had grown was already being used for agricultural purposes.⁹ Albeit, agricultural purposes less profitable than pineapple. Under this reasoning, the formula of more forest and more agricultural exports was the only sensible idea. The only way that someone could be against it, was due to political reasons. In the words of Chaves: "An incorrect message is being presented. The image of a sector that has been successful is being tarnished".

As we can see, no mention is made here regarding what happened to the human and non-human elements that made up the landscapes that were transformed by the expansion, or growth, of the pineapple industry. Nor of the economic value that was lost to the transformation of the land uses. Nor of the different claims of water poisoning and appalling working conditions that have been leveled against the industry and that have little to do with deforestation (Acuña 2006; Silveti 2015; Aguilar and Arroyo 2014; Arguedas 2015; Maglianesi-Sandoz 2013; Diepens et al. 2014; Echeverría-Sáenz et al. 2012; Carazo et al. 2016). It would appear that these are the cases in which, according to Chaves, the word expansion is used in political terms.

I would like to explore the process by which we got to this conjuncture. How is it that the country went from having less than 2,500 hectares of pineapple in 1984, to the 58,000 hectares that we supposedly have today? And how is it that this expansion, if we are to take Abel Chaves word for it, "did not happen"? In other words, my objective is to show that the process of dispossession that allowed the spectacular growth of the pineapple industry in the last three decades was rendered

⁸ *Estado de la Nación*, a private think tank that publishes a yearly report on the political, social and economic transformations of the country.

⁹ An argument which, by the way, is supported by the study of Fagan and other (2013) regarding the relation between conservation lands and agriculture in the country's northern region.

invisible and de-politicized by the framework of sustainable development. Let's begin with a general characterization of the industry and a brief look at its history.

While the growing of pineapples in Costa Rica has a very long history, its industrialization and specialization towards exports can be dated to the decade of the 1970s (Aravena Bergen 2005). During this decade, the transnational Fresh del Monte began exploring the possibility of moving their stagnant production of pineapples from Hawaii to other places in Latin America with lower land and labor costs, as well as more favorable climate conditions. The fact that a subsidiary of Del Monte was already present in the country producing bananas, as well as the "political stability" of the country, made of Costa Rica an attractive destination. By the late 1970s, the first industrial plantations were created in Buenos Aires of Puntarenas, in the south of the country, by the Pineapple Development Company (PINDECO). Expanding from there to different parts of the country in the following decades (Guevara, Arce, and Guevara 2017).

The process of expansion of the pineapple industry must be understood within the larger framework of transformation of the Costa Rican development model that was mentioned before. What came to be known as the process of structural adjustment, was basically the deepening of the articulations of the national economy with the global market through economic liberalization, as well as a somewhat uneven and incomplete process of privatization and institutional reform. In terms of the rural areas, the idea was to promote tourism, as well as a set of "new" export oriented crops, such as pineapples, oranges and oil palms, in an attempt to diversify the economic structure and take advantage of the national "competitive advantages" (basically, cheap labor and land) (Edelman 1999; León 2015).

A set of incentives were given to promote these crops. For example: Export Contracts (Law 6955), which exempted exporters from paying import tariffs for raw materials and equipment, as well as sales taxes; Tax Installment Payments (*Certificados de Abono Tributario*), which basically acted as exports subsidies; and the classification of processing and packaging plants as free zones (Law 7210) (Obando 2017). At the same time, support for the production of staple crops and other products oriented towards the domestic market was limited. For example, credit oriented towards the staple crops sector was cut by nearly 90% between 1980 and the 2000s, and technical support was oriented away from this products, and towards the new export oriented crops (Edelman 1999; Cerdas Sandí 2015).

This transformation took place in a period in which the country's agricultural land was contracting anyway. I already mentioned the increase in the number and extension of protected wildlands (Corrales 2017). Also, in the period between 1984 and 2014, the country's total farmland decreased a 20% (around 600,000 hectares) (GRUTA 2017), in part due to conservation, but also as the broader process of urbanization. As such, the rural areas became a place of dispute between three dominant production logics¹⁰: First, a set of small and medium producers of staple crops, other foodstuff and cattle, whose production was oriented mainly towards subsistence and the domestic market. Second, a group of larger producers, including cooperatives and domestically own companies dedicated to the production of the "traditional" monocultures (coffee, sugar cane, rice). Finally, a group of transnational companies specialized mainly in the production of tropical fruits (bananas, pineapple and oranges) for export, but that also control most of the national food industry through their control of the supermarket sector (Alvarado and Charmel 2002).¹¹

The resulting balance, as seen in the last decade or so, has been a significant increase in the market power of the third logic, a complicated balance for the second one, with some producers managing to thrive, while others sink, and a decrease in the number and influence of the first one (GRUTA 2017). As a result, Costa Rica went from being a country that produced most of its foodstuff before the

¹⁰ Of course, none of these logics should be understood in pure terms. As we will see in a moment, what we find are particular combinations of the three groups.

¹¹ For example, according to Henry Picado (2014), three companies, including subsidiaries of Cargill and Walmart, control 92% of the industrial production of chicken and 75% of the industrial production of eggs in the country.

1980s, to one that imports a 34% of the rice, 69% of the maize, 73% of the beans and 77% of the cereals that are consumed domestically (Chacón 2014). What is also clear is that it is in this dispute, and not in the expansion of the almost inexistent agrarian frontier (deforestation), that we will find the explanation behind the growth of the pineapple industry (Fagan et al. 2013).

Although there is a growing body of literature on the effects that the expansion of the pineapple industry has had in the Costa Rican country side, we still know very little of its history. As mentioned before, the industrial production of the crop began in Buenos Aires in the late 1970s, with the installation of PINDECO. From there, seeing the great success that the industry was having and the high prices that the fruit was receiving in the global markets, it expanded its presence towards the northern region of the country (the Cantons¹² of Los Chiles, Upala and Guatuso), in the border region with Nicaragua. In the 1990s, the scientist in the plantations of Buenos Aires created a new variety of pineapple, adjusted to the country's climate, known as the MD-2, which signaled the consolidation, and subsequent land rush to increase the amount of hectares dedicated to the crop. By the 2000s, it expanded into the country's northern Atlantic region (specially the Cantons of Guácimo, Siquirres and Pococí) (Valverde, Jiménez, and Porrás 2016). What all these places have in common, is that they were traditional agricultural regions that combined the presence of monocultures with significant production for the domestic market.

We know very little of how the crop gained traction on each of these specific regions. However, through the fragmentary evidence that we can find across different studies, as well as interviews and participant observation, we can get a general sense of the process. The first thing that can be said is that it has been far from a homogenous and sustained process. In each particular region the strategies deployed by the companies to promote the crop have been highly differentiated. However, an element that seems to be present in most cases is the active participation of the state. It would appear that in the cases of both the northern and Caribbean regions, the initial introduction of the industrial production of pineapple was done through the Peasant Settlements that the then Institute of Agrarian Development (Institute of Rural Development, nowadays) had created during the 1960s and 1970s, to respond to the increasing levels of unrest in the rural areas, due mainly to the lack of access to land (Alfaro 1989; Edelman 1999; Rovira 1987). By the 1990s, these Settlements were having a hard time, as the support and market for their produce, mainly staple crops, was contracting. In this context, many of these producers were approached by transnational companies and invited to shift towards the new export oriented crops, pineapple included. The Ministry of Agriculture and Husbandry (MAG) also played an active role in this process, as they gave technical support to the would-be exporters (Den Daas 1993; Acuña 2006; Rojas 2006).

In many cases the results were boom and bust cycles, in which the peasant producers became more and more indebted, as they were invited to shift between different non-traditional crops, in search for the one that would finally be successful (León 2015). This success, when it came, usually did in the form of contract farming, in which they would produce the fruit, following the technical requirements set by the transnational companies (especially Dole and Chiquita) that control most of the exports. This was a sort of double edged sword. At the same time that this sort of arrangement allowed them to secure better profits than with any other crop, it also forced them get indebted to keep up with the technical and managerial standards, creating relations of dependency with these companies (Watts 1992; ; for an example in the northern region, see: Rojas 2006).

However, this was not the only type of relationship between pineapple and the Peasant Settlements. According to Valverde, Jiménez and Porrás' (2016) study of the effects of the pineapple industry in the northern region, a significant amount of hectares of the crop are located within these Peasant Settlements. Since the beneficiaries in the Settlements received the land in the form of leases and could not sell it, they began leasing out their plots to local contractors that put them to work for the larger pineapple companies. As a result: 1. The former staple crops producers became wage laborers, many times in their own lands; 2. Due to the exposure and use of pesticides, the land's fertility was

¹² Costa Rica is administratively divided into Provinces, then Cantons and lastly districts.

being destroyed; 3. The beneficiary families were being displaced and forced to rent elsewhere, becoming in practice once again landless.

Using again the fragmentary information that we have on the topic, it appears that once the crop had gained a foothold in the region and showed that it was a profitable venture, the process of expansion would move into other sectors. Here, the particular agrarian history of each region has had much to say in terms of the routes and rhythms. However, for my interests here, I will make a general characterization of this process.

When the crop really started to take hold outside of Buenos Aires in the 1990s, it began to overlap and compete with other monocultures, such as sugar cane and oranges in the northern region, and papaya in the north Caribbean. Due to the high prices that pineapples were receiving at the moment, many medium and larger producers either migrated towards pineapple themselves, or sold their land to transnational companies and their local contractors. As the pineapple plantations began to expand in this manner, they began to affect their neighboring communities, mostly peasant communities and large and medium cattle ranchers, which in turn created the conditions for further expansion.

In the case of the peasant communities, the effects of the process of structural adjustment mentioned before had left them in a precarious situation, which made the idea of selling their lands to the pineapple plantations an attractive one. For those who did not want to sell, life near the plantations became harder and harder, due in part to the large amounts of pesticide that are used and that tend to poison both the water sources and their crops. Regarding the cattle ranchers, the situation was similar. The waste left after the harvesting of the pineapples produces a large fly (*Stomoxys calcitrans*) that feeds on livestock, making it lose weight. This forced many of them out of business, leading to the sale of their land to the pineapple plantations, thus fueling even further the expansion of the crop.

The process just presented in a very schematized manner, has had a profound effect in the landscapes of the regions discussed. The production of pineapple demands the total clearing of the land (Garita Coto 2014). Producing spaces with very little shade that contrast with the former cattle ranches and peasant farms that dominated these regions. Further, the social worlds of the neighboring communities have been rattled and transformed significantly. For example, peasant households who had been used to working independently, found themselves having to resort to wage labor as a way of survival (Valverde, Jiménez, and Porras 2016). Particularly in the Caribbean, people that had occupied lands in an attempt to escape the labor conditions of the banana enclave, found themselves landless again and forced to see their daughters and sons repeat the pattern, but now in the pineapple plantations (Aguilar and Arroyo 2014). As we saw, it has also affected the capacity of the country to produce its own food, tilting ever more the scale of balance towards the transnational companies that control both the agricultural exports and imports. Which in kind, also transformed the dynamics between rural and urban spaces. As less and less of the national diet came to depend on domestic production, and the country's reality came to be understood as dominantly urban, the rural spaces came to be seen as either spaces of nature (National Parks and beaches), or export-oriented plantations. Rendering invisible, as it were, the peasant or cattle ranching ways of life.

Diana Ojeda (2016:33–34) proposes that we think about dispossession as something that goes beyond the loss of a good, or a series of goods. For her “What is dispossessed, without doubt, is not only a good, but the socio-environmental web from which it is a part of.” Thus, we must not think about dispossession as an event, but as a process. Because, when we approach it as an event, “... not only are the historic and geographical roots of inequality that make dispossession possible in the first place hidden. But it also, since it does not allow us to see its sustained nature, nor its consequence on the material and symbolic ecologies that sustain life in different times and spaces, it has a profound depoliticizing effect.”

If we follow this definition, it is clear that the process of growth and consolidation of the pineapple industry in Costa Rica, has been one of dispossession. However, this is not how it is framed and understood by the different actors involved. We already saw what the president of the CANAPEP had

to say in this regard. However the lack of mention to the process of dispossession extends way beyond the representatives of the industry. For example, in an op-ed piece on the efforts being made to guarantee both the economic and environmental sustainability of the pineapple industry, the Minister of Agriculture, Luis Felipe Arauz (2017), mentions that the discussion regarding the pineapple industry had been polarized between the CANAPEP, that exalted its economic importance; and the environmentalist groups that were against its expansion due to the supposed environmental impacts. According to him, it was necessary to find an equilibrium between both sectors. In the rest of the article, he argues first in favor of the economic importance of the industry for the national economy (basically jobs and exports). Next, he goes through the different environmental claims laid against the pineapple industry, and questions each one of them. For example, regarding the already mentioned study that claimed that the expansion of the industry had resulted in the clearing of almost 6,000 hectares, the Minister argued that “This study does not prove that the source of the deforestation is the pineapple activity, since it could have been the result of another activity previous to the pineapple during those 15 years.”

Here again we can see the sustainable development framework in action, as the idea of the equilibrium between economic growth and environmental conservation is at the crux of the Minister’s intervention. Further, once again the social impact of the industry is reduced to the creation jobs, without any mention whatsoever of what was lost, jobs included, through the process of expansion by dispossession. We are thus presented with a reality, the pineapple industry, which has no history beyond the creation of jobs and the production of revenues. Also, this industry is presented by itself, without any linkage to the fate of other sectors such as the producers of staple crops or cattle ranching. As such, the logic operating here is quite clear: The industry is too important for the national economy, and the claims of environmental degradation to fickle to stop the national progress over them. In the own words of the minister:

The solution proposed by the environmental sector [to the effects of the industry] is to declare a moratorium on the expansion of the crop. I do not think that this solves the problems noted. Should we prohibit the growth of an activity that creates thousands of jobs and resources for the country? Or do we control and resolve its problems? This question can be extended to any human activity that affects the environment, including, for example, the use of automotive vehicles.

Such a trivialization of the topic should not surprise from the head of a ministry that has played an important role in the promotion of the crop. However, it gives us a sense of how the government has approached the topic. In the next section we will explore how the topic of the expansion of the pineapple industry has been contested in three different cases.

3. The politics of pineapple in Costa Rica: Opposing the pineapple expansion

A topic that begs much more attention than the one I can give it at the moment, is how in Costa Rica the environmental discourse has subsumed or overdetermined the discussion on agrarian conflict in the last few decades (GRUTA 2017). In general terms, as we will soon see, the protest against the expansion of pineapples tends to be framed in terms of the water that it poisons, or the deforestation that it creates; never, in terms of the process of dispossession that I described above. As such, these types of protests play themselves into the framework of sustainable development, questioning the way in which the crop is produced, but not the fact that it is being produced at all. Further, the tag of environmentalist papers over the more than evident differences that exist between the different actors involved. What we find is that in most cases, anyone that is against the ways in which capital circulates in the rural areas is immediately understood as an environmentalist and not necessarily as a peasant, a cattle rancher or even a housewife. This identification between environmentalism and opposition cuts in two directions. On the one hand, by presenting them as defenders of the environment, it renders invisible their particular histories, including the process of dispossession that they have suffered. On the other, it creates a bridge between their causes and the environmental sensibilities of the urban middle classes, allowing for the creation of specific rural-urban alliances in

particular time-spaces. Such as in the case of open pit mining in the town of Crucitas, near the border with Nicaragua (Arévalo Villalobos 2016).

In what follows of this section, I will present three different cases or vignettes that will allow us to see how these elements combine and operate on the ground.

Vignette 1: water and pineapples in the Caribbean

The pineapple industry appeared first as a national concern in the mid-2000s, when it became evident not only the extent of the expansion in the previous 20 years, but also the effects that it was having on the neighboring communities. A turning point in this regard came in 2007, when the Aqueducts and Sewers Institute (AyA), the public institution in charge of water provision, declared a regional emergency due to the significant residues of Bromacil, a pesticide used extensively in the production of pineapples, that were found in the water supply of the communities of El Cairo, Milano, La Francia and Louisiana of Siquirres in the Province of Limón. This declaration was the result of more than four years of community organizing and mobilization of a set of local leaders, most of them women, from the affected communities, as well as a broad regional coalition that would eventually become the National Front of Sector Affected by Pineapple Production (FRENASAPP),¹³ and a few San Jose based environmental organizations. From the beginning, it became evident that although the point of contestation was the poisoning of the local water supply, what was in play for many members of these coalition were the structural transformation that had led to the installation of the pineapple plantations in the region in the first place. Containing some of the poorest districts in the country, it became evident that there was a continuation between the banana plantations that had dominated the region's landscape until the 1980s. However, for both the state and the press, the situation was framed as a health issue that could be solved with the construction of a new aqueduct.

In this context, as a provisional solution while a new aqueduct from a new water source higher in the mountains, was constructed, the AyA began to supply these communities with drinking water twice a week via tank trucks. At the end, the provisional solution became permanent, and for the next 10 years, until 2017, when the new aqueduct was created, the households of these communities continued to receive their drinking water via tank truck.¹⁴

Another point that is important to make is that, although the whole process took more than 10 years (the first protests began in 2003), the coalition complaints and protests remained squarely within the formal legal framework and avoid confrontation with either the government or the pineapple companies. Rather, it combined filing petitions and complaints in the courts, with peaceful protest in different public institutions. The case also received a lot of international attention. In 2009, Catarina Albuquerque, the UN's special relator for Human Rights, Water and Sanitation, after her visit to the country, recommended that the government regulated the agricultural use of Bromacil and Diuron. As a response to this report, the Costa Rican mission before the UN circulated an official note that stated that "it would be important to know which alternatives to bromacil and diuron could be given to the pineapple producers" (Boeglin 2015). Also, in 2015 the Inter American Human Rights Court held a public hearing on this case, forcing the government to speed up the process of construction of the new aqueduct.

However, as if this was not enough indictment of the position that the Costa Rican state continues to have on this topic, when the current government finally inaugurated the aqueduct, it openly admitted that the contamination had been done by the neighboring pineapple plantations. However, no legal action has been taken against these companies. Nor have they been forced to pay the more than \$3

¹³ The creation of this alliance was facilitated by the long tradition of political organizing against the effects of pesticide use in the banana plantations since the 1990s (Barraza et al. 2013).

¹⁴ The new aqueduct only services the community of El Cairo and Louisiana. The rest of the communities continue to wait for a definite answer to this problem.

million that it costs the Costa Rican government to continue the supply of drinking water by tank trucks during the last 10 years (Arguedas 2015).

It is also important to point out that from the beginning, the veracity of the complaints presented by communities such as El Cairo or Milano were called into question by both the pineapple companies and state officials, due to their supposed lack of scientific bases. Even when they are backed with solid evidence, the legitimacy of the institutions backing those results is questioned. For example, according to the XX Report of the State of the Nation (2014), the National Water Laboratory had recommended the AyA to stop distributing water by tank truck to the aforementioned communities. According to the reports from private labs that they had contracted, no residues of pesticides had been found in the water since 2012. However, according to lab tests done by the Regional Institute of Toxic Substances Studies (IRET), of the National University, in 2014 significant residues of bromacil and other pesticides were found. The result of this controversy was that each side, those who oppose and those who promote the pineapple industry, elected one of the two reports to argue against the other, with the government playing the passive spectator.

We find a similar situation in the discussion regarding how many hectares of pineapple does the country actually has. As I mentioned before, according to the 2014 agricultural census, the number hover around 37, 000 hectares, while according to the report led by PNUD the number was closer to 60,000, and according to CANAPEP the real number should be 43, 000 hectares. This mess speaks of the lack of interest by the government to impose some sort of order upon this sector. For example, a study in the northern region has shown how there is a massive discrepancy between the amount of land that hold the necessary environmental permits to produce pineapples, and the actual surface that is under production. In this direction, that same study concludes that the government's oversight of this aspect has led to the expansion of the crop (Valverde, Jiménez, and Porras 2016).

As a whole, these controversies point towards the politics of knowledge that frame and define the discussion around the crop's expansion. There is an implicit hierarchy of knowledge that discredits completely the experience of the people and communities involved, and forces them to prove to the state that they are victims and not liars. At the same time that it is publicly acknowledged that the companies have broken the law (discrepancy between environmental permits and actual hectares in production, water poisoning), but no legal actions are taken. It is no wonder that when speaking with leaders and members of these communities, they express great frustration and a sense of being "abandoned" by a state that in their eyes, clearly takes the sides of the companies.

Vignette 2: Pineapple moratoriums

As mentioned before, in 2007, the same year that the protests against water poisoning began to take force, a broad group of community and environmental leaders came together to found the National Front of Sectors Affected by the Pineapple Industry (FRENASAPP). Initially this organization centered on the topic of pesticide contamination and the impact of the pineapple plantations on the health of the communities. However, as time went by, it has also began to question the development model and the types of jobs that were being promoted with the pineapple industry.

At least since 2009 FRENASAPP began to push for a national moratorium on the pineapple industry. The idea was to pause the expansion, while further studies were made to determine whether the industry was harming the neighboring communities, and verify that all of the plantations were complying with the national environmental and health regulations. Due to the supposed importance of the industry in terms of exports and job creation,¹⁵ the proposal never gained much traction in either the executive or legislative branches of government.

¹⁵ According to PROCOMER, in 2016 the pineapple industry's exports represented over \$870 million, which accounted for a 9% of the country's total value of exports, and placed it second, just behind bananas (10% and over \$987 million). Further, according to CANAPEP, in 2015 the pineapple industry in Costa Rica generates

As a result, FRENASAPP decided to shift their attention towards the municipalities of Guácimo, Siquirres and Pococí. In 2012, after various year of political work and lobbying, the proposed moratorium on the production of pineapples was accepted in all three municipalities. However, the CANAPEP responded immediately by filing an appeal of unconstitutionality against the moratorium, which basically claimed that it violated their right to “freedom of enterprise.” The Constitutional court accepted the appeal and revoked the moratorium. In 2016, a different political coalition managed to pass a similar moratorium, now in the municipality of Los Chiles. However, once again CANAPEP appealed the resolution and the Constitutional Court ruled in its favor (Obando 2017).

These rulings left the community and environmental organizations reeling. It was one thing to be unable to sway the ministries and public institutions in their favor, it was another to have the Constitutional Court, traditionally taken to be one of the few really neutral authorities, rule against the autonomy of the municipal governments and what seen as a very reasonable proposal. As one of the leaders of the political coalition in the northern region mentioned in a meeting a few months before the ruling: “We are not against the production of pineapples per se. We understand that it is very important source of labor in many communities. What we want is for it to be done well. Following the laws that we have.”

What these cases show, is the friction that exist between how the topic of the pineapple expansion is understood in the national and in the regional scale. Nationally, agro exports and job creation are equalized with economic growth and thus, understood as a priority. Regionally, the topic is approached rather from a perspective of livelihood and the impact that this industry has on the different communities. As such, there was a better political climate to push for a moratorium in the municipal level, than on the national one.

This is not to say that the split between economic growth and environmental protection is so clean cut in either scale. One the one hand, as I mentioned above, environmentalism as a way of calling the opposition to the monoculture agricultural model creates a bridge between the rural experiences and the environmental sensibilities of the urban middle classes. As a result, increasing pressure has been placed on the government to assure a better protection of the environment, not necessarily the communities’ wellbeing. On the other hand, at the community level, the pineapple industry has had a very divisive effect between those households who depend on wage labor in the crop’s plantations, and those whose livelihood is related to other practices.

In general, I would argue that the local and regional organizations, their leaders and the communities that they represent have reached an impasse. On the one hand, it is clear to them that state does not act in their best interests, and that the formal ways of channeling their discontent do not work, at least not in the way they would want. On the other hand, the traditional forms of understanding their place in the world, their common sense, are still strong enough to keep their imagination within the limits of the status quo. In other words, that they are have a very hard time to think outside the limits of the institutional order. The result, is a generalized feeling of dejection that has led many people away from the organizations.

Vignette 3: the the National Platform for the Responsible Production and Trade of Pineapple

In response to the increasingly negative publicity that the industry has been receiving, both domestically and abroad, both CANAPEP and the government have fashioned strategies to make the industry more “sustainable.” For example, in 2006 the CANAPEP created the Socio-environmental Commission for the Sustainable Production of Pineapples (COSAP). The objective of this commission is to promote a set of “good agricultural practices” among its members, to assure a production process more “friendly” with the environment. These good environmental practices are presented in a set of technical manuals that explain the different parts and aspects of the production process.

In the case of the government, it has also promoted a set of “good agricultural practices,” similar to those of CANAPEP. But also, in 2011 it proposed the creation of the National Platform for the Responsible Production and Trade of Pineapple (PNP). According to its website (www.pnp.cr), the PNP “...is a space for inter-institutional and inter-sectoral dialogue, which articulates and monitors the actions and tasks required in the short, medium and long term by the various stakeholders and others affected by pineapple activity, in order to improve the environmental and social performance of this crop.” Initially funded by the Dutch ICCO Corporation, and under the leadership of the UNPD, the PNP’s main objective is to improve the social and environmental performance of the pineapple industry and turn it more sustainable.

In 2015 the PNP published an Action Plan for the next five year that resulted from three years of work, in which over 900 people, representing over 50 organizations related to the industry gave their input. However, CANAPEP, which represents only a 5% of the national producers, but concentrates nearly 85% of the country’s total production, and had participated in the whole process, did not agree with the resulting Action Plan and decided to pull out of the Platform. According to them, the initiative had been politicized, since labor unions had been invited to present their inputs in regard to the labor conditions, but not the solidarista associations that are much closer to the plantations management. At the same time FRENASAPP questioned the impartiality of those coordinating the process (Bonilla 2016). This is to say that the PNP does not have much influence whatsoever in the actual operation of the industry. However, what I find noteworthy is that by looking at the PNP, we are able to see how such a polarizing and conflictive topic as the pineapple industry in Costa Rica, can be approached from the sustainable development framework.

The Action Plan is organized around 12 action lines. Each action line proposes a task that needs to be completed in order for the sector to become sustainable. However, each action line is redacted in such a vague and general manner that very little is actually said. For example, Action Line 10 claims that “The Government will promote a national dialogue on labor rights in the agribusiness sector.” Action Line 11, the only one that refers explicitly to the social impacts of the industry, says: “The State, with the technical and economic support of producers and civil society organizations, will promote the identification of possible (positive or adverse) impacts of pineapple production on rural communities and their offset.” Regarding the more specific tasks, it instructs that the “Producers, with the collaboration and approval of SETENA and the Directorate of Water of MINAE, will develop and apply actions to control, minimize, and remedy the impact of poor productive practices on the affected natural ecosystems in the farms and neighboring communities.” The other 10 Action Lines are written in a similar manner. In all of them, what we find is the sense that the industry is taken as a given that can be improved, but not changed. Further, that the problems are technological and managerial, never political, in the sense of the distribution of power. Another element to be taken into account is that every Action Line places the state as a cohesive actor, involved with creating alliances between the different actors.

As a whole, the Action Plan proposes the generation of equilibriums around a much contested topic, between highly polarized actors, with extremely different resources. Further, it proposes that many of these differences stem from a lack of information and scientific knowledge, with not even a mention of other forms of valuation or knowledge production (for example, experience), making impossible a sincere dialogue between the different parts. The result of such a discursive construction is the creation of a supposed middle ground, in which everyone can meet, as long as they stick to the program.

4. Closing remarks 1: Creeping authoritarianism in the Central American Switzerland

Instead of a traditional set of closing remarks, I would like to propose two different, albeit interconnected entry points into the material presented above. The first one, that I will explore in this section, from the perspective of the changes that the national political culture has suffered in the last few decades. The other one, from a more theoretical articulation between the discussion on sustainable development as a form of passive revolution, and populism.

Regarding the first point, and as I mentioned before, in the 1980s the country began a process of structural adjustment, or neoliberalization, which had a profound effect on the Costa Rican society as a whole. Known historically as one of the less unequal countries in Latin America, Costa Rica began a process of class differentiation and concentration of wealth (Robinson 2003; Sojo 2010). As a result, a set of mainly urban middle classes that had been born under the shadow of the social democratic-inspired developmental state, began a long process of decomposition that continues to our day. These middle classes played a crucial role in the production of the regime's hegemony. On the one hand, through their enthusiastic belief in the electoral system, they bestowed the governing elite with a high level of legitimacy. On the other hand, they operated as a sort of buffer between the dominant and subaltern groups, blocking, as it were, the possibility of confrontational class struggle to take explicit forms (García 2014).

Oversimplifying what is certainly a very complex process, we could characterize the moral economy that regulated the relations between middle classes and governing elites in the following terms: in exchange for a high social wage and reducing the chances of becoming poor, the middle classes gave the regime a very high level of obedience, legitimacy and moral authority, not only in electoral terms, but also in direct support to its policies and actions. As a result, the state form that took shape between the 1950s and 1980s, continued and deepened the country's elite's history of displacing social conflicts from the political, to the institutional or legal arena (Alvarenga 2005). What translated into a dynamic in which the developmental state grew by creating institutions whose function was to contain social unrest and co-opt leaders and members of the subaltern groups. This, of course, did not mean that coercion was not utilized. Rather that it was reserved to those groups that remained outside this moral economy and always justified under the rule of law and the need to maintain the country's social peace (Solís 2006). This went well with a country whose official history revolves around the idea of being a peaceful and egalitarian society even during the colonial period (Jiménez 2005; Acuña 2002). The resulting image was one of a middle class country, where conflicts were resolved peacefully through the official institutional channels and where democracy reigned supreme.

Once the structural adjustment process dissolved this moral economy, the two aforementioned mechanisms to produce hegemony also began to crumble. As a result, the social unrest of the subaltern groups, that had always been there, became much more visible, as middle class groups, and former middle class groups, came into contact with new realities. Also, new grievances were added, including environmental ones, as the middle classes began to feel the effects of the structural adjustment and their lives full of certainties were turned upside down (Guillen 2016; Ramírez 2012).

According to the last report of the State of the Nation (PEN 2017), during the 1980s the support given to the government, the political parties and the democratic system was still high in country's Central Valley. However, as the 1990s rolled in, this support began to falter, and the levels of contentment with the political system began to mirror those of the rest of Latin America. Based on a public opinion survey carried out by the University of Vanderbilt, known as the Barometer of the Americas, that same report by the State of the Nation claimed nowadays most of the population, from all ways of life, is highly dissatisfied with the general course of the country, the opportunities to find a good job and consider that their situation was worse than in their parents' era.

At the same time, against what one would expect, this increasing discontent has not only not translated into a higher number protest, but also "...most of the people still have very rooted ideas about the country as an inclusive political community." Further, when asked about possible solutions to the country's current situation "...the discontent persons opt for solutions that do not contravene the [country's] institutional design, nor the formal mechanisms provided by the system to channel their discontent." (p. 295)

However, when we move away from the general support to the political system to more specific topics, what we find is a tendency towards authoritarian responses to the country's problems. For example, in a recent pre-elections poll carried out by the National University, Altemeyer's scale on authoritarianism was applied. When looking at the scale as a whole, the report comes to the following

conclusion: "...almost a 44% of the respondents shows a 'high' support of authoritarianism; while more than 31% express a 'very high' support to it."¹⁶ (p. 15)

It is never a good idea to use these sort of surveys to jump to conclusions. However, in this case, the results that they present mirror the arguments that different authors have been making since the mid-2000s, regarding the increasing levels of authoritarian conducts in the country (Solís 2006; Sandoval et al. 2010; Sandoval 2002; Huhn 2012; Sojo 2010). Taking all of these elements into account, what we find is the paradoxical image of a political systems that maintains relatively high levels of legitimacy, but that at the same time, is experiencing increasing levels of social unrest and creeping authoritarian practices, or at least the support of those types of practices. In other words, the Costa Rican political system, with its usual posturing away from the extremes "...has progressively assumed those postures of pragmatic and creeping authoritarianism, which had, as one of their effects, a gradual suspension of many of the traditional bases of democratic representation and countervailing power; but coupled with their formal preservation, as the means by which passive popular consent is secured." (Hall 1988:126).

This impasse, which at least potentially creates the conditions of possibility for the flourishing of authoritarian populism (Hall 1988), is the result of a long period of time of what Gramsci (1971:276) called a crisis of authority, where "...the great masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies, and no longer believe what they used to believe previously, etc. The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear."

The old supports to the regime, based on the idea of the democratic and egalitarian country of middle classes, are no longer a reflection of the social relationships that organize political and social life. However, there is still no new consolidated common sense to articulate and give form to the new relations between dominant and subaltern groups. As a result, in "this interregnum," we find hybrid discourses that call upon elements from the "old" common sense –respect of the status quo and the government, canalizing discontent through the formal channels, avoiding frontal confrontation –, to hide the increasing levels of coercion that are needed to sustain domination. The *desarrollo sostenible a la tica* that I mentioned before is a clear example of these hybrid forms.

5. Closing remarks 2: Between export-oriented and environmental populism: the politics of sustainable development

'Sustainable development' is defined here as first, in respect to the dominant discourse of sustainable development, which emerged in the 1980s and early 1990s and was part of maintaining capitalist hegemony by counteracting environmentalist demands for 'limits to growth'; and second, in regard to continuous social, economic and political reconfigurations of capitalism in response to what Gramsci called the 'organic crises' of capitalism where capitalist hegemony becomes challenged. - Thomas Wanner (2015:24)

According to Thomas Wanner (2015:27), whom I quote above, the function of sustainable development has been to defuse the environmental critiques that were being thrown against capitalist development in the 1980s and 1990s. Thus, "Greening the economy and growth is about improving the environmental sustainability of current unsustainable economic growth patterns." At the same

¹⁶ These were the results to some of the questions (IDESPO 2017:13):

- "The groups and people that represent a serious menace to society deserved to be punished strongly." Around 90% of the respondents agreed.
 - "We need authorities that govern with a heavy hand." Around 90% of the respondents answered affirmatively.
 - "We need to strongly defend the established order." Around 90% of respondents agreed.
 - "The obedience to authority is the most important thing for the good of society." Around 80% of the respondents agreed.
- "The respect for the authorities is one of the more important virtues that we must learn." Around 92% of the respondents agreed.

time, "...green economy/growth must be seen as yet another mechanism to maintain the 'techno-economic hegemony' and 'hegemony of eco-economic 'win-win' thinking' that, first and foremost, attempts to legitimise the global capitalist economic order." The basic idea, is that the degradation of nature, and economic growth can be sustainable, because they can be decoupled through technological and managerial fixes. In other words, the sustainable development framework is guided by "...the belief that technological innovation, adequate pricing of 'natural capital' and a combination of market-based and policy instruments can achieve single-handedly economic and ecological sustainability and in the process eradicate global poverty and national and international inequalities." (p. 28).

According to Erik Swyngedouw (2010:215), the elevation of climate change to the terrain of public concern has had a paradoxical effect. On the one hand, it has become a common topic of discussion and public policy. At the same time, we have

...the consolidation of a political condition that has evacuated dispute and disagreement from the spaces of public encounter to be replaced by a consensually established frame...[that]... is structured around the perceived inevitability of capitalism and a market economy as the basic organizational structure of the social and economic order, for which there is no alternative. The corresponding mode of governmentality is structured around dialogical forms of consensus formation, technocratic management and problem-focused governance.

In other words, that at the same time that topics such as climate change, or sustainable development, enter the public scene, and thus would appear to be very "political," the very opposite happens. Since these topics are framed as unavoidable situations, inevitable side effects of the capitalistic market economy, the questions necessarily shift away from the why this is the case, to how we can fix it, as we saw in the case of the PNP. As such, it leaves the arena of the dispute and the contradictions, and into that of consensus building and synergies around scientific knowledge that is presented as an absolute truth.

For the Costa Rican case, and following my discussion in the previous section, I would argue that sustainable development operates in the interregnum created by the crisis of authority that resulted from the process of structural adjustment. It appeals to the need of constructing consensuses and equilibriums, at the same time that it uses scientific knowledge to justify, and depoliticize, the increasing levels of coercion that are needed to sustain domination. For the case of monocultures, such as pineapples, the formula has been to approach the social and environmental effects of their expansion as technical and managerial in nature. As such, only those grievances that are presented in this terms and through the formal institutional channels, are seen as legitimate; as we saw in the case of the water poisoning. Any other form of protest is not only dismissed, but presented as anti-progress or anti-social peace, indeed, as anti-Costa Rican.

This is why those groups that oppose the general model of agricultural development promoted in the country, tend to present their grievances in the language of "environmentalists." This is not to say that environmental concerns are not present in their complaints. My argument is rather that to enclose these grievances as simply environmental, hides other elements that are also present, such as the dynamics of dispossession that have made the pineapple industry possible in the first place. Of course, this is why the sustainable development common sense is so effective. By grouping differentiated grievances in a single category, it is not only able to depoliticize them, but also to present solutions framed in the mold of "environmentalism for profit," as universal.

Also, as I mentioned before, the language of environmentalism can operate as a bridge between rural experiences and urban middle class sensibilities. However, what can be bridged is limited to the framework of environmentalism, thus foreclosing, or at least restricting, the type of urban-rural coalitions that can be created. This is in part a problem of representation. Rural areas in Costa Rica tend to be presented to the general public in digital and mass media through images of nature (forests and beaches) and monoculture (coffee, sugar cane, oil palms, pineapples), but almost never, with the people in charge of producing those landscapes (Mitchell 1996). The result is an alienating experience

in which monocultures stand for money, and sustainability stands for protected wildlands, with the rural communities being left out of the picture. This becomes crucial when we start to think about how the system functions as a whole.

Neal Richardson (2009) coined the notion of “export-oriented populism” to refer to the type of politics that were promoted in Argentina under Nestor Kirchner’s government. According to him, the shift from the production of wheat and beef to that of soya had allowed the government to promote a development model based on the export of agricultural monoculture, at the same time that garner massive popular support from the urban working class. Since soya, unlike beef and wheat, was not part of the urban working class diet, Kirchner was able to promote its expansion, tax its exports, and use part of the revenues to subsidize certain “wage goods” and social policies oriented towards these groups.

The Costa Rican case can be read as a loose variant of this model. The country’s development strategy is organized around the promotion of agro-exports and tourism in the rural areas, combined with a service economy in the cities, which is highly dependent on the attraction of foreign investment. Foodstuff and consumption goods in general, are supposed to be imported in the cheap, for which revenue, through exports and foreign investment, must be created to assure the macroeconomic health of the system and the creation of jobs. Politically, the legitimacy of the system is based on the support of the urban working and middle classes, who are supposed to understand their wellbeing in relation to the promotion of exports and the attraction of foreign investment. In practice, what this tend to do, is simplify the question of development to whether jobs are being created, exports promoted and foreign investment attracted. As such, activities such as the growing of monocultures are highly attractive, since the supposedly generate jobs, are export oriented and attract foreign investment. The whole strategy of the government and the corporate sector is organized around this mantra. In this case, the “people” are called to support the export-oriented strategy, as the only way possible to retain the Costa Rican exceptionality and promote development.

The only exception, is when environmentalism as discourse is able to bridge both spaces, as in the case of the water poisoning that we saw before. However, in these cases the framework of sustainable development is able to contain the discontent by presenting as techno-managerial in nature, and thus solvable. At the same time, the grievances of the communities where the monocultures are located are either water down (seen as “simply” environmental), discarded as unfounded fantasies of traditional sectors that are against progress, or repressed, when their actions threaten the creation of jobs, the promotion of exports or the attraction of foreign investment.

Erik Swyngedouw (2010:223–24) has argued that in the case of the global discussion on climate change we are seeing a sort of “environmental populism.” And that one of the characteristic of this form of populism is that

...populist demands are always addressed to the elites. Populism as a project addresses demands to the ruling elites (getting rid of immigrants, saving the climate . . .); it is not about replacing the elites, but calling on the elites to undertake action. The ecological problem is no exception. It does not invite a transformation of the existing socio-ecological order but calls on the elites to undertake action such that nothing really has to change, so that life can basically go on as before. In this sense, environmental populism is inherently reactionary, a key ideological support structure for securing the socio-political status quo. It is inherently non-political and non-partisan. A Gramscian ‘passive revolution’ has taken place over the past few years, whereby the elites have not only acknowledged the climate conundrum and, thereby, answered the call of the ‘people’ to take the climate seriously...

For our case in point, the sustainable development discourse articulates a similar relation between the “people” and the political and economic elites. Since the export-oriented economic strategy is seen as a must, the inevitable environmental impacts are presented as something that can, and must be fixed by the corresponding authorities. Thus, the good agricultural practices promoted by CANAPEP, the

creation of the PNP, or the executive decree that the government signed in 2017 prohibiting the import of Bromacil, can be seen as the elites acknowledging these ecological problems, and doing something about it. In other words, showing that "...we have to change radically, but within the contours of the existing state of the situation..." (Swyngedouw 2010:219).

Pieced together, what we find in Costa Rica is a combination of export-oriented and environmental populism. On the one hand, the promotion of exports and the attraction of foreign investment, is naturalized and presented as the sine qua non condition for both developing the country and maintaining its exceptionality. However, this model of economic development has to contend with increasing levels of unrest and social discontent, particularly in the rural areas. It is here, on the other hand, that the sustainable development common sense operates by displacing this unrest from the political arena, and into the techno-managerial one, where the elites are called upon to answer to the cry of the "people." Even if this means imposing those answers upon the rural communities involved.

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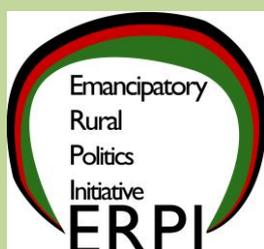
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