THE COSTA RICA READER

HISTORY, CULTURE, POLITICS

STEVEN PALMER AND IVÁN MOLINA, EDITORS

The Costa Rica Reader

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Edited by Steven Palmer and Iván Molina

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To Lubín
in loving memory

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A Note on Style and Sources

Many of the selections in this anthology are abridged, and some have had footnotes and other scholarly armature removed. Readers interested in the full versions should refer to the Acknowledgment of Copyrights section.

The occasional term that may have an odd or pejorative ring for readers

(for example, the repeated use of the word *Indian* in selections on the colonial period) have been retained because they are the accepted norm in Latin American scholarship.

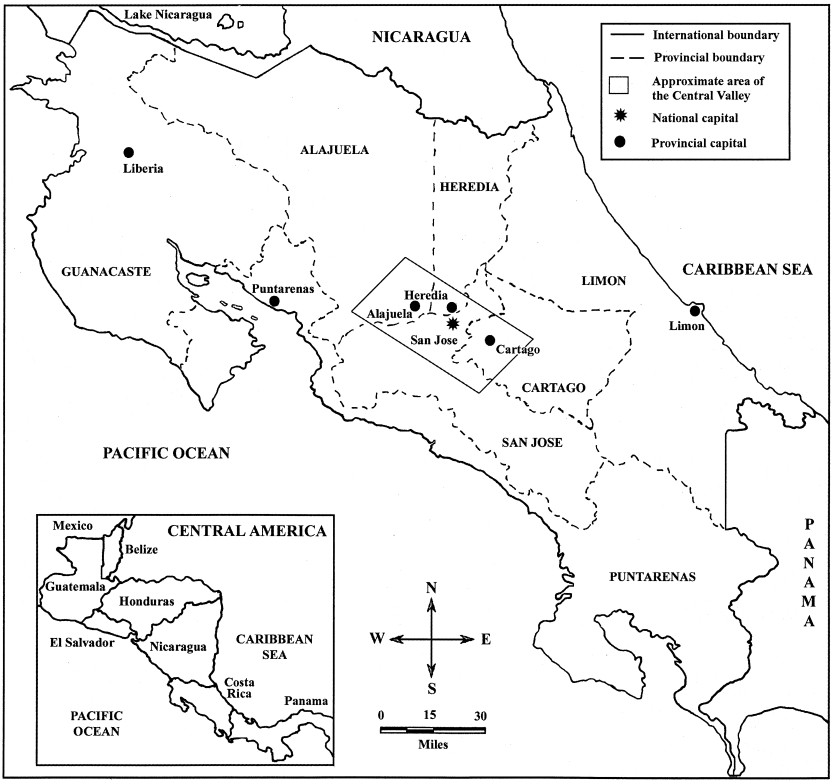
Translations in this anthology were done by Steven Palmer.

Introduction

In 1999, the Costa Rican Tourism Institute officially declared Costa Rica "a land of marvels," their marketing campaign only the latest in a long line of celebrations of Costa Rican exceptionalism. The country has been imagined as the Switzerland of Central America and, in one *Time* magazine report, as a tropical Shangri-la. It has been hailed as a democratic oasis on a continent scorched by dictatorship and revolution; the ecological Mecca of a biosphere laid waste by deforestation and urban blight; and an egalitarian, middle-class society blissfully immune to the violent class and racial conflicts haunting most Latin American countries. As John and Mavis Biesanz put it a half-century ago in *Costa Rican Life*, the "little country of the Ticos" has been characterized "by one writer after another" as a land of "peace, hard work, and progress."

Costa Ricans themselves have been only too happy to concur that they are exceptional—to the point of finding evidence of their blessed distinction in the oddest places. In 1909, the great man of letters Ricardo Fernández Guardia declared that the terrible poverty and isolation suffered by the society during the colonial period had been a positive thing, since "such great and prolonged misfortune served to inculcate habits of work and sobriety in the Costa Rican people." Two decades later, another brilliant intellectual, Carlos Monge, would take this statement a step further, finding in the equally shared misery of the colonial era the origin of a supposed "rural democracy" that made Costa Rica different from every other Latin American country and explained its tendency toward peaceful politics. Indeed, Costa Rica has never been consumed by the civil strife, militarism, and race-based oppression characteristic of its neighbors. Perhaps most strikingly, it is the only country in Latin America to have enjoyed uninterrupted political democracy over the past fifty years, a time when even bastions of democracy like Chile and Uruguay suffered bloody military coups and long dictatorships that replaced civil liberties with state terror. It is above all this democratic heritage that makes the exceptionalist proposition so compelling.

The mantra of Costa Rican exceptionalism can also prove disconcerting, however. For one thing, it provides the centerpiece of a dubious mythology



Costa Rica

that equates Costa Rican national identity with an alleged white racial heritage, setting it apart from other Latin American countries. This generates xenophobia and promotes discrimination against the vast majority of visibly nonwhite Costa Ricans, especially those from Guanacaste and Limón, who have marked mestizo and African ancestries. A deep-seated racist strain remains alive and well in Costa Rica. In a recent cyberspace chat, one Costa Rican mused, "Sometimes I wish they'd leave us alone like in the colonial era. Thanks to God, Costa Rica is a marvelous country protected by the Virgin of Los Angeles. . . . Costa Rica has been genetically privileged, this is understood around the world, so why do we want to ruin this inheritance?"[1] On the more formal end of the intellectual spectrum, the notion that Costa Rica is a historical freak, or "outlier," allows social scientists to dismiss the country's relevance for understanding patterns of development in Latin America and elsewhere.

If we adjust our lens a bit, the exceptionalist picture of Costa Rica blurs very quickly. The country's coffee economy offers a classic example of develop-

ment based on a single export commodity — and of the pitfalls of this so-called monocrop route into the emerging global economy. From the colonial period to the present, the northwestern part of the country has hosted a ranching economy of vast haciendas that bears a strong resemblance to other Central American countries. After 1880, Costa Rica also became the original "banana republic": it was the crucible of the United Fruit Company, a transnational giant long linked to U.S. power in Latin America. From William Walker's attempt to take over Central America in the 1850s, to Teddy Roosevelt's canal project in early twentieth-century Panama, to Ronald Reagan's obsession with destroying Nicaragua's revolution, U.S. policy has exerted as much pressure on Costa Rica as it has on any other country in the area. More recently, while Costa Rica received international laurels for its peace and ecological initiatives, the government has tried to implement structural adjustment programs as comprehensive as any others on the continent. The logging of the rain forest assumed feverish rates equivalent to those in the Brazilian Amazon. All the while a new super-elite associated with drug trafficking and other forms of transnational corruption have gained a new foothold in Costa Rica's national society.

We resist the temptation to see the country as an exception, yet we do insist on the distinctiveness of its past and present. We understand Costa Rica as one recognizably Latin American outcome, its history a network of Latin American paths tracing a particular journey. These paths may be most visible here, but to one degree or another, they have been blazed everywhere in the region, and we think they are worth rediscovering and exploring. Its size and geographical location mean that Costa Rica is, and will continue to be, a highly vulnerable country, and the peoples of Costa Rica have met the challenge of this vulnerability in a variety of ways. This book shows Costa Rica as a place of alternatives and possibilities that undermine stereotypes about the region's history and call into question the idea that current dilemmas facing Latin America are inevitable or insoluble.

During the colonial era, Costa Ricans suffered a relatively miserable lot, and they have depended on two agricultural exports for most of the modern era. Yet they have built a democratic political system and achieved a healthy measure of social justice in a region where dictatorship and grotesque inequality have been the sad norm. Contemporary Costa Rican society struggles to maintain ecological dignity against the tide of expanding nontraditional export agriculture and a booming tourist economy, and tries to preserve high levels of social services and social cohesion in the face of the antistatist pressures of global free trade. Many pundits are telling us that globalization has stripped individual countries of their capacity to shape their own destinies. If this is said about

the large, powerful metropolitan countries, how much more true must it be for the tiny ones on the periphery? Yet Costa Ricans have been able to fashion an uncommonly democratic and equitable society within the small spaces left them in the grand construction of a global political economy. This confirms that Third World people do make their own history, though they may not make it just as they choose.

* * *

It is less than 300 miles from Costa Rica's southern frontier with Panama to its northern border with Nicaragua, and the country's Pacific-to-Caribbean width never exceeds 161 miles. Off the Pacific side are two small but notable islands: San Lucas, once a dreaded penal colony, and the Isla de Coco, famous for its stories of pirates and buried loot and today a National Park branded "treasure island" by the tourism marketers. Costa Rica is a tiny country, then, of about 20,000 square miles, and at roughly 4 million inhabitants, relatively small in population as well. The greatest share of that population lives in the Central Valley, an area accounting for only 6.4 percent of national territory which stretches from the cities of San Ramón in the west to Turrialba in the east. Justly famous for its extraordinary range of microclimates, flora, and fauna, Costa Rica is not known for its cultural diversity. This was certainly different prior to the Spanish conquest. At that time, as many as twenty distinct indigenous societies numbering in the hundreds of thousands and speaking many different languages inhabited the area. The disaster of conquest reduced the numbers of indigenous people under Spanish control to a mere 10,000 at the beginning of the 1600s. This had important consequences for the area's subsequent development. The scarcity of labor made the province unattractive to most settlers, and given the weak colonial economy, Spanish settlers could not afford to import large numbers of African slaves. The failure to build a colonial society on indigenous or slave labor led to a peasant economy in the Central Valley during the 1700s. The continuing migrations of families of free mestizo peasants outside the Central Valley, especially during the twentieth century, along with the extension of a government presence to all parts of the country, provided the basis for a relatively coherent nation.

Still, modern Costa Rica has been shaped by geographical, social, and cultural diversity. Already during the colonial period, cattle estates and a peasantry of pervasive mulatto and indigenous origins characterized the north and central Pacific areas. The Caribbean, with its cocoa plantations and African slaves, also offered landscapes quite distinct from that taking shape in the Central Valley. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, ranching activity

on the Pacific side, as well as the development of the banana economy first on the Caribbean lowlands and later in the Pacific south, shaped the social and economic characteristics of these areas and, in the case of the banana industry, brought a large immigration wave of people of Afro-Antillean descent. Nevertheless, the populations of the Central Valley provided the institutional and cultural bases of national society, not those of the Pacific or the Caribbean. The former was a society characterized by small and medium producers in both city and countryside, and market relations prevailed here, rather than coercion based on factors such as ethnic difference.

One of Costa Rica's clearest traits has been to resolve conflict by channeling it in a legal and institutionalized fashion. This tendency had become apparent by the end of the colonial period, especially in the Central Valley, and it was consolidated in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Forces favoring social, ethnic, and cultural integration have tended to outweigh those favoring discrimination. The most important of these integrative forces have been the public education system and an electoral dynamic that by the end of the nineteenth century was already promoting the electoral registry of all adult Costa Ricans independent of ethnicity, education, or class. In Costa Rica, the state has played—and continues to play—a central role in the management and resolution of differences and conflicts, and this dynamic has favored the strengthening of the institutional bases of national life.

During the crisis years of the 1980s, it often appeared that these deep continuities in Costa Rican life were being scrambled or erased altogether. Yet as a new century gets underway, some familiar patterns have reasserted themselves. Perhaps most important, the popular protests against the structural adjustment program begun in the 1980s—protests shaped and made possible due to a long-established democratic dynamic—imposed a gradual rhythm on reforms intended to cut back the state's role in guaranteeing the welfare of all Costa Ricans. This has meant that economic restructuring, some of it drastic in scope, has taken place without a radical jump in poverty or unemployment rates. And these are unemployment rates that have remained low despite the immigration of tens of thousands of Nicaraguans since the mid-1980s. The newcomers are remaking Costa Rican culture in ways that, while still far from determined, appear much less dramatic than the xenophobic panic of the 1990s predicted. The advent of large-scale tourism and the installation of high-technology manufacturing plants, led by INTEL, have also ensured economic stability for the moment. The pressures of public opinion, meanwhile, have propelled a new struggle against the corruption and impunity of the elites in all areas of national life, including the much-vaunted but ill-treated environment.

As the twenty-first century takes flight, public accountability has become a focus of Costa Rican social and political life.

* * *

Instead of succumbing to the notion that Costa Rica is a happy anomaly, our reader is designed to provide windows onto the country's extraordinary past and present, ones that offer unique perspectives on some of the continent's most pressing issues. The anthology features a diverse cast of characters: eloquent working-class raconteurs from San José's poorest barrios; English-speaking Afro-Antilleans of Limón Province; Nicaraguan immigrants; factory workers; dissident members of the intelligentsia; indigenous people struggling against ethnocide; and children living through civil war, to name but a few. They tell of themselves and their country in ways that brush against the grain of ethnic and middle-class homogeneity. We have also included an eclectic and lively selection of travel writing, essays, literature, scholarship, and visual "takes." Over the years, the country has been blessed with original thinkers from different social classes, and it has attracted perceptive visitors. Many of the finer exponents of this broad intellectual tradition are anthologized here, translated into English for the first time.

The anthology has eight parts. We begin with the period from the initial Native American encounter with the Spanish through to the early era of statehood in the 1830s. The reader's second part concentrates on the nineteenth century, when the coffee boom and the rise of the Liberal republic cemented Costa Rica's national identity. Part 3 is dedicated to charting the emergence of the social question and the radical politics of the first half of the twentieth century. The subsequent section complements these ideas with a focus on the evolution of the country's unique democratic institutions and fresh perspectives on the civil war of 1948, which temporarily broke apart the machine of Costa Rican democracy in revealing ways. The fifth part of the reader provides vignettes of the incredible "Costa Rican Dream" of social democratic consensus and middle-class prosperity the country lived from the 1950s until the crash of the early 1980s, when Central America descended into revolution and much of the world into economic slump. The final three parts are thematic and oriented toward understanding this small nation-state's complex present. "Other Cultures and Outer Reaches" explores the real diversity of the country's peoples and regions, as well as their past and present confrontations with discrimination and assimilation. This section is followed by "Working Paradise," which provides a selection of texts that see the country's ecology not as pristine, virgin Nature being ravaged, threatened, and rolled back but as a rich natural environment worked continuously and often brutally in order to sus-

tain human and corporate life. Finally, "Tropical Soundings" offers a sampler pack of contemporary Costa Ricans negotiating the exhilarating—if treacherous and contaminated—waters of globalization as the mall supplants the town plaza, a spectacular tourism boom transforms the social as well as the natural topography, and the foundations of the national economy are turned upside down. Yet—to the surprise of almost everybody—Costa Ricans have never persisted more firmly in their defense of social democracy.

Note

1. Cited in Carlos Sandoval, *Otros amenazantes: Los nicaragüenses y la formación de identidades nacionales en Costa Rica* (San José: Editorial de la Universidad de Costa Rica, 2003), 270.

I

Birth of an Exception?

The exceptional attributes of contemporary Costa Rica are commonly assumed to have pre-Columbian or colonial origins. In the century after 1880, nationalist historians forged three myths in particular about these origins, ones frequently repeated uncritically by visitors and American scholars. One is that when the Spanish arrived, they found but a tiny indigenous population in Costa Rica. The second holds that the Spanish conquest of the area was essentially peaceful. The third, more complex, myth of Costa Rican exceptionalism claims that the lack of indigenous people to serve as laborers and the scarcity of precious metals made Costa Rica a poor and marginal colony, a condition from which a society of homogeneous yeoman farmers without any meaningful class or racial divisions emerged and flowered in the eighteenth century. This, then, constituted the humble but sound origin of the "rural democracy" that remains the core of the nation-state to the present day.

The first two of these myths are nonsense. Historical demographers have shown that prior to the arrival of Columbus in Cariari (today Puerto Limón) in 1502, the territory of Costa Rica was home to about 400,000 indigenous people. They were organized into small and politically fragmented chieftainships, not comparable in complexity to the Mayan groups in the north of Central America. Some of the largest and most organized indigenous societies in Costa Rica were located in the Nicoya region. They were influenced by Mesoamerican culture, and the cultivation of corn predominated. In the Caribbean lowlands and the Pacific south, by contrast, populations were more dispersed, the consumption of *pejibaye* (the rich, pulpy fruit of a palm tree) and yucca was the norm, and the influence of Chibcha culture from northern South America prevailed. Both poles influenced the Central Valley, which was divided into two confederations of chieftainships, Garabito and Guarco. The Spanish conquest of Costa Rica lasted for more than half a century after efforts got underway in 1510. The genocidal enslavement of the indigenous societies of Nicoya on the Pacific north coast was the conquest's first stage. Its second phase began with

fruitless attempts to consolidate a Spanish settlement on the country's Caribbean side. In the process, the Spaniards reduced the indigenous population to the point of extinction through disease, war, reprisals, relocation, and brutal exploitation. The Native American population stood at about 120,000 in 1569, and had fallen to 10,000 by 1611. By 1675, a mere 500 "Indios" paid tribute. One can hardly call any of this a peaceful conquest of a virtually uninhabited area.

Addressing the myth of rural democracy requires a more nuanced look at the way colonial Costa Rica was configured into three different zones—a basic division established by about 1650. In the Central Valley *encomenderos* (Spaniards with special rights to indigenous labor and tribute), colonial functionaries, and ecclesiastics took control of the agricultural and craft wealth produced by the indigenous populations. In the Pacific center and north, cows, mules, and horses were raised on great estates. This area's economy experienced its greatest growth after 1750, when the displacement of pasturage by export crops in El Salvador opened a market for cattle on the hoof from Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Finally, on the Caribbean side, some cacao production developed and enjoyed a brief boom, but waned in the face of competition from Caracas, Maracaibo and Guayaquil. Although the cacao boom was based on the labor of imported African slaves, the slave trade was limited in Costa Rica and did not become an alternative to compensate for the collapse of the indigenous population. Beyond these spaces dominated by Spanish culture, in the coastal plains of Talamanca and near the current border with Nicaragua, so-called *indios bravos* (wild Indians) took refuge and resisted Spanish conquest until the second half of the nineteenth century.

Costa Rica found itself on the margins of the colonial Central American world due to a lack of mines and the scarcity of indigenous survivors. The Spaniards who settled in Costa Rica failed to construct a society similar to that of their neighbors, that is, one based on the exploitation of indigenous and slave labor. The development of a peasant economy in the Central Valley indeed proved the fundamental outcome of this failure. The families of small and medium agriculturalists constituted a free peasantry with a strong mercantile vocation, and they did become the principal social group of the Central Valley during the eighteenth century. In contrast to the myth of rural democracy, however, an unequal access to land and significant differences in wealth marked their reality, and in their majority, they had mixed-race (mestizo and mulatto) ancestry. Agricultural colonization begun by this peasantry extended the primary area of settlement from Cartago and environs to the west, leading to the founding of the towns of Heredia (1706), San José (1736), and Alajuela (1782). These tiny urban milieus, where the more specialized artisans lived, also

bred a clear colonial elite made up of small groups of merchants, owners of large estates, and military, civil, and ecclesiastical functionaries. Their wealth came from unequal exchange with the peasantry: they bought the agricultural surplus at low prices and sold imported articles at high ones. The so-called rural democracy of the eighteenth century was a society of peasants and merchants in which the exploitation of the former by the latter was not based on physical coercion, but rather on the different position each enjoyed in market relations.

Ethnic and class differences did divide and separate the population of the Central Valley, but the people experienced four important processes of integration. First, social hierarchies depended increasingly on economic wealth rather than ethnic origin, a phenomenon aided by the process of race mixture. According to figures from 1777–78, the province was ethnically comprised of 60 percent mestizos, 18 percent mulattoes and blacks, 12 percent Indians, and only 10 percent Spanish (both peninsular and American-born, the latter of whom claimed pure racial lineage back to Spain). Second, in contrast to other parts of Hispanic America, where a deep cultural division existed between Indian and Hispanic societies, in the Central Valley of Costa Rica, a Hispanic and Catholic culture took shape and was shared—if unequally—by most groups. The third factor favoring social cohesion was the size and location of the mass of the population. In 1824, the province had only about sixty thousand inhabitants, and four out of every five of them lived in the Central Valley, in small urban and rural communities strongly endogamic. As a result, the spread of family ties helped to compensate for social and ethnic divisions and promoted cohesion at a time when colonization of the agricultural frontier tended to remove emigrants from their hometowns. Finally, as some of the following selections will reveal, Costa Ricans tended to channel individual and collective conflicts along legal and institutional avenues even in the colonial period.

When Costa Rica became independent in 1821, it was the society of the Central Valley—not that of the Caribbean with its cacao plantations and slaves, and not that of the Pacific center and north with its vast haciendas—that provided the foundations of Costa Rica's national experience and institutional character. That is, the basis of Costa Rica's so-called exceptionalism was a certain regional development whose agrarian structure resembled that of other parts of Latin America, such as Antioquia in Colombia, Boconó in Venezuela, Santa Fe in Argentina, the Bajío in Mexico, and the Cordillera in Puerto Rico. In contrast to these areas, which developed as local or regional peculiarities, the ever more differentiated yet integrated world of Costa Rica's Central Valley became the foundation of the nation-state. Moreover, distance from the frac-

tious centers of Central American political and economic power in Guatemala and El Salvador allowed the province to evade the protracted civil wars of the postindependence era—wars that also consumed the imperial pretensions of Costa Rica's more powerful neighbors to the north, who might otherwise have conquered and annexed the province.

Warriors and Sacred Struggle

Pre-Columbian Distinctions

The pre-Columbian indigenous societies of the Pacific north displayed a greater Mesoamerican influence, especially in religion and art, than those of the Caribbean, where a greater Chibcha influence prevailed. The tendencies are evident in these two works, one realized in ceramic, the other in stone.

(left) Jug with anular base; Pacific north, 800–1350 C.E. (Museo Nacional de Costa Rica)
(right) Male figure; Caribbean, 500–1000 C.E. (Museo Nacional de Costa Rica)

A Conqueror Looks on the Bright Side

Town Council of Castillo de Garci-Muñoz

In 1560, the colonial administrators of Guatemala gave Juan de Cavallón the right to conquer and settle the territory then known as New Cartago and Costa Rica. His expedition left Nicaragua in two groups: the first tried to establish a settlement on the Caribbean, but was thwarted by indigenous resistance. The second, under Cavallón, penetrated into Costa Rica via Nicoya, and in March 1561 founded Castillo de Garci-Muñoz, the first settlement in the Central Valley. But the Audiencia then recalled Cavallón and allowed Juan Vázquez de Coronado to take his place. In 1562, the new leader had his town council write the following letter, a representative of a classic genre. These letters underlined the sacrifices the conquistadors had made in the name of God and king, while they also solicited favors from the Crown and speculated wildly about the economic possibilities of the territory they had subdued (often by making spurious comparisons with the spectacular conquests of the Aztecs and Incas). Ironically, this letter was one of the sources used to forge the myth of Costa Rica's peaceful conquest.

Catholic Royal Majesty,

By other letters that we have written Your Majesty we have given a lengthy account of how, in your royal name, we are engaged in the pacification and discovery of the provinces of New Cartago and Costa Rica, and of how, because of the rebellion and stubborn disobedience of the natives who are set in their many ancient rites and sacrifices, we have suffered trying to attract them to the knowledge of our Lord and the dominion of Your Majesty by peaceful means because they have done everything possible, with riots and treachery, to defend against the settlement of this city. . . .

On the second of November of this year, Juan Vázquez de Coronado entered this city of Castillo, where the Spanish people of the province are gathered, and he was received with much love and goodwill by everyone. The colors were presented and all the customary formalities were extended him. Realizing the urgent needs of all who were there, the said Juan Vázquez gave and supplied to

almost everyone linens, sheets, cloths, shirts, dresses, arms, horses, and shoes and many other things of which he came well provided, and so took care of the said needs. He spent his goods liberally and with great generosity on everyone, inspiring them to serve Your Majesty with greater zeal and willingness in the campaign. The said Juan Vázquez, besides spending a vast sum in gold pesos, put himself deeply in debt in order to provide the aforementioned relief.

And afterwards he immediately dispatched his master at arms and other captains to the lands of Garabito and Coyoche, leading chieftains who were rebelling against us, so that they might be made to understand how he had come to these provinces sent by Your Majesty to pacify them and settle the place and bring the natives to a knowledge of God our Lord and under the dominion of Your Majesty. By peaceful means and with much love and many gifts he persuaded them, sending them ransoms and presents and getting them to agree that the gospel might be preached among them. And our Lord has willed that through the determined zeal with which the said Juan Vázquez serves Your Majesty, eight chieftains have arrived and are now in this city. They have consigned themselves to the dominion of Your Majesty, recognizing you as their sovereign lord. We believe that, God willing, in this way they will attract and subdue the rest.

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

We greatly need Your Majesty's royal favor and require that those who govern in these parts understand that Your Majesty is served by the continuation of the said pacification and settlement. It is going ahead in peace and with Christian virtue as Your Majesty has wished it, and the said Juan Vázquez is carrying it out with integrity. And we ask that Your Majesty favor us with his royal treasury for the purpose of this mission, since up to now this has not been done. For such an important thing it will be necessary, and the fortune of any one individual will not be enough because the costs involved are large.

Hunting Indians

Claudia Quirós

The Central Valley was subdued beginning in 1561, but in the northern plains and the southern Talamanca region, important refuges of so-called wild Indians consolidated themselves and survived throughout the colonial period despite constant harassment from the Spanish. Unlike the Chichimecs in northern Mexico and the Araucanians in the south of Chile, who carried out guerrilla wars against the Spanish, the indios bravos *of Costa Rica relied on their ability to survive and defend themselves in inaccessible areas. Cartago, the colonial capital, relied on the exaction of tribute and labor from local indigenous groups, and so there was constant demand for more Indians, especially as the population of those under Spanish rule declined through disease and other factors. The recent work of the noted historian Claudia Quirós describes the* correrías *organized by Spaniards—expeditions to hunt and extract Indians, principally from the Talamanca region.*

The juridical concept of *just war* began to take shape in Spanish law with a royal edict of 1500 that condemned the slaving activities undertaken by Columbus in each of the islands that he had "discovered." This proclamation established that all Indians had to be considered free vassals of the Crown of Castile, but the same document included a contradictory caveat saying that the aboriginals captured in "just war" could be kept as slaves, since this was the message contained in the notorious *requerimiento* (literally, the giving of notice; a text read aloud by the Spaniards prior to conquering an area, which exhorted the Indians to accept Catholicism and a new king without acting aggressively or suffer the consequences). It was undoubtedly under cover of this legal exception that the abuses against the antislaving law were committed, and which indeed allowed an increase in Indian slavery. The monarchy tried to rectify the situation in a royal decree of August 1530, in which it ordered that Indians should not suffer enslavement, even in cases of just war. Nevertheless, due to the strong pressure of conquerors and discoverers, the same exception was definitively

reestablished four years later in the New Laws of 1542 and became ratified later in the New Code of 1680.

In my view, the concept of *just war*, understood in light of these juridical dispositions and based on the real practices that developed in Costa Rica, was characterized first and foremost by permanent violence and aggression by the Hispanic population against the irredentist indigenous communities or against those indigenous communities whose rebelliousness, or geographical inaccessibility (this held especially true in Talamanca and the Pacific south), had thwarted effective and permanently established domination. The objective of this aggression was to assure a labor force that, given the juridical conditions of its recruitment, took on the character of a semi–slave labor force. The indigenous people captured in so-called just war did not fall under any of the categories of Indian workers or tributaries in the Law of the Indies, which might have eventually afforded them some protection.

The arguments used to legitimize the assaults against the Indian communities of Talamanca and the Pacific south were many and varied, but three stand out. One was to punish the "crimes" committed against missionary priests and Spaniards. Another was to repopulate Indian communities within the orbit of Spanish tribute, whose populations were suffering a constant decline. The third argument held that these communities needed to be resituated in more accessible areas. These arguments became jumbled up with dogmatic religious rhetoric about the necessity to bring the unhappy and rebellious infidels the "gentle yoke of the gospel."

The campaigns of just war in seventeenth-century Costa Rica began with the visit of the oidor (a high court judge with powers of a governor), doctor Pedro Sánchez de Araque. From the moment he arrived in the province, he participated in activities that took on the character of just war. Passing through the villages of Chome and Abangares, he issued orders to imprison Indian "vagrants" from these communities, recruiting them for the conquest of Talamanca he was proposing to undertake. When he entered Cartago, in April 1611, the city received him with all the honors befitting a person of his rank, as it was the first time that such a notable authority of colonial justice had visited there (he represented the tribunal of the *Audiencia*, the highest political and judicial organism in the jurisdiction). The governor, the members of the town council, and representatives of the royal treasury and the church greeted the oidor. Following the ceremonies held in his honor, Sánchez de Araque told all soldiers present that they were not to leave the city "on pain of death." He immediately decreed that all the principal residents of Cartago should go with him to the "Talamancan war." He also issued orders that reduced the availability of Indian

laborers to the colonists, both in terms of numbers and of the amount of time they might be used. Obviously, the disposition was not fully respected, but it functioned as an argument to justify violence against Indians who had yet to be subdued, since the principal residents of Cartago alleged that with such a reduced number of *alquilones* (indigenous laborers rented out by an encomendero), it would be impossible to satisfy their labor needs. Despite Sánchez de Araque's acute interest in the conquest of Talamanca, he was unable to undertake it personally during his visit and so delegated the governor and a certain Captain Diego de Sojo to carry it out after his departure. They made various attempts to reactivate the conquest of Talamanca, but repeatedly failed. . . .

According to the official records, the Indians of Chirripó rebelled in 1614. A detachment of soldiers sent to the area easily put down the rebellion, in the process capturing twelve *piezas* (as healthy male slaves were called during the colonial era; the term denied them human status, while also suggesting their use as dynamic "parts" of the machinery of colonial labor systems). A year later, arguing that the Indians of Tierra Adentro and Talamanca had allied with those of the Valley of Duy, the new governor Juan de Mendoza y Medrano proceeded to punish them, "taking 80 piezas," along with the chieftain, don Lorenzo, in order to resettle them in a village he named San Juan de Auyaque. Immediately afterward, and citing new uprisings, the governor himself went to the village of Quepo where he captured thirty Indians and the chieftain, Sebastián Jarú. Later he went to the region of the Votos, who had rebelled, and took twenty Indians, "achieving this by incursions and other military stratagems." In a report to the Audiencia, this governor summed up the results of his "three incursions," boasting that he had taken more than four hundred Indians.

In 1620, Mendoza's successor, Alonso del Castillo y Guzmán, wrote to the Audiencia to report on the measures he had taken with respect to the "uprising" of the Auyaque, Curero, and Hebena Indians, who four years earlier had murdered their missionary priest and other people. He explained in his letter that he had rounded up more than four hundred piezas along with their chiefs. Trying to outdo the deeds of his predecessor and to improve his position with the Audiencia, he added: "I put all the prisoners in this city where I brought to bear exemplary punishments on the heads and captains, which will assure the security of this province." Note that the new authority punished crimes that his predecessor had already addressed.

A later review of his tenure in Costa Rica revealed that in order to establish legal justification for his actions, Castillo y Guzmán had convened an "extraordinary war junta" in June 1619, alleging that given the high cost to all of maintaining a fort in Tierra Adentro, it was necessary for the "peace and security of

the province to proceed with the punishment and conquest of the Auyaque, Cacero, and Hebeno Indians." He said that he would go in person and that all those who accompanied him would receive Indians in service for building houses and for agricultural work. Near the village of Auyaque, having taken 220 Indian prisoners, he one morning ordered raiding parties in every direction with the objective of hunting more Indians, and in this way obtaining the 400 "piezas." These Indians were taken to Cartago, where they were subjected to a military trial, whose sentence, without any right of appeal, was decreed on 24 December 1619 in the following terms: first, all the Indians, including the caciques and leaders of the Curero, were condemned as instigators of the crimes of rebellion, sacrilege, and homicide. All were sentenced to expulsion from their villages, whose lands would be ploughed and sown with salt. Under pain of death, neither these Indians nor their descendents unto the third generation could go within ten leagues (fifty kilometers) of Curero.

Second, the following special sentences were handed down to the Indian leadership:

The caciques don Juan Serrabá, Francisco Cagji, and Diego Hebena, were taken from the church of La Soledad—which served as a prison—on horseback, their feet and hands tied and nooses hung around their necks, paraded through the streets of Cartago in the company of the town crier denouncing their crimes, and taken to the outskirts of the city, where they were hanged. Afterward, they were decapitated and their heads put on pikes—Serrabá's in the plaza of the village of Guicucí and Hebena's in the village of Hameas. The headless corpses were dragged to a bonfire and reduced to ashes.

Francisco Muchú, Yiriquirá, Mateo Catebá, Diego Areucará, Lucas Noariz, Duará, Quirodujara, and Juan Ibaczará y Bicara were hanged and decapitated. Their bodies were buried in the cemeteries of the city churches. Two of the heads were sent to the village of Quepo, another to Co, and others were left on the road to Ujarrás, in Auyaque, in Pejibay, in Catapas, and in Abangares. Two other heads were placed at the site of the execution as a warning against the frequent Indian uprisings. Pablo Zuré, Quirigrama, Baltazar Cruz, and Chirobujiburú were paraded through the streets of Cartago to the plaza, where each had the tendon of his right foot cut.

Other minor sentences included Jeca having to serve ten years for the vicar Baltazar de Grado; Luis Querisocá, after being paraded through the streets, receiving one hundred lashes; Pedro Gómez Quiquirá having to work in the convent of San Francisco for four years; and Alonso Jiménez Quiñore, Juan Díaz Cacaricará, Pedro Yaramá, and Diego Garito being condemned to perpetual exile from the village of Auyaque, on pain of death.

* * *

The sentences were decreed and carried out by judicial means on 8 January 1620. The surviving Indians were shared out, as promised by the governor, among the soldiers who had accompanied him in this campaign of just war in Costa Rica. After committing such horrible crimes, Castillo y Guzmán wrote to the king to tell him of the "services" he had rendered in his favor, and for which he asked to be rewarded with 3,000 pesos or in Indians from vacant *encomiendas* (a grant to a Spanish colonist of the tribute of a number of Indians), as he did not have the resources necessary to provide adequate dowries for his daughters.

In the face of the atrocities committed against them by this governor and his predecessors, it is obvious that the Indians' capacity to respond to Spanish domination was much reduced, and with it the possibility of rebelling against or successfully confronting their aggressors. The massacre of Indian caciques, chiefs, and other leaders, particularly those of Tierra Adentro and Talamanca, undoubtedly dismantled Indians' sociopolitical structures. Nevertheless, the political and socioeconomic organization of the Talamanca Indians, combined with their geographic inaccessibility, allowed them to remain irredentist.

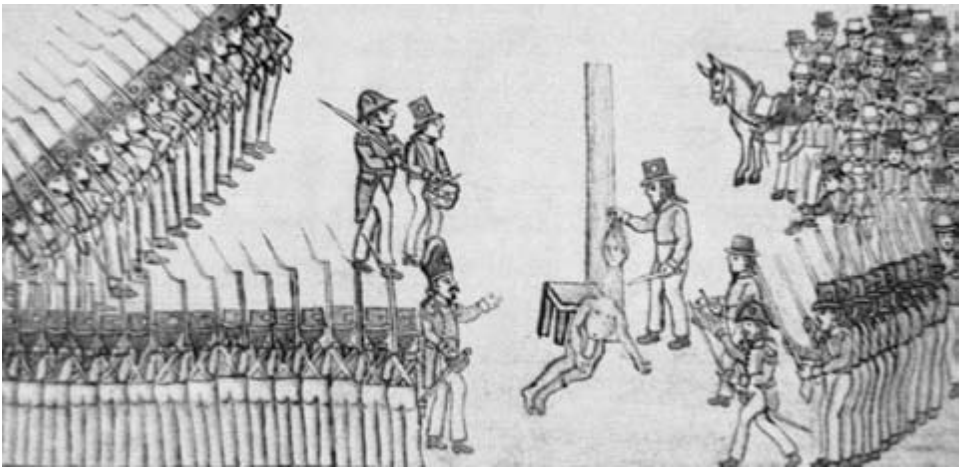
Although no documentation exists on any new campaigns of just war in Talamanca for the four decades between 1620 and 1662, this does not necessarily suggest that they stopped. After 1662, the governor Rodrigo Arias Maldonado began the conquest of Talamanca and Tierra Adentro anew. With this objective, he penetrated into the region and established an encampment on the banks of the Tarure River (Sixaola). From there, and with the intention of founding a new indigenous settlement, he, together with the cacique Cabsi, proceeded to take away Indians from Ciruro, Uruscara, Duqueiba, Moyagua, and Jicagua. In this fashion they succeeded in gathering 1,200 men of productive age, who together with women and children populated a settlement named San Bartolomé de Duqueiba. This new campaign, and especially the siting of a new village of such impressive size, gives evidence to the qualitative change that began taking place in Costa Rica with the emergence of cacao growing, which had begun with great success in the Atlantic littoral in the middle of the seventeenth century.

In 1665, the governor Juan López de la Flor took ninety Voto Indians and resettled them in Atirro, and in the town of Tariaca he captured sixty-three Indians, executing seven by crossbow and taking the rest to Cartago to share among his colleagues. From this point on, no more evidence exists pertaining to the incursions in search of rebellious and "infidel" Indians. Without a doubt, the resources traditionally destined for the just war had to be directed toward meeting the threat of pirate incursions. This becomes apparent in a

document from 1677, in which the treasurer refused to give the governor 161 pesos "to embark on a campaign to take out Indians," saying that these funds should go toward a war with the English and the French and not be used against the natives. Three years later, an attempt was made to reduce the Caribes and Abubaes, who lived between Quepo and Boruca and whose population was estimated at five hundred families, but the campaign could not be undertaken because the "South sea was infested by the English enemy."

The Execution of Pablo Presbere

José María Figueroa



Album de Figueroa (Archivo Nacional de Costa Rica)

Starting in the mid 1800s, José María Figueroa, from an important Cartago family, began to put together an eclectic "album" of maps, drawings, lists, and other textual bits and pieces cataloguing life in Cartago and Costa Rica. The country had little in the way of a historical record when he began his work, so his depiction of the execution of rebel Indian chief Pablo Presbere suggests that the great indigenous rebellion of 1709 was still alive in the old colonial capital's collective memory.

The Trial of Pablo Presbere, Cacique of Suinse

Lorenzo Antonio de Granda y Balbín

After the disastrous attempt to dominate the Indians by force, a new stage in the conquest of Talamanca began in 1689, this time assuming a missionary character. This phase lasted some twenty years and ended in 1709, when the indigenous peoples of the area rebelled and destroyed the churches built in their territory. Pablo Presbere led what became the most important indigenous uprising in colonial Costa Rica. Although effective in the sense that it put an end to Spanish efforts at colonizing the area, the rebellion was quelled, and Presbere was captured and subjected to Spanish justice.

In the city of Cartago of the Province of Costa Rica, the twentieth day of the month of June, 1710, don Lorenzo Antonio de Granda y Balbín, Governor and Captain General of this Province for His Majesty, records that in fulfilment of my orders, I went to the room where I have a man prisoner with the intention of hearing his confession. I made him appear before me. Also present was Christóbal de Chavarría, a free black and interpreter named by me because the prisoner is not fluent in our Spanish tongue. I asked the prisoner to swear an oath by God our Lord and the sign of the cross, and the said man did swear it and promised to tell the truth in all that he was asked. He was then subjected to the following questioning and cross-examination:

Asked his name and his place of birth, his age and his profession, he replied that his name was Pablo Presbere and that he was from the nation that in the Province of Talamanca they call Suinse, and that he was cacique of the said nation. He was unable to give his age; he looks more than forty years old.

He was asked if he knows that the King our Lord (God protect him) has in all his cities, villages, and places established his royal justice to punish that which is evil and reward that which is good.

He replied that he had heard it said.

He was asked how, knowing what had just been asked, he committed the grave and awful crime of conspiring with the Indians of the nations that were reduced to the yoke of our saintly Catholic faith by way of evangelist ministers. And why together with them he went through with murdering the Reverend Fathers Pablo de Rebullida, Juan Antonio de Zamora, ten soldiers, and the wife of one of them in the villages of Chirripó, Urinama, and Cavécar. And why he had burned churches and taken sacred ornaments that were then smashed to smithereens and subjected to degrading practices.

He said that it was because the Indians of Tuiná, Cavécar, and San Buenaventura, as well as those of San Juan and Santo Domingo, saw the Reverend Fathers and also Father Antonio de Andrade and the soldiers who were in his company write letters to this city [Cartago]. They judged that it was so that the Spaniards could go and take them from their villages [to Cartago, according to the rumor that spread among the indigenous people]: these were the ones who united and committed the crime of which he was asked.

He was asked how it is that he denies in part or in whole that which is referred to in the previous question when the Master at Arms don José Casasola y Córdova and other leaders went to the mountains and the nations and ascertained that he was the leader of the conspiracy and that he was guilty of the murders, for which he was brought in shackles to this city. He said that he says the same as that which he has already said.

Asked where exactly he was at the time of the conspiracy and murders, the prisoner replied that on that occasion he was in Taires.

He was asked if he knows or saw that Balthasar, Pedro Bocrí, Antonio Iruscara, Pedro Bettuquí, and Melchor Daparí, who the said Master at Arms brought as prisoners to this city, the last of them this very day, cooperated in the uprising and killings. He said that he does not know that any of those mentioned committed such a crime.

He was asked if he has knowledge of any other Indians among those brought to this city by our Master at Arms who were accomplices in the uprising and murders. The prisoner said that he does not know nor has he heard it said that any of those Indians were involved in any such thing.

We subjected him to further questioning and cross-examination regarding the conspiracy and the deaths of the Reverend Fathers and the soldiers, but he replied that he had nothing more to say than that which he had already testified, since the statement we had before us was the whole truth. This he affirmed and ratified after his confession was read back to him. Neither he nor the interpreter signed saying that they did not know how; I the said Governor and Captain General do hereby sign. . . .

The Sentence

In the criminal proceedings brought by Royal Justice over the conspiracy and uprising of the infidel and subject Indians of the mountains of Talamanca and the deaths thereby inflicted on the Reverend Fathers Friar Pablo de Rebullida and Friar Juan Antonio de Zamora, ten soldiers who were members of the guard, and the wife of one of them, against Pablo Presbere, Balthasar Siruru, Pedro Bocrí, Antonio Uruscara, Pedro Bettuquí and Melchor Daparí, prisoners, and the rest who appear to be accomplices:

Given the testimony and the other evidence relating to the case, it is imperative to condemn, and I do hereby condemn, the said Pablo Presbere for that which has been proven against him despite the denials contained in his confession, to be taken from the room where I have him prisoner and placed on a pack mule and led through the streets of this city while a crier declares and describes his crimes. Outside the walls of this city, he shall be tied to a post and have his eyes gouged out, *ad modum beli* [in military mode] and then shot by crossbow, since we are without an executioner who knows how to apply the garrote. Upon his death, he shall have his head cut off and placed high upon the post so that all might see it. As for the rest of the accused, given that it is not fully proven whether or not they were accomplices in the said uprising and deaths due to the variable depositions against them, I order them retained in prison until more exact investigation can take place, leaving the case open against them and the others who appear to be accomplices. . . . Don Lorenzo Antonio de Granda y Balbín, 23 June 1710.