

**LAND AND SEEDS:
THE CULTURAL, ECOLOGICAL, AND GLOBAL POLITICS
OF ORGANIC AGRICULTURE IN LATVIA AND COSTA RICA**

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Natural Resources and Environment)
in The University of Michigan
2008

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DEDICATION

To the keepers of the land and the seeds

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have accumulated many friendships and debts through the PhD program and dissertation-writing stage. First and foremost I cannot express in words my gratitude to the Latvian Organic Agriculture Association and the Costa Rican Organic Agriculture Movement for welcoming me into their midst, and showing me the complicated and compelling reasons for being organic farmers. In the interest of preserving the anonymity of those I interviewed, I cannot name here all of the farmers and movement leaders who welcomed me into their landscapes, farmsteads, and lives, and taught me to see the fields, forests and meadows with different eyes. My respect, admiration, and affection go out to all of you.

I have benefited from mentorship and advice at the University of Michigan from various people. Thank you to Greg Keoleian and Jonathan Bulkley for serving as the bridge between my MS and PhD worlds, but also for seeing that I had other paths to follow. To Maria Carmen Lemos thank you for taking me in as an advisee when I was searching for a new direction, and for having faith in my crazy project (even if I never could identify my dependent and independent variables!). To Stuart Kirsch, thank you for all the careful readings, the copious feedback and for helping me find the ethnographer within me and begin writing once I returned from the field. To Ivette Perfecto, John Vandermeer, Catherine Badgely and the NWAEG crowd, I am grateful for showing me an alternative academic world, full of challenging discussions, adventurous side-trips, and life-long commitment to communities of friends and colleagues. And thank you for sharing the wonders of Cuba with

me. Finally, this dissertation would never have taken shape without the endless reassurance of my co-chairs Michael Kennedy and Rebecca Hardin. I am grateful to Michael for his endless enthusiasm and for always being able to find an “ah-hah” in the course of our many conversations spanning over a decade. Thanks to Rebecca Hardin, without whom I never would have trusted that I, too, can venture into the world of anthropology, and thank you for being more than an advisor, but also a mentor, friend, and emergency rescue on more than one occasion!

I also wish to thank a number of people at UM who helped me in the month before my defense when health crises complicated and delayed the final stages of completion. At SNRE I am indebted to Jennifer Taylor and at Rackham Graduate School I am grateful to Ashley Andreae and Erin Cain for helping make all the necessary arrangements. To Diana Woodworth and Beni thank you for all the assistance in preparing countless grant applications, without which a great deal of this research never could have happened. A Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad fellowship provided funding for the bulk of the research in Latvia and Costa Rica. At Michigan, the International Institute, the Center for Russian and East European Studies, the Center for European Studies and the European Union Center, the Rackham Graduate School, the Advanced Study Center and the School of Natural Resources and Environment have provided generous support for preliminary and follow-up research and the writing phases of this project. I am thankful to my institutional hosts at the University of Latvia’s Social Science department and to the University for International Cooperation in Costa Rica that helped me make contacts and enter networks in both countries.

To Dace thank you for being such a permanent part of my life as we negotiated the labyrinths of parallel PhD worlds. And to both Dace and Ivan, thanks for all the banana bread, wine, and friendship that made the low points of fieldwork bearable. My early years

in the PhD program would not have been nearly as much fun without the climbing, champagne, and cooking with the Andreas, Bernhard, and Andrew. To Karen Hébert and Josh Reno, thank you for the diss-writing and job-search support circle, and to Karen for all of those virtual writing by Skype sessions during the last months! I also benefited from comments, feedback and discussions from the members of DESULICO. To Eric and Scott, thanks for taking in the homeless ones. To Tom I am grateful for assistance and exchange of opinions during the referendum. To Andrea, thank you for being my first *Tica* friend and introducing me to the wonders of your world, but also for pushing me make those first phone calls on my own...And to Aarabella, Leonel, Valeria and Leo, thank you for helping to make Costa Rica feel like home.

I am grateful to my parents and family for allowing me the freedom to choose my meandering path through life that has led to this unexpected point. Tētīm paldies par garajām pastaigām un sarunām dabā, un Mammai pateicos ka man rādīji, ka ne no zinātnes ne no darba nebija jābaidās. Sandrai pateicos par visiem kopīgiem atvaļinājumiem kad varam izrunāties no sirds kā var tikai ar māsu. Andai paldies, ka veimēr esi rādījusi priekšzīmi kā nesteidzoties baudīt dzīvi, pat visgrūtākajos laikos. Maniem vecvecākiem paldies, ka padarījāt pagātņi dzīvu un izpētes un sapratnes vērtu. Kamilai pateicos par dzīves gudrību, sirdsmieru, un piemēru, ka doktorgrādu var iegūt jebkurā vecumā. Maniem “audžu vecākiem” Anitai un Imantam, un audžumāsām Zanei un Solvitai ar ģimenēm, paldies, ka mani pieņēmat savā lokā jau pirmajā vakarā kad tikāties un kļuvāt par vairāk kā tikai “radiem.”

Finally, to Hadley, thank you for the rhymes, songs, grumbles, and laughs and for believing in me more than I ever could. And to both Hadley and Trīnīte, thank you for being my home to return to, from wherever I may come and wherever you may be.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANAO - Asociación Nacional de Agricultura Orgánica (National Organic Agriculture Association – Costa Rica)	GRAIN – Genetic Resources Action International
ASOMAOCO – Association of MAOCO	HIVOS - Humanistisch Instituut voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerking (Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries)
APOT – Asociación de Productores Orgánicos de Turrialba- (Turrialba Organic Producers’ Association)	ICE- Instituto Costarricense de Electricidad (Costa Rican Electricity Institute)
CAFTA- Central American Free Trade Agreement	IDA- Instituto de Desarrollo Agrario (Agrarian Development Institute, Costa Rica)
CAP – Common Agricultural Policy, EU	IFOAM – International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements
CATIE - Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza (Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Center, Costa Rica)	InBio – Biodiversity Institute, Costa Rica
CEDECO - Corporación Educativa para el Desarrollo Costarricense (Educational Corporation for Costa Rican Development)	ISO – International Standards Organization
CBD – Convention on Biological Diversity	IUCN - International Union for Conservation of Nature
CNN – Cable News Network	LAD – Lauku atbalsta dienests (Rural Support Agency, Latvia)
COMEX - Ministerio de Comercio Exterior (Foreign Trade Ministry, Costa Rica)	LBLA – Latvijas bioloģiskās lauksaimniecības asociācija (Latvian Organic Agriculture Association)
EU – European Union	LVL – Latvian lats
EUR – Euro	MAELA – Movimiento Agroecológico Latinoamericano (Latin American Agroecology Movement)
FECON - Federación Costarricense para la Conservación del Ambiente (Costa Rican Federation for Environmental Protection)	MAOCO – Movimiento de la Agricultura Orgánica Costarricense (Costa Rica Organic Agriculture Movement)
FAO – UN Food and Agriculture Organization	NATO – North American Treaty Organization
GDP – Gross domestic product	NGO – Non-governmental Organization
GIS – Geographic Information System	NIS – Newly Independent States
GMO – Genetically Modified Organism	PAC – Partido Acción Ciudadana (Citizens’ Action Party, Costa Rica)

PES – Payment for Environmental Services	
TRIPS - Trade-related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights Agreement	
TSE- Tribunal Supremo de Elecciones (Supreme Election Tribunal, Costa Rica)	
UNDP – United Nations Development Program	
UNICEF- United Nations Children's Fund	
UPOV – Union for the Protection of Plant Varieties	
USAID – United States Agency for International Development	
USD – US dollar	
USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics	
VECO – Vredeseilanden	
WTO – World Trade Organization	
WWF – World Wide Fund for Nature	
ZT – Zaļais tirdziņš – (Green market cooperative, Latvia)	

ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a multi-sited ethnography of the development of organic agriculture movements in the historically, culturally, and ecologically diverse contexts of Latvia and Costa Rica. It explores how the divergent traditions and practices surrounding landscape preservation, biodiversity conservation, and seed production have shaped national-level organic movements in these countries. My research reveals that despite radically different backgrounds and strategies, both movements are limited in similar ways due to their marginal positions within their respective countries and the global economy. They share certain characteristic problems in moving organically grown products to market, which differ greatly from the trends of “conventionalization” encountered by organic sectors in the US, Western Europe, and other industrialized countries.

Further, the dissertation investigates how the two organic movements have reacted to the respective regional economic integration processes of joining the European Union (EU) and resisting entry into the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). I trace the course of two specific rural development struggles over land surveying and land use practices in Latvia, and intellectual property rights over seeds in Costa Rica. These struggles reflect broader contests over understandings of cultural landscapes as formed through organic farmer practices; public versus private control over space, place and property; the formation of farmer social networks and relations; and broader ideas of democracy and participation in social and political life. I argue that the culturally specific and embedded responses to these processes of regionalization and globalization have emerged out of the different

environmental and agricultural histories, political narratives and cultural symbols in each country. The Latvian organic movement tends towards re-territorialization, emphasizing the social imaginaries of the nation and land in response to the EU. In contrast the Costa Rican organic movement has joined together with other social movements in resisting CAFTA through a global perspective of interchange and circulation of ideas across borders, paralleling their emphasis on seed exchange as a form of resistance to intellectual property rights. Heated debates at the global level about the harmonization and standardization of norms for organic agriculture across such different ecological and cultural terrains reflect the difficulty of “uniting the organic world in all its diversity,” as stated in the mission of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM).

INTRODUCTION: Globalizing organics

Decentralizing Latvian organics

Outside, the first signs of spring are peeking out as the snow melts. It is the last possible moment to take advantage of farmers' "free time" before spring planting begins and farm activities consume them. Perhaps inspired by the new beginnings outside, a new organization begins to take shape inside. The Eco-Health Farm Network, that has been one of the most active and organized branches of the Latvian Organic Agriculture Association (*Latvijas bioloģiskās lauksaimniecības asociācija*, or LBLA) for years, has gathered in a meeting room of one farmer's house.

These are farmers from all over the country who for the last seven years have been trying to combine organic farming with an interest in health, well-being and traditional herbal healing practices and ecotourism. Over the years, their training has included courses on Latvian herbal sauna procedures, medicinal properties of herbs, basic nutrition, massage techniques, reiki, ecological home cleaning products, and many other topics. Some offer these services to guests in specially designed facilities in their farms, while others have more traditional vegetable or beef cattle farms, and simply come to the courses for their own benefit.

Their long-time leader, Anna, has been named a fellow of an international organization for social change in recognition of her innovative ideas and leadership in combining health, wellness, and organic

Uniting Costa Rican organics

It is a hot and dry morning, as the rainy season is coming to an end. I meet Elena, the facilitator for the National Strategy seminar for the Costa Rican Organic Agriculture Movement (*Movimiento de la Agricultura Orgánica Costarricense* or MAOCO) about an hour before the two-day strategic planning workshop is to begin. In order to try to preserve neutrality in what had the potential to be an emotionally charged workshop, the organizers from MAOCO had decided to hire a professional facilitator. Everything is set up well in advance: the colored note cards counted out by fives, the large pieces of flip chart paper attached to the walls around the room, the markers and program distributed.

This is the first of two large "reorganizational" assemblies for MAOCO. In this first one, the strategy and goals were to be developed, with a new organizational structure to be developed at a subsequent meeting. Thirteen regional strategy workshops had taken place all over the country during the last two months, and each region had designated two delegates to participate in this national assembly.

The seminar started off very smoothly. The first activity was an establishment of group rules. These included such things as listening and respecting all opinions, working together in a constructive spirit of solidarity and equity, and thinking together of a common vision for the movement.

The facilitator continued with a

farming into a unique model. She has also been awarded a national “creative woman of the year” award in Latvia, and has been interviewed in numerous journals and newspapers. She describes her group as “seekers,” as farmers who are always eager to learn something new, and who wish to spread their specific, holistic understanding of organic agriculture to other farmers as well as consumers.

As the meeting progresses, it is clear that the outside facilitator who has been hired for this event, is gently trying to convince people that being organized, by forming an official new NGO, would give them more power and influence with government institutions.

Anna agrees, saying that she is constantly sent away from the agricultural funding institutions because they see the Eco-health farm group as environmentalists, only to be rejected from the environmental organizations because they are seen as farmers. They finally need to define their own identity.

After much deliberation and encouragement from their facilitator, the 25 farmers present decide to take the plunge. They devise a vision and mission, set out goals, and organize into committees. According to the new vision and mission devised by the group, environmental health farms are “certified organic farmers who farm according to the principles: be good to nature, know how to protect your health, and help others do so, as well” (Bergman n.d.).

Most importantly, they make the commitment to register formally as a new NGO within the next year. This new group will remain part of the Association, but they hope this step towards institutionalization will help them gain access to more funds, and give them more freedom to organize activities specific to their interests and needs. Some farmers express worries, however, that this may be seen as breaking away from the Association.

This initiative taking place in 2006 was

theoretical presentation about what a strategy is and does, and then opened up a brainstorming session about what the objective of this national strategy would be. Here Elena’s structured plan soon began to break down. In the middle of this first brainstorming session, old debates and discussions reemerged, not about the strategy itself, but about what MAOCO itself was, and should be. Some participants began questioning whether it was possible to define a strategy without defining first what MAOCO is, who belongs to it, and how its organizational structure would work. Others began openly doubting the value of all the preliminary exercises. Were they not there to define a national strategy based on the regional ones? And if so, shouldn’t the regions have time to present their ideas and discuss them?

This workshop and the process leading up to it carried its own legacy of debates and disagreements. The movement had been working in a relatively informal way for several years, but some were beginning to feel that it lacked an institutional identity with which to apply for funding projects, etc. One of the leaders had suggested registering MAOCO as an organization, in order to make applying for grants easier. This had raised many fears that MAOCO would change drastically from the loosely organized social movement it was now, to a mere bureaucratic institution like so many others.

The definition of the regions had also been difficult, as some groups felt they identified more closely with their strong local associations than with any of the proposed regions. They had petitioned to the MAOCO central office to become a new region, but others resisted, saying that this would lead only to becoming a federation, which would defeat the purpose of being called a movement.

These conflicts in 2006 reflect some of the deeper issues that remain unresolved within MAOCO, founded in 2000, yet also many of the strengths that keep it going.

significant because it marked a trend in decentralization of the Latvian Organic Agriculture Association, founded in 1995. The Eco-Health Farm network was one of the first groups within the Latvian organic farming network to define itself as a specific subgroup within the Association.

One of these is the conscious decision to be a *Movimiento*, rather than an association or federation, and the constant reflexivity and resistance to institutionalization which that entails.

As the two stories above illustrate, organic movements all over the world are busy negotiating their identities, their organizational structures, and their role in rural development debates. They are combining old and new, local and global, practical and philosophical in different ways in order to make movements and organizations that fit local needs and contexts. Similar debates are happening at the global level. In 2005, the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) held an interactive process and intense debates among 750 member organizations from throughout the world in order to define the Principles of Organic Agriculture. After long discussions, they came up with the four principles of Health, Ecology, Fairness, and Care. Each of these is elaborated on several pages and is intended to serve as a set of both moral and practical guidelines for organic movements around the world. These principles were devised in order to, as one of the organizers put it, “address globalization challenges” (Luttikholt 2007).

This dissertation investigates how meanings of organic farming have grown out of the specific histories and ecologies of two small countries as culturally and politically different as Latvia and Costa Rica. Further, it asks how farmers and their organizations are experiencing and negotiating such “globalization challenges” at various levels. On the farm level, it asks how farmers through their practices are inventing and reinventing organic agriculture in the context of changing local circumstances. At the movement level, it explores how groups and organizations in Latvia and Costa Rica are responding to regional economic integration into the European Union (EU) and the Central American Free Trade

Agreement (CAFTA), respectively. At the national level, it questions how farmers and citizens of these countries imagine themselves within these new regional initiatives. Finally at the international level, the two distinct stories told in the dissertation raise broader issues about how the coordination of social movements “from below” combines with the homogenization of standards and legislation “from above.” In sum, the dissertation seeks to connect the micropractices of organic farmers with the larger political possibilities and social imaginaries that they are seeking to create and inhabit.

In the remainder of this introduction I give some background on the issues I have raised here and explain how I am using each of the above terms and concepts. First, I discuss some of the recent trends of how social scientists and ethnographers have been engaging with globalization, rural areas, and regional integration. Next, I situate organic agriculture within the context of globalization in order to show how it serves as an exciting lens through which to study these processes of regional and global integration. Then I explain how the Latvian and Costa Rican movements are located in the global organic world, and give some background on the two countries and regions. Finally I discuss the methods I have used and present an outline of the dissertation chapters.

Studying the global

Perhaps the largest controversies of our times surround the meanings, purposes and effects of globalization. As activists and farmers protest outside meetings of multilateral development agencies and the World Trade Organization, academics have been attempting to analyze and understand the complex processes that underlie globalization. Some have attempted to characterize the increasing interconnectedness and the flows of people, finances, technology, ideas, and information around the globe. For instance Appadurai (1997) has named these “scapes,” to suggest the changing cultural geographies implied in these shifts

and flows. Debates have formed about whether globalization is something new, or rather just an intensification of long-term historical processes; whether globalization implies homogenization or results in plural, culturally distinct globalities; about what happens with “global” elements when they are imported into “local” cultures; and who is ultimately included and excluded from these globalization processes (Appadurai 1997; Jameson and Miyoshi 1998; Guidry, Kennedy et al. 2000; Rees and Smart 2001; Berger 2002; Gille and O Riain 2002; Lewellen 2002; Eriksen 2003; Nustad 2003; Inda and Rosaldo 2008). There is disagreement about whether these changes have the effect of compressing space and time, thus making the world feel smaller and faster (Harvey 1989), or stretching it out, replacing face-to face encounters with other forms of communication and interaction (Giddens 1990). Other scholars have reminded us that the reach of such global forces is only partial and uneven (Sassen 2000), and that global models do not take account of the different opportunities of various groups and the power dynamics involved (Massey 1994). In sum, global connections are “messy,” yet such tense interactions embody “friction,” rife with potential for both conflicts and creative innovations (Tsing 2005).

These multiple theories of how globalization and regionalization processes work call for studies of how very different places and groups of people are reacting to similar changes (Fox and Gingrich 2002). Yet these global changes and processes also pose challenges for ethnographers, whose traditional approach of studying cultures and communities has been through participant observation in bounded local field sites. Both global and multi-sited ethnographies are methodologies interested in expanding the horizons of the ethnographic approach towards more innovative ways of studying global processes in one or several field sites (Burawoy 2000). Multi-sited ethnographic studies have been described as juxtaposing phenomena that are considered to be “worlds apart,” exploring how the “global” is an integral part of the “local” in each site, and tracing the unexpected ways in which places are

connected. Unlike typical controlled comparisons that hold variables constant, multi-sited studies follow people, things, metaphors, and conflicts to different sites where they occur (Marcus 1998). Global ethnographies attempt to denaturalize "global forces" by considering how they are negotiated as the result of social processes and connections, and investigating how they are constituted imaginatively (Burawoy 2000).

Locating the rural

The majority of multi-sited and global ethnographies, however, have focused on phenomena stereotypical of modernity and transnational mobility, such as migrants, sex workers, international agencies, tourists, and new medical technologies (Martin 1994; Burawoy 2000; Lock 2002; Scheper-Hughes and Wacquant 2002; Inda and Rosaldo 2008). Most multi-sited or global ethnographies have neglected to study rural or agricultural issues, possibly with the assumption that the rural is inherently "local", and that these communities are the most "rooted," and thus the least mobile and global. Yet it is precisely rural areas that are the principal sites of contestation between international development trends and local histories. As farmers "stay put," national and global development trends come and go, leaving their traces on the landscapes, communities, and practices of the farmers.

Raymond Williams' (1973) iconic work "The Country and the City" demonstrates that the nature of these two concepts is not timeless, nor is the relationship between them. Cultural geographers have long been exploring the concept of "place" as lived experience, based on Heidegger's concept of "dwelling," and anthropologists have explored the many ways in which places are contested (Feld and Basso 1996). Yet Massey makes the point that in the face of all the debate about globalization and deterritorialization, "local places" have come to be seen as reactionary, because "while time is equated with movement and progress, 'space'/'place' is equated with stasis and reaction" (Massey 1994:151). Massey

contends, however, that a notion of a “global place” can also be constructed by conceiving of it as a meeting place, or as "articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences, and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself" (Massey 1994:154). Thus, in order to understand how processes of globalization are affecting rural areas, one must place these changes into the context of other historical processes, as well as the lived experience of people and their future imaginaries.

Imagining the regional

Regions can also be experienced as “places” due to their intermediate state between territorially-based nations and global spaces. Ching (2000) discusses the “supranational regionalist imaginary” of Asia that serves as a basis of identity and differentiation from other regional unities. Yet regionalization processes have been much less studied and discussed by scholars who are studying the cultural processes of globalization.

In contrast, international relations experts have studied extensively the processes of regionalization, and have identified the phenomenon of “new regionalism” in the post– Cold War world. This is the transformation from a bipolar or the “three worlds” model to a more complex multi-polar world. In this new regionalism, “regions....are not ‘given,’ neither are they formal organizations. Rather they are created and recreated in the process of global transformation” (Hettne, Inotai et al. 1999). The new regionalism is characterized by the formation of free trade areas at the regional level, as well as larger social and political processes of regional integration. One of the biggest debates is about whether these new trends of regionalism are a “stepping stone” or a “stumbling block” to globalization (Ching 2000).

Both Latvia and Costa Rica are involved in regionalization processes of entering the EU and CAFTA¹, respectively. Latvia declared independence from the Soviet Union in May 1990 and then joined the EU in May, 2004, along with nine other new Member States, bringing the total to 25 members.² At the time there was very little open public resistance to joining the EU and the events were celebrated throughout the post-socialist world as a “return to Europe.” Meanwhile, when I was designing my research in 2004, CAFTA had already been signed after stormy negotiations, and was set to be ratified and enter into force by the time my fieldwork began. Due to significant public resistance, however, Costa Rica was the only country that did not ratify the agreement according to the established timetable. Rather the ratification of CAFTA was approved by an extremely narrow margin in a highly contentious referendum in October 2007. Thus, my original research design changed from examining the effects of CAFTA to following the resistance to and debates about its potential threats. (The referenda processes and debates in both countries are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five.)

By juxtaposing the EU and CAFTA I by no means intend to suggest that they are equivalent in either form or content. I do contend, however, that these regional integration processes are fundamentally altering the legal and economic systems of Latvia and Costa Rica. Even more importantly, the discussions and debates surrounding these agreements have lasted for years in both countries, and have thus served as a powerful background against which ideas and practices take shape, and as the generalized context for all political

¹ CAFTA is a free trade agreement between the United States and five Central American countries (El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica). Costa Rica withdrew from the negotiations at one point in December 2003, but rejoined again in January 2004. The agreement was originally signed by the US and the Central American countries in May 2004, the Dominican Republic was added in August, 2004. After the addition of the Dominican Republic, the acronym was changed to CAFTA-DR, but I will refer to it here as CAFTA for the sake of simplicity.

² The other new Member States include Cyprus, Malta, Lithuania, Estonia, Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia. Bulgaria and Romania have also since joined, bringing the total to 27.

and policy-related decisions. As such they are powerful cultural constructs that have great power to transform social relations.

Thus throughout the dissertation, in addition to tracing the concrete actions and effects of these regionalization and globalization processes and debates, I also gauge how people imagine these new regions and the effects this will have on how people and communities relate to one another and their environments. I use the concept of “social imaginaries” to describe these aspects.³ The term refers to emerging ideas shared by groups of people about their relationships to one another, politics, and markets. Taylor (2002:106) defines social imaginary as:

the ways in which people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations.

Gaonkar and Lee (2002:11) also point out that social imaginaries function as moral codes: “A social imaginary carries within it an image of a moral order, which imbues embodied practices and the accompanying cultural forms with meaning and legitimacy.” Finally, practice is an important part of the social imaginary: “The relation between practices and the background understanding behind them is therefore not one-sided. If the understanding makes the practice possible, it is also true that the practice largely carries the understanding” (Taylor: 107). Therefore I focus throughout the dissertation on the mutual constitution of practices and ideas in forming competing social and environmental imaginaries about the roles and meanings of organic agriculture in Latvia and Costa Rica.

The idea of social imaginary is a useful tool for understanding the ways that social movements like the ones in Latvia and Costa Rica are organizing for broader changes in

³ The term “new social imaginary” emerged from a group of scholars working with the Center for Transcultural Studies in the 1990s, who drafted a statement on social imaginaries in 1999 Gaonkar, D. P. (2002). "Toward New Imaginaries: An Introduction." Public Culture 14(1): 1-19..

society, and how these imaginaries compete with those of other groups. I also explore throughout how the regional social imaginaries of Europe, Central America, and Latin America influence the organic farmers' and activists' perceptions of and reactions to the regionalization processes. These regional social imaginaries are to a large extent what influence how these alternate and multiple forms of globalization are experienced, reacted to, and ultimately take shape.

For instance, Wolff (1994) has argued that the idea of Eastern Europe as separate from and less developed than Western Europe is much older than the moment the iron curtain descended after World War II. He argues that Eastern Europe was “invented” in this image in the eighteenth century of the Enlightenment through cartography, travel and fiction writings. The political separation into the communist bloc after World War II only reinforced this cultural wall. After 1989 and the fall of communism, reunification of “Europe” was a much more difficult project due this historic separation, both imagined and real. The continuity of Soviet and socialist practices and understandings of the world have been so persistent, despite the many changes, that the historical moment of a “transition” from socialism to democracy, and from command to market economies, took on a “culture” of its own (Kennedy 2002). Kennedy characterizes the assumptions surrounding the term transition thus:

Transition can work, so it goes, as long as the socialist past is expunged and the nationalist threat is held at bay. This narrative plot...diverts our gaze from transition's own cultural power. Transition is a culture of power with its own contradictions, contentions, repressions, and unrealized potentials (6-7).

Many other scholars of Eastern Europe have analyzed these contradictions that confounded the seemingly straightforward post-socialist “transition” (Burawoy and Verdery 1999; Berdahl, Bunzl et al. 2000; Hann 2002; Verdery 2003). Beginning another transition through

joining the European Union, which for so long represented a forbidden cultural utopia, implies a new set of contradictions which I will explore throughout the dissertation.

For Costa Rica, rather than such a strong set of historically defined regional identities, there is a string of ambiguities about its role in Central and Latin America. Latin America has been constructed through its insertion into world economy as “Europe’s New World and the USA’s ‘backyard’” (Barton 1997:5). These historical relationships have contributed to the region’s poverty and the perception of Latin America as the periphery (Escobar 1995). Nevertheless, it is incredibly heterogeneous, and there are probably as many differences within Latin America than between the so-called North and South (Barton 1997). And if Central America is united in a post-revolutionary search for a cultural imaginary that transcends recent wars and conflicts (Rodriguez 2002), Costa Rica’s peaceful democratic history leaves it out of the picture due to its “exceptionalism” (Edelman 1999; Molina Jimenez 2005). The US relationship with Central America has been described as a “theater of the absurd” because of the wide array of strategies, from market mechanisms to armed violence, that have been employed. Low-intensity “democracy” has been described as the new phrase to replace “development” in the 1990s (Barton 1997:75). All of these images influence perceptions of the CAFTA process and the creation or re-creation of the North-Americanization of Central America.

Multiple organics

Within this global context, organic farmers are a particularly interesting rural group through which to study the processes of globalization on agriculture, because organic agriculture embodies many of the contradictions discussed above. First, organic agriculture itself is a mix of the old and new. It is embedded in agricultural traditions and is in some ways ‘what all agriculture used to be:’

From this perspective, organic agriculture is the original and mainstream agriculture, and ‘conventional’ industrial agriculture is the one that departs from the practices that agriculture has been following since its inception (Kristiansen, Taji et al. 2006:4).

I briefly trace below how this shift happened.

Origins of organics

Sir Albert Howard is largely seen as the pioneer of organic agriculture in England in the 1930s-1940s. He differed from his colleagues of the time by putting a greater emphasis on soil biology and physics rather than on soil chemistry. Those favoring the latter method included Liebig and Sprengel, whose theories of mineral nutrition for plants led to the development of synthetic fertilizers and became the backbone of industrial agriculture (Heckman 2005). Heckman explains Howard’s Law of Return:

Howard’s concept of soil fertility was centered on building soil humus with an emphasis on a ‘living bridge’ between soil life, such as mycorrhizae and bacteria, and how this chain of life from the soil supported the health of crops, livestock, and mankind [sic] (Heckman 2005:144).

This contrasted with Liebig-Sprengel’s Law of the Minimum which defined the minimum mineral nutrition required by plants in the form of nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium (now known as the NPK formula still seen on fertilizer packaging). Howard did not call it organic farming, however, but rather “nature’s farming,” based on the idea that in nature there is no waste because processes of decay and growth balance one another (Heckman 2005). The emphases on closed systems, maintaining soil fertility, and regarding soil as a living organism have remained some of the central tenets of organic agriculture.

Since the break with mainstream conventional practices, many promoters of organic agriculture have also stressed that organic agriculture is a modern, scientific concept,⁴ and there has been a vested interest to prove scientifically that organic systems can be just as

⁴ This is at times another point of conflict with farmers’ groups in developing countries who use traditional farming methods and are considered “organic by default.” There is some disagreement as to whether or not this constitutes “real” organic farming.

productive, are better for the environment, and produce healthier foods than conventional systems. Another pioneer in England, Lady Eve Balfour, conducted experiments on her farm comparing results from organic and conventional systems from 1939 to 1969. The beginning of organic agriculture in the US was when J. Rodale was influenced by Howard's writings and began experimenting on his farm near Allentown, Pennsylvania in the early 1940s. He later became one of the prime promoters of organic agriculture in the US and the editor of "Organic Farming and Gardening" magazine (Heckman 2005).

Providing scientific evidence that organic agriculture is a viable option for food production, rather than just a niche market providing for elite sectors, is still a politically charged question. This is evidenced by the recent controversy over several studies that do show that organic agriculture could "feed the world" using only currently available agricultural land (Avery 2007; Badgley, Moghtader et al. 2007; Badgley and Perfecto 2007; Badgley, Perfecto et al. 2007). Given current concern over a global food crisis, this is a particularly important question.

Throughout its history, organic agriculture has also been very much a mixing of local and internationally borrowed ideas and practices. Many of the founding texts on organic agriculture were based on compiling cross-cultural practices and examples. When Howard wrote his *Agricultural Testament* in 1943, he based it on 26 years of living and working with farmers in India.⁵ FH King's 1911 book on permanent agriculture compiled information from Japan, China, and Korea (Heckman 2005). In 1972, the idea to found an international organic agriculture organization was based explicitly on the idea that cross-cultural learning was necessary:

⁵ One of the most fundamental ideas was the maintenance of soil fertility, which explains why the British organic association remains named the Soil Association to this day.

At the time when industrial expansion is questioned and notions of “quality” and “survival” are raised, it seems necessary to me that organic agriculture movements make themselves known and coordinate their actions...The food quality and ecology crisis is no longer a national problem, but an actual international concern to ...which we must rapidly bring our solutions. For the time being, all the scientific [sic] and experimental data we have hardly can cross the borders. Wouldn't it be possible to try to share them? I think that the creation of an international federation of organic agriculture movements would be of much interest for all of us and for humanity; this federation respecting all particularities and individualities (Chevriot 1972).

In response to this invitation, IFOAM was founded in 1972, with five founding groups from the UK, Sweden, South Africa, the US, and France. Today it has 780 members from all over the world.

Defining organics

The term “organic” was first used for agriculture by Walter Northbourne in the book “Look to the Land” in 1940 in which he elaborated the idea of the farm as an ‘organic whole.’ It is from this usage that the idea of organic farming as a holistic approach or system of farming comes, rather than referring only to the return of organic matter to the soil, as is often assumed (Heckman 2005). Williams, in discussing all the uses of the term ‘organic,’ points out that it was first used in this sense of describing a holistic system by romantic philosophers such as Coleridge, who defined an organic system as one where ‘the whole is everything and the parts are nothing’ (Williams 1976).

Because organic agriculture has been since its beginnings something that is set apart from other forms of agriculture, its definition is also often relational- as a comparison with other forms of agriculture or other practices. The first efforts by IFOAM to agree on a definition of organic agriculture came in the 1970s, with efforts to define a set of standards according to which organic agriculture could be judged. The first IFOAM Basic Standards were published in 1980, and this was the first step towards organic certification. Third party certification systems, whereby accredited certification bodies visit farms and determine that

they meet a set of either government or private-set standards, has now become the most common way of determining if a farm and its products can be labeled as organic. This then serves as a guarantee to consumers who purchase the product. The issue of certification has been contentious as IFOAM has expanded, however, because certification agencies and standards have typically been imported from the global North to provide food for export from the South. Therefore standards are not always appropriate for Southern producers, and certification costs can be prohibitive (Raynolds 2004). Allen and Kovach (2000) contend that standards necessarily reduce the holistic ideal of organic agriculture to a list of acceptable inputs, and can lead to mere “input substitution.”

The most recent definition of organic agriculture, adopted by the General Assembly of IFOAM in 2008 reads:

Organic agriculture is a production system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems and people. It relies on ecological processes, biodiversity and cycles adapted to local conditions, rather than the use of inputs with adverse effects. Organic agriculture combines tradition, innovation and science to benefit the shared environment and promote fair relationships and a good quality of life for all involved (IFOAM 2008).

The definition was devised by an international taskforce and was open to comment by all IFOAM members. It captures many of the elements discussed above, combining traditional practices with science, attempting to use closed systems, and giving special attention to soil fertility and natural cycles.

The term “organic” is also a word with many connotations beyond agriculture. Escobar (1999) proposes to use the term “organic nature” as a mode of analysis for linking the spheres of the cultural and the biological. He bases his discussion on Ingold, who sees a relationship between “organic and social life.” These multiple uses of the term organic raise interesting questions about how the term is used in relation to organic agriculture movements today. Throughout the dissertation I will show how both the Latvian and Costa Rican

organic movements are redefining organic agriculture in their own cultural contexts in ways that transcend ecological issues to include much broader social and political values and imaginaries.

Social movement versus market sector

Organic agriculture has long been somewhat precariously perched between a productive sector of the economy and a social movement that it is advocating for change. This duality in its position and role is one of the main causes for debates within the organic world, as well as one of its strengths.

Organic agriculture is perceived in part as being a social movement, because it was in fact a breaking away from the mainstream scientific convictions of the time. In an address to the first IFOAM scientific conference in 1977, Lady Eve Balfour recounted the beginnings of the organic movement:

These pioneers had one thing in common--they were what we should now call Ecologists. They all succeeded in breaking away from the narrow confines of the preconceived ideas that dominated the scientific thinking of their day. They looked at the living world from a new perspective--they also asked new questions. Instead of the contemporary obsession with disease and its causes, they set out to discover the causes of Health. This led inevitably to an awareness of wholeness (the two words after all, have the same origin) and to a gradual understanding that all life is one (Balfour 1995 [1977]).

On the 25th anniversary of IFOAM, a group of long-time IFOAM activists reflected back on Lady Eve Balfour's speech in Switzerland as crucial to the development of IFOAM as a social movement. Her statement that "the health of soil, plant, animal and man is one and indivisible" was seen as one of the founding concepts:

There can be a separate case for an "organic market sector" or an "organic industry" but an organic movement as a force for change has difficulty justifying its existence if it abandons or ignores this founding concept of health (Woodward, Fleming et al. 1987:33).

The authors reflected also, however, that they feared that the organic movement was beginning to move away from these roots.

Today organic agriculture is still seen by many as a reaction against the industrialization and globalization of mainstream agriculture. For instance, Michelsen (2001) argues that organic agriculture is a social movement that defines itself in opposition to conventional agriculture and includes a major social change as well as a change in human-nature relationships. This view is complicated, however, by a closer investigation of how organic sectors function (Guthman 2004).

The total amount of land area organically certified worldwide remains small, at 0.65% of all agricultural land. Currently the largest areas dedicated to organic production are in Oceania, followed by Europe and Latin America. The highest shares of organic land as a percentage of all agricultural land are in Europe (Willer, Yussefi-Menzler et al. 2008). Table one gives an overview of organic land use in various regions, as well as Latvia and Costa Rica.

Table 0.1: Certified organic land area and farms. Source (Willer, Yussefi-Menzler et al. 2008)

	Organic agricultural land (ha)	Share of total agricultural land	No. of farms	Average farm size-ha (from data)
Latvia (2005)	118,612	7%	4,095	28.96
EU-27	6,803,024	4%	178,896	38.03
Europe, total	7,389,085	1.62%	203,523	36.31
Costa Rica	10,711	0.4%	2,921	3.67
Latin America total	4,915,643	0.68%	223,277	22.01
USA	1,620,351	0.50%	8,493	190.79
North America	2,224,755	0.57%	12,064	184.41
Africa	417,059	0.05%	175,266	2.38
Asia	3,090,924	0.17%	97,020	31.86
Oceania	12,380,796	2.7%	7,594	1630.34
worldwide	30,418,261	0.65%	718,744	42.32

These data reveal the striking differences among regions in certified land area and farm size. Two-thirds of organic land is in natural grasslands, primarily in Australia and

Europe, and these are also the regions with the highest shares of organic land.⁶ There are unofficial estimates that there is as much, if not more, land that is managed organically, but not certified. This is particularly true for developing countries where certification costs may be prohibitively high or where produce is intended for local markets and thus not certified.

Despite the seemingly small ratio of agriculture devoted to organic production, the organic food sector today is a multi-billion dollar industry. Sales of organic foods worldwide doubled between 2000 to 2006, reaching 36 billion USD (Willer, Yussefi-Menzler et al. 2008). Recently organic was also identified as the fastest-growing sector of the global food industry (Raynolds 2004). 97% of global revenues in organic sales come from North America and Europe (Willer, Yussefi-Menzler et al. 2008), and South-North trade is experiencing the fastest growth (Raynolds 2004). While on one hand this provides good export markets for producers in the global South, it also raises concerns that organic markets are replicating unfair trade patterns of conventional export markets, as well as about its long-term sustainability: “This disparity between production and consumption is putting the global organic food industry in a fragile condition.” There is a growing realization within the organic sector that developing countries must develop their own domestic markets rather than just concentrate on export (Sahota 2008). The two country cases studies here will explore factors that facilitate and prevent this from happening.

Conventional organics

The rapid growth and changes in organic markets have raised considerable fears about the “conventionalization” of organic agriculture. The largest market share is in Europe, but Central and Eastern European countries make up only 2% of that. Growth in North American markets is fueled largely by the entry of large retailers like Wal-Mart and

⁶ This also explains the extremely high proportion of organic land in Latvia.

Safeway, who have started their own organic labels. There is also a trend of consolidation both in organic retailers and processing companies, with many multinationals, such as General Mills, Dean Foods, Campbell's Soup and Dole becoming involved.

In the US, Michael Pollan (2001; 2006; 2008) has perhaps done the most to popularize the term "industrial organics" and expose the many contradictions that reside within our perceptions of what organic represents and the actual practices that are behind the large-scale cheap organic food available in many mass-market grocery stores. Among the shocking ills he has brought to light about the "organic –industrial complex" are the large-scale monocultures and organic "factory farms," the long lists of additives and preservatives used in processed organic foods (such as in organic TV dinners or the futuristic idea of an organic Twinkie), the buy-outs of small organic companies by large agroindustry, the watering down of organic standards, and the long food-miles traveled and energy intensive processes involved in organic food processing. He argues that due to its rapid growth, the organic sector "has attracted the attention of the very agribusiness corporations to which the organic movement once presented a radical alternative and an often scalding critique" (Pollan 2001). Other popular books and newspaper exposés have also contributed to the growing disillusionment and skepticism regarding organic food, and brought to light a new debate regarding the prioritization of "organic vs. local" food.

What is called within the academic literature on organic food as the "conventionalization debate" started long before Michael Pollan's exposé in New York Times magazine (2001) or the publication of his books, however. Conventionalization has been defined in the literature as:

the dynamics by which the organic sector reproduces the most salient features of conventional agriculture...being subjected, for example, to modernization and intensification – in which economies of scale are becoming increasingly important and farms are increasingly relying on purchased off-farm inputs such as feed, fertilizer and machinery (De Wit and Verhoog 2007:450).

In 1997, a group of scholars published a study of the California organic sector which concluded that the most valuable parts of organic commodity chains were being appropriated by agribusiness (Buck, Getz et al. 1997). This initiated a debate about whether this sort of “conventionalization” is inevitable, where else it is happening, and to what extent the opposite trend is occurring, that organic agriculture is actually demystifying the social and ecological relations of production (Kaltoft 1999; Lyons 1999; Allen and Kovach 2000; Reynolds 2000; Campbell and Liepins 2001; Hall and Mogyorody 2001; Guthman 2002; De Wit and Verhoog 2007).

Guthman (2004) revisits the conventionalization argument that she and colleagues made in 1997 regarding organic agriculture in California, and complicates but reinforces their original position with new data. She concludes that despite the existing diversity of farm types and sizes, a small minority of large farms receive the majority of the revenue, and this stiff competition has negatively affected small growers who may be committed to more rigorous standards. Thus “the threat that agribusiness would dilute the meanings and practices of organic agriculture has in some respects already been borne out” (312).

This hybrid position of organic agriculture as at once global and local, old and new, economic sector and social movement hint at the wide variation that exists in understandings and practices of organic agriculture worldwide, and the difficulty in achieving IFOAM’s mission of “uniting the organic world in all its diversity.”

Other than ‘organic’

What is often understood as organic agriculture also encompasses a variety of other names. In Latin America, for example the term agroecology is more widely used than organic (Altieri 1999; Pretty 2003). It was developed in the 1930s as the “applied ecology of agriculture” and is used to refer to “the study of ecological processes in agroecosystems”

(Gliessman 1990:14-15). It has also become a more politicized term in Latin America, because organic agriculture has taken on negative connotations of being primarily for export markets. This difference in terminology reflects broader debates within Latin America about the inclusion of more social and political concerns into the definition of organic. The Costa Rica is one of the few countries in Latin America where the term organic is used more commonly than agroecology, although with a much broader meaning than just production for export markets.⁷ This contributes to Costa Rican “exceptionalism.” In Latvia and many European countries the term used is actually “biological agriculture.”

Another type of system is biodynamic. Developed by Rudolf Steiner in the 1920s, this method incorporates knowledge about celestial cycles to determine planting, thus it is more philosophical and has its own distinct certification systems (Kaltoft 1999). There is also a more general term of “sustainable agriculture” that does not have any one definition but can include low-input agriculture, etc. I will use the term organic throughout, but am not referring to any one specific definition of organic. Rather, I study how actors in the contexts of Latvia and Costa Rica define and understand organic.

Latvia and Costa Rica: worlds apart?

I lost count eventually of how many times in the course of my research and writing I have had to answer the question “Why Latvia and Costa Rica? They seem so different...” On some levels, these two countries could not be more different, with diverse histories, ecologies, and politics. While Costa Rica has enjoyed a long history of independence, Latvia has been run by a succession of foreign rulers; Latvia is a flat country with a temperate climate, and Costa Rica is a mountainous and volcanic tropical land; and while Costa Rica is well known as a tourist destination and for its economic connections to the US, Latvia has

⁷ For a detailed description of terms as well as a comprehensive description of organic agriculture in Costa Rica see García, J. (1998). La Agricultura Organica in Costa Rica. San Jose: UNED.

just emerged from the Soviet Union and still constructing a market economy and international image. They would indeed be considered by most to be “worlds apart.”

Yet there are certain things about these two nations that challenge the assertion of incommensurability. The Baltic States and Central America occupy parallel geographic situations at the crossroads of the global East-West and North-South axes, respectively. These have resulted in histories of economic, if not always political, domination by neighboring powers, including control over natural resources and agricultural production. Currently, each of these two regions is negotiating its place in the regional trading blocs of the EU and the CAFTA, which, despite their other differences, have been contentious because of the profound influence they will have on agriculture. Both countries are also roughly the same size,⁸ and small enough for the organic movements to be organizing at the national level.



Figure 0.1: Map of Latvia in Europe, left. Map of Costa Rica in Central America, right. Sources: www.startlatvia.com/latvia-map/; www.paradisecostarica.com/OurLocation.html

⁸ Both countries are often said to be roughly the same size as West Virginia. Latvia measures 64,589 km², and Costa Rica 51,100 km.²

For several years, Latvia and Costa Rica have also been ranked nearly side by side (at 45th and 48th respectively) in the UN Human Development index⁹ (UNDP 2008). This close proximity of these two countries along this statistical continuum reveals Latvia as the poorest and lowest-ranked of the EU-25 Member States,¹⁰ and Costa Rica as the highest-ranked in Central America. This similarity mixes up the sharp dichotomies that divide up our conceptual worlds into developed vs. developing, North vs. South, or East vs. West. Instead, I am consciously juxtaposing the “Northeast” to the “Southwest” or two ‘not-quite-developing’ but ‘not-yet-developed’ countries, to level out the conceptual playing field.

Each country’s organic history is closely tied up with its own developmental history and global position, as I recount below, using parallel page layout to emphasize commonalities and contrasts.

Latvia: Organic Beginnings

The Latvian organic agriculture movement started during the *glasnost* period of the Soviet Union. It began with a handful of biodynamic farmers in the western coastal town of Liepaja in the late 1980s, who were in effect protesting the Soviet agricultural system and developing their own alternative.

These first years are now described by “old-timers” nostalgically, as characterized by camaraderie and a sense of common purpose. It is described very much as the finding of fellow, like-minded people, or *savējie*.

The idea was to show that it was possible to farm differently. Some of the

Costa Rica: Becoming Organic

Some producers have been practicing organic agriculture in Costa Rica since the 1980s, but the National Association of Organic Agriculture (Asociación Nacional de Agricultura Orgánica, or ANAO) was formed in Costa Rica only in 1992. By 1999 this organization had become almost entirely inactive, partially because new institutions, such as the certification agency, Eco-logica, had been formed under its supervision and taken over part of its activities. In 2000 MAOCO took over many of the functions of ANAO.

The idea of organic agriculture came partially from the US. Some of the organizers attended a conference there and

⁹ A ranking calculated every year by the UN Development Program that takes into account GDP per capita, life expectancy at birth, adult literacy rates, and education enrolment ratios. Costa Rica generally ranks higher on life expectancy than Latvia, but slightly lower in the other three indices. I do not mean to take these indicators as more than illustrations of the larger point that the boundaries between our conceptual categories are often blurred upon further investigation.

¹⁰ Excluding Bulgaria and Romania which joined the EU only after I had conducted my main dissertation fieldwork. Both rank considerably below Costa Rica, thus further emphasizing my point that the EU or “Europe” no longer so straightforwardly connotes “developed.” Similarly, several Latin American countries such as Argentina and Chile rank higher than several EU New Member States.

first inspiration came from German colleagues, especially from one man, Dr. Jorge, who has traveled to Latvia repeatedly, and helped advise on the conversion to organic agriculture.

Dr. Jorge is a biodynamic farmer associated with the German association Demeter, and because of that, the first Latvian organic farmers were in fact biodynamic. This means that they learned to make their own soil additives using cow's hooves and horns, plant according to cycles of the moon. It also meant that neighbors looked at them like they were a little crazy.

Due to these beginnings, the first identification of the movement was as being the opposite of Soviet agriculture. The Association attributes the chemicalization and environmental degradation of the landscape to Soviet agriculture, and equates environmental consciousness with the Latvian national identity (Vaivare and Tooma-Rijniece 2002). Thus, many problems are attributed to the former regime, and the independence period beginning in 1991 is seen as a new beginning.

The number of certified organic farms has been steadily increasing, jumping from 38 in 1998, to 219 in 2001, to over 4000 in 2006. The total land area occupied by these certified and transition period organic farms in 2006 was 150,000 hectares, or 6.8% of the total agricultural land area.

The rapid growth since entry into the European Union in 2004 is attributed largely to the new support payments offered for conversion to organic agriculture. While the subsidies granted to organic farmers are tiny compared to the development funds allocated for other types of agriculture, they are of great significance to the smallholder farmers who may not have any other options. The support provides certified organic farmers with 82 EUR per hectare, and transition-period farmers with 139 Euro/ hectare per year.

came back full of excitement, and with the goal of creating a fully certified organic system in Costa Rica.

Many farmers, however, tell also of the arrival of Mr. Agasaki who came as part of a technical assistance project from Japan, and taught many people to make fermented organic fertilizers such as "bokashi" using efficient microorganisms.

Many farmers were already organized into local smallholder associations, who then collectively decided to convert to organic methods. Many organic farmers had personally experienced pesticide poisonings and cite this as one of their main reasons for converting to organic agriculture.

MAOCO condemns the Green Revolution specifically for destroying the environment, the campesino sector and indigenous people (Sancho and Montero 2002). They worry that joining CAFTA will only amplify these trends.

In 2006, there were 2,921 organic farms, with a total area of 10,665 hectares, or 2.38% of the total land area. This represents a decrease in the number of farms since 2004. This is largely due to a number of organic coffee organizations converting back to conventional coffee production, because conventional coffee prices increased from their low in the 1990s, making the organic price premium minimal.

In 2007, a new Law for the Support of Organic Agriculture., that had been conceived and developed by the movement, was approved by the Legislative Assembly. This Law was a great victory, and will include for the first time government incentives for the conversion to organic agriculture. These will work as a Payment for Environmental Services program (PES), as well as include tax deductibles. The Movement is hopeful that they will be able to attract significant numbers of new organic farmers through these programs.

Structuring Organics

The Latvian Organic Agriculture Association (LBLA) was founded in 1995.¹¹ It now has a membership of approximately 850. In most cases farmers join the association as individual members rather than through a local or sectoral subgroup. It is for this reason that the institutionalization of the Eco-health farm network was such a momentous step.

LBLA defines itself as a professional organization that unites environmental protectionists with organic producers and advocates. The main aims of the organization are to promote the production of organic produce, develop market policies for organic products, inform consumers about the health and environmental benefits of organic agriculture, develop educational opportunities for organic producers, popularize organic production methods, and attract supporters to the association (LBLA n.d.).

The organization has a well-defined structure. The day to day activities are coordinated by a president and a coordinator. The president has been working on a volunteer basis for years, choosing to accept no monetary compensation for her work, but trying to balance administration and lobbying on behalf of LBLA with an academic profession at the Latvian Agricultural University. The coordinator has been paid through various grants, but there is still no permanent office. There are monthly meetings of the Council, which is comprised of representatives of both regional sub-groups and sectoral subdivisions (i.e. beef, dairy, etc.). There is a recurring discussion about hiring more people to do the work, but financing from member fees and occasional grants is

Moving Organics

In 2000, the Costa Rican Organic Agriculture Movement (MAOCO) was founded as a broad coalition made up of approximately 180 organizations. These include not only producers, but also consumers, educators, NGOs, and other agencies interested in promoting organic agriculture.

MAOCO defines itself as a “space for consensus, exchange, and meeting” of different actors dedicated to organic agriculture. MAOCO has seen as its mission to unite the diverse groups that are already working in organic agriculture, first at the regional level, through regional strategy-building workshops, and then at the national level.

In 2007, after years of discussions like the one described above, representatives of MAOCO at a National Assembly agreed on a mission to consolidate a social movement for political representation, dialogue, and exchange with diverse actors committed to the organic sector in order to facilitate production, processing, trade and consumption of organic products at the local, regional and national levels; promote common principles and values; establish alliances and promote alternative development strategies (MAOCO 2008).

As demonstrated above, there have been repeated discussions about the organizational structure of MAOCO. It has one full time executive secretary, one office manager, and a part-time project coordinator as staff paid through various funds and projects, with a full-time office in San Jose. A new formal association, ASOMAOCO was registered purely in order to facilitate the logistics and legal details of funding applications.

In the meantime, a special committee

¹¹It was first founded as the Latvian Association of Organic Agriculture Organizations, because it started out as an association of several regional organic groups, primarily in Liepaja. Gradually more and more independent farmers joined the Association, so that the name became less accurate, and the association officially changed its name to the Latvian Organic Agriculture Association or LBLA.

insufficient to fund one or several full-time salaries. There is also concern about who the ideal candidate for such a post would be: farmers are already overburdened with their farm-work and administration, but non-farmers lack the intimate knowledge of the farmers' everyday challenges.

Those in charge of regional or sectoral subgroups are all active farmers, and every hour spent organizing on behalf of the Association is time away from the farm. Only a few of the regional groupings have begun to form a true local identity, organizing themselves more formally and sharing events and future plans.

In 2006, the Association Council decided to try out a new organizational form that would help distribute responsibilities among more people by creating a seven-member Board in addition to the council. Each elected board member is responsible for one specific domain of the association's tasks, such as marketing, running exhibitions, analyzing legislation, etc.

There is a General Assembly once a year for all members. Members can be individual farmers or cooperatives or local associations, and pay differentiated membership dues. All members receive a monthly bulletin with information on events, policies, and projects.

The number of members has been steady for several years, despite the rapid increase in farm certification. This is a source of worry to members, because they feel that the whole sector benefits from the work of the Association, while only members are actively contributing time and resources to the work.

There are signs of divisions within the movement, however, between smaller and larger farms, between those interested in forming a viable family business and those satisfied with production at the subsistence level, and between those who started the movement and the newcomers. Nevertheless, there is rarely time at the meetings to discuss the daily management issues, let alone these broader questions.

was formed with the aim of redesigning the structure of the organization, and a consultant hired to help identify problems in the organizational design and communication and propose potential solutions. In the meantime, a National Committee keeps meeting every month to make all of the important decisions. It includes representatives from each region as well as from a number of supportive NGOs and rural development networks.

One of the main tasks every month is coordinating activities to keep reports to funders up to date. MAOCO receives funding from various donors, such as the UNDP and several Dutch and Belgian NGOs, though these are slowly starting to pull out to other less developed Central American countries.

On one hand, the Movement might be seen as undefined or in conflict with itself. On the other hand, however, the issues that could prove to be divisive are being openly discussed, and these discussions help keep the movement reflexive of its own purpose and goals. It prevents stagnation and settling into set patterns. Several participants at the National Strategy workshop spoke about how MAOCO, as a movement did, and had to keep constantly redefining itself. "MAOCO is not an institution; it is not something that you can touch," commented one participant, "MAOCO is in my region because I am there, and I form part of this movement."

"MAOCO doesn't exist, in the sense that we invent it anew and form it every time we meet. Seven years ago 15 people came together who wanted to work together, [but now] we reinvent it and make it real each time we meet. So we are meeting [now] to make a common plan, let's do it, and then review again what type of organization we need in order to realize this common plan, common strategy."

And so discussions continue about the appropriate form, structure, and goals of the movement, and how to avoid overlap with work done by other groups.

Methods and Positionality

Each story is different depending on where you begin, and each network different depending on where you enter it. In both countries, my entry point was through the respective organic agriculture organizations, LBLA in Latvia and MAOCO in Costa Rica. The leaders of these organizations graciously welcomed me and assisted me in setting up institutional affiliations and initial contacts with farmers. My association with these groups doubtless colored my reception by other parties, contributing respect on the behalf of members of the organizations, or perhaps denying me access to some who were unaffiliated with them or criticized their work. Thus, this is not a study of all organic farmers in the country, but rather of those working within these networks.

This dissertation is based on more than two years of fieldwork in Latvia and Costa Rica between the years 2003-2008. Although the bulk of this research was done over the course of 19 months from May 2005- December 2006, I had visited each field site for preliminary fieldwork of four to six weeks in the summers of 2003 and 2004, and returned for several follow-up visits of two to six weeks in each site in 2007 and 2008.

In reaching out to farmers, I used a snowball sampling method (Bernard 2002), working out from recommendations made by the leaders of the respective organizations and their members. This meant that the farmers with whom I became acquainted, whose farms I visited and whose stories I heard, at least initially, were the most active farmers within these networks. I also met these same farmers repeatedly at markets, meetings, and events, and thus built-up long term friendships and acquaintances with them during the course of my fieldwork and subsequent follow-up visits. In both sites, my research involved a mix of participant observation through volunteer work on farms, attendance at activities and events, in-depth interviews and farm visits. In total I conducted more than 100 in-depth interviews

with farmers and other stakeholders, and attended and participated in at least as many seminars, discussions, meetings and events.

My field work activities varied in both sites because it was in many ways “led” by the activities in the site itself. For instance, in Latvia there were fewer organized meetings and events than in Costa Rica, and I instigated several focus group discussions with farmers on specific topics in order to bring them together. In Costa Rica, however, there were several ongoing processes of institutional design and regional and national strategy-building, where I raised my questions rather than organize new meetings.

In both countries, I tried to visit farms in all geographically, climactically, or demographically distinct regions of the countries in order to ensure breadth and variation in my data. It is important to note that although both countries are ethnically diverse, the primary groups with whom the associations worked, and therefore with whom I conducted the majority of my research were the dominant ethnic groups, and my fieldwork was conducted in Latvian and Spanish. Although I did visit farms and attend meetings in Russian-speaking parts of Latvia and in indigenous regions in Costa Rica, my work can not claim to speak in depth for the doubtless different social realities and imaginaries in those groups and regions.

In both field sites there were several farms where I spent more time volunteering, and these farmers in some ways became my “key informants,” providing the richness and depth that only repeated contacts and increased trust can bring. These farms I did not choose for their representativity as much as for the relations of trust that emerged with these farmers. Often the relationship emerged out of a mutual curiosity. These were farmers who had as many questions about my work and life as I had about theirs, and thus spending longer periods of time with them was easy and enjoyable. These are relationships that I hope will continue long after my fieldwork and writing is completed.

My project is multi-sited on various levels. It “follows” how the idea of organic agriculture has developed in two such different contexts- as a philosophy, a movement, and a set of concrete practices, and how the idea has been contested, renegotiated and imagined by various groups in each setting. I traveled back and forth between farms and meetings, much like the farmers themselves are often forced to, migrating between rural and urban spaces with frequency but many of them still with relative unease. In each of these locations I was a more or less active participant and observer. My days went from planting, weeding, or sorting seeds, to leading discussions or making presentations about my other field site, to simply observing the discussions and events going on around me.

Finally, a significant part of my research took place across various borders. I attended regional and international meetings and conferences, sometimes with farmers or organization leaders, and sometimes in their stead. I also spent one month as an intern at the headquarters of the IFOAM office in Bonn, Germany, compiling a report on a related topic, but at the same time trying to understand how my two field sites fit within broader global debates about meanings and practices of organic agriculture.

Thus my movements both mimicked and complemented those of the organic farmers. While on the ground with the farmers, I studied the multiple ideas and things from outside that came and went and influenced their historically and culturally situated lives, and made up their understandings of the places where they lived and the practices with which they worked. While away, I followed the “forces” that might in time arrive to their farms, such as the negotiation of the new EU regulation on organic farming.

My family connection to Latvia, and my opposite status of a complete outsider in Costa Rica, have influenced my work in several ways. I was born in the US, but grew up speaking Latvian at home and being socialized into an exile/ immigrant Latvian community

during my childhood and adolescence.¹² As a result, I have spent many years exploring the at times uneasy intersection of the Latvian and American parts of my identity. The most active way of doing so was by living and working in Latvia for several years at various points after college and again after completing a Master's degree. This means that in Latvia I was neither a "native ethnographer" nor a typical fieldworker who has had little or no prior experience in her field site. This hybrid identity also influenced my reception by people with whom I interacted throughout my fieldwork. Some assumed that I was a local student who had received a prestigious scholarship to study in the US, and asked excitedly, what it was really like "over there." Others commented on how well I spoke Latvian for an American. Regardless of the assumptions involved, my ultimate explanation of my status as a "foreign Latvian" as well as a "foreign researcher" placed me in a position of simultaneous insider and outsider. It meant I would get "kitchen access" at farms while foreign tourists dined in the dining room, but while sitting in the kitchen was asked to share insider information on life in the US.

In Costa Rica, my appearance made me at first glance an obvious *gringa*, with all the assumptions that might accompany that often lovingly used term. My positionality became more complex once my dual nationality and multi-sited project placed me in a more ambiguous category. Some interpreted me then as European, (and thus somehow a different

¹² The Latvian communities in the US are made up primarily of people like my grandparents and parents, who fled the Soviet occupation of Latvia during World War II, ended up in displaced person camps in Germany after the war. They were sponsored by various churches or charity organizations for immigration to the US anywhere from 2- 10 years after the War. My parents were children when leaving Latvia but adolescents by the time they arrived to the US. These powerful experiences were the foundation for building strong Latvian communities outside of occupied Latvia, complete with Saturday schools, educational camps, churches, and numerous cultural organizations. Most Latvian-Americans considered themselves to be in exile during this time. Officially the state of "exile" ended in 1991 with the regaining of Latvia's independence, a fact which also changed the nature of community and political activities, as increasingly more activities were carried out within Latvia itself. Many individuals and families eventually returned, others participate in volunteer activities in Latvia primarily during vacations and summers. Younger generations of Latvian Americans are much more assimilated into US society and many feel more American than Latvian.

version of a *gringa*); others as someone who could share experiences from another small country that seemed worlds away. And many hoped that I would bring valuable information back and forth across borders rather than just take it and leave.

This explanation makes two things clear. One is my own role as researcher, a role which was in no way that of a passive observer. As I moved back and forth between these contexts that were not themselves explicitly or directly linked in many ways before I began this project, I shared information and engaged people in discussions about my other research site. I turned questions I had pondered about one site on to the other, in order to explicitly compare the answers, the attitudes, and narratives. In this way I was also acting on both my own and the farmers' curiosity that had originally driven my project, which is the question of "How is it done elsewhere?" As my research progressed, I would on occasion hear farmers or organization leaders invoke my other field site as an example of either a threat or a positive example of how things might otherwise be.

Finally, my position as a woman situated me differently in these two contexts and greatly influenced my research. Gender roles are complexly constructed in both countries, and particularly so in rural areas. In Latvia in the organic sector, as in the NGO sector in general, many of the most active participants in meetings and organizations were women. Women have taken on an implicit role of leading a society forward in a time when many men collapsed under the emotional strain of the post-Soviet "transition." With high unemployment and economic hardships, and correlated rates of alcoholism in rural areas, I heard and witnessed multiple cases of alcohol abuse and domestic violence. The strong role that women have taken on in practice is accompanied however, by a conscious longing to have men play their part. This came out in actions such as a woman negotiating all aspects of a transaction and then pushing the paper over to her husband for a signature, and in leaders of

organizations expressing their conviction that a man could lead it better and speak better on behalf of the organization than she could.

In Costa Rica, the narratives and practices were almost reversed. Many organizations and NGOs were holding courses and seminars for the mostly male-dominated farmers' groups to counter the "Latin machismo" and teach them greater gender sensitivity. While some men were self-professed converts, telling me how much they had learned from these seminars and how things had changed in their own homes, others smirked openly at the "feminists" who had ruined more than one good family or marriage through their careless actions and provocations. Many women, on the other hand, did feel that it truly was still difficult for them to become involved in social organizations or even to play an active role in the management of the family farm. Several, commented, however, that the conversion to organic farming, because of its complexity, had given them many more opportunities to be involved or to manage certain aspects of the farm work. In both countries, due to a desire to better understand these situations, I gravitated more towards women and developed closer bonds with them. Thus, although there is no explicit gender analysis in the dissertation, it will be clear that many of my examples and quotes come from these women, who I came to greatly admire.

Overview of chapters

This dissertation, then, is about the interaction of lived rural places, market and social processes and national and regional social imaginaries. The chapters are divided into three sections that reflect these emphases. *Section I: Practices into Places* develops a cultural geography of the landscapes in which farmers live and work in each country, and from which organic agriculture emerged in the late 1980s. Chapter One tells the agricultural histories of the two countries through their landscapes. It discusses how organic farmers in each country

are differently situated within the cultural politics of these landscapes due to the different historical moments in which they find themselves. Chapter Two illustrates how some organic farmers are engaging in the cultural politics of landscape change through their biodiversity conservation practices, in Latvia by preventing afforestation of meadows, and in Costa Rica by preventing deforestation. It shows, however, how in both countries these practices create a certain amount of legislative unease, because organic farmers “fall through the gaps” between the neat categories of conservation and agricultural production.

Section II: Commodification and Non-commodification is about the interactions between social relations and market processes for organic inputs and final products, and locates the two movements in relation to global organic markets. Chapter Three discusses how in Costa Rica seed exchange promotes networks of relatedness and fictive kin, while in Latvia new EU regulations are producing “legible” seeds and subjects and replacing social relations with bureaucratic ones. It suggests that this displacement of the importance of kinship and relations between people, to the tracing of the genealogy of seeds, is a necessary step for the commodification and control of seeds and farmers. Chapter Four shows how despite the great differences in approach and strategy of the two movements at the market level, they have very similar problems. These countries face entirely different problems than those of “conventionalization” as is happening in the global North. Rather, their different marginal positions in relation to global markets blur the line between conventionalization and globalization, and often result in the non-commodification of organic food.

Section III: Imagining a Region includes three chapters that examine explicitly both concrete effects and imagined threats or benefits of joining the EU and CAFTA, as held by different groups. Chapter Five shows how in both the EU and CAFTA referenda the “yes” and “no” campaigns relied on similar strategies of “common sense-making” but elicited different public responses. I argue that despite the fact that the “yes” side won in both cases,

the Costa Rican “no” side was able to construct a much more attractive counter-hegemonic discourse because it fit into longer-term efforts by social movements to create a more participatory, process-based democracy.

Chapters Six and Seven analyze the effects of regional integration through the two dominant rural development struggles that I observed regarding land in Latvia, and seeds in Costa Rica. Chapter Six analyzes the effects of EU accession in Latvia through the lens of a land surveying scandal. It reveals the great disillusionment among farmers and the wider population with the imagined “return to Europe” because Europe itself has changed. In response, both the Latvian government’s and the organic association’s resistance to post-productivist Europe has been to re-emphasize the productivist approach, but this may be difficult for the farmers discussed in Chapter Two who were beginning to engage a more biodiversity-centered approach. Finally, Chapter Seven explores the contradictions between the “organic future” encapsulated in the new Costa Rican organic law and the requirements put in place by the ratification of CAFTA, specifically the obligation to join the Union for Plant Variety Protection (UPOV) convention. I analyze the different social imaginaries of the proponents of UPOV, the environmentalists who attempted to hold a referendum to stop it, and the organic farmers who see practice as the best form of resistance. This shows how the Costa Rican environmentalists and organic farmers tap into a wave of transnational social movements opposing intellectual property rights and expert hierarchies.

In the conclusion I reflect on how the two organic movements in Latvia and Costa Rica have framed their resistance to what they see as threats of regionalization and globalization, due the articulation of particular histories, ecologies and imaginaries. The Latvian movement tends more towards reterritorialization, emphasizing the social imaginary of the nation and land, while the Costa Rican movement has tended more towards a global perspective of interchange and circulation of ideas across borders, paralleling their emphasis

on seed exchange as a form of resistance. These approaches mirror two of the main positions that get articulated at the international level, as well, thus reflecting the difficulties of uniting the “organic world.” I discuss what these two stories tell us about the way in which local and regional cultures and histories are continuing to influence local practices and understandings in the countryside and thus how the organic farmers and movements are transforming, rather than being subsumed into, processes of globalization at the national and regional levels.

SECTION I: PRACTICES INTO PLACES

CHAPTER 1

Reclaiming history, changing the future: the cultural politics of landscape change

It will come as no great surprise that driving along a country road in northeastern European Latvia and tropical, Central American Costa Rica is a strikingly different experience. In Latvia in the summer, meadows and open fields dominate the landscape, with solitary wooden farmsteads far off from the road. Fields of grains such as wheat, rye, oats and barley are interspersed with open meadows, some with grazing brown cows or beef cattle, goats, and sheep; others are overgrown, with silhouettes of the ruins of old farm buildings or concrete *kolhoz*¹³ structures dotting the horizon. In Costa Rica, many small, colorful concrete-block houses line the windy, undulating roads, behind which stretch areas of various export crops in different regions: steep uplands growing onions, potatoes and cabbage, and gentle foothills covered with coffee bushes, pasturelands or densely grown ornamental crops in the Central Valley, expanses of pineapple plantations or banana trees in the Atlantic, beef cattle grazing in the dry lowlands of the Pacific. Beyond the obvious, and sometimes superficial, differences, however, each of these landscapes reveals its own

¹³ A kolhoz was a collective farm in the Soviet Union. The process of forced collectivization is discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.

historical and cultural story of agricultural change, and embodies its own social and environmental imaginary for its inhabitants. And within each of these landscapes are groups of organic farmers, creating their own strands of the national agri-environmental narratives of these countries.

In this chapter I explore the creation of landscapes through organic farming practices as a form of engagement in the cultural and political struggles over rural development policies in the context of regionalization and globalization. The first section provides an overview of anthropological approaches to understanding landscapes, and discusses the Latvian and Costa Rican landscapes as embodiments of their varied histories. I argue that the actions and practices of organic farmers to preserve or recreate the respective landscapes in both countries amount to a cultural politics of landscape. I show, however, how the different agricultural histories and embodied landscapes of the two countries position organic farmers very differently in relation to these changes in the landscape.

History embodied in landscapes

Emphasis on the landscape as a unit of analysis has become integrated both into conservation biology and anthropological literature. Anna Tsing (2005: 173-4) laments the fact that social scientists and biologists often seem to talk past one another, biologists treating humans as a homogenous group with a singular urge to survive and reproduce, while political ecologists extend a general disinterest towards non-humans and the diversity of nature that exists outside the domain of human use. She tries to show how treating the landscape as both a natural and social phenomenon can help bring these two fields into dialogue. Like Tsing, I take landscape as both a natural and social unit of analysis. I go beyond the approach offered by political ecologists to include also recent literature on the anthropology of landscape, which can be a powerful lens through which to understand the actions and practices of

Latvian and Costa Rican organic farmers in creating and re-creating landscapes. Anthropological analyses of landscapes have focused on the importance of what makes land a place rather than an abstract space, on the ways in which landscape is a process of transformation that becomes embodied in the land, and how landscapes reflect history, memories, and the future hopes and potentials of its inhabitants.

Landscapes are in many ways “more than meets the eye.” First, landscapes are an embodiment of human practice. Ingold (2000) emphasizes that it is important to take the “dwelling” perspective, or privilege the point of view of the people living within landscapes. Ingold (2000:198) invokes the idea of the ‘temporality of the landscape,’ which reflects the fact that landscapes are at least partially formed by human tasks, and that “*the landscape as a whole must likewise be understood as the taskscape in its embodied form: a pattern of activities ‘collapsed’ into an array of features*” [emphasis in original].

Landscapes embody not only present practices, but are also an “enduring record of - and testimony to- the lives and works of past generations who have dwelt within it” (Ingold 2000:190). As such, landscapes are intimately tied up with people’s histories, memories, ancestors and kinship networks. In many cultures, landscapes serve as a living reminder of past events, meaningful lessons, or an embodiment of kinship ties (Gow 1995; Basso 1996; Kirsch 2006). For Hirsch (1995:22), landscape is the intermingling of the background and context, or space, and the particular, or place. The background represents the “potentiality,” as that which is not necessarily fully achieved in the foreground of daily activities: “this process is one which relates a ‘foreground’ everyday life (‘us the way we are’) to a ‘background’ potential social existence (‘us the way we might be’).” Thus, through the accumulation of these embodied practices in the past and present, the landscape itself can be understood as a process (Hirsch 1995; Ingold 2000), not just a snapshot or momentary state of existence.

In my conversations and walks through the countryside with organic farmers in both countries, these associations in the landscape with history, family ties, current practices and future hopes were ever present. Understanding the farmers' lived experiences and intimate knowledge of their land is important because they are very involved in the actual production of the landscape. To the organic farmers, what imbues the land with meaning is their everyday farming practices, which show the reality of their everyday experience, as well as changes in the landscape that are associated with their practices.

In the two sections that follow I will show how the diverse landscapes I described in the introduction to this chapter have been formed through historical processes and how the farmers relate these historical processes to their current practices. From the stories of organic farmers in Latvia, what came across was a the landscape of successive abandonments and reclamations, and in Costa Rica, a landscape of continuous change and interference, that they hope yet to recover.

Latvia: landscape of reclamation

In Latvia the potentiality of the landscape is in many ways closely enmeshed with the past, or with the imagined past prosperity of smallholders. Latvians attach importance to the land, and in particular to their rural landscapes, in ways that stem from national struggles during the almost 600 years of serfdom on German manors,¹⁴ followed by domination by Poles, Swedes and Russians. Only during a brief period of independence in the 1920s-40s did agrarian reform distribute land to smallholder farmers. After WWII, however, Latvia was occupied by the Soviet Union, and land was forcibly collectivized in the *kolhoz* system (Plakans 1995). In the early 1990s after independence from the Soviet Union, previous

¹⁴ Traces of this history dot the landscape as German manor houses that have often been transformed into schools, and the remains of old windmills.

landholders and their descendents could receive back their land as private owners.¹⁵ Because of this history, the image of the smallholder has taken on symbolic importance at both the individual and national levels. There is a dominant image of Latvia as a ‘nation of farmers’ that Schwartz represents as the “agrarian nationalist” narrative (Schwartz 2006).

In this traditional national agrarian narrative, the conjunction between landscape as a place and as a practice is embodied in the figure of the *sēta*, or farmstead. The farmstead includes the traditional cluster of buildings where all farm activities take place, and has been institutionalized into the national imaginary through its recreation in literature and preservation of “typical farmsteads” in the Ethnographic Open Air Museum.¹⁶ Schwartz (2006) traces the multiple ways in which the myth of Latvia as a nation of smallholder farmers was created and reinforced, starting with the National Awakening in the late 1800s and continuing throughout the independence period. Policies, such as extensive land reform and agricultural supports were reinforced by popular literature to create what she calls “the agrarian ethnoscape,” with land as a central symbol. Many farmers in Latvia today (organic and not) have preserved or restored the traditional style, look, and function of these farmstead buildings on their farms.¹⁷

¹⁵ See Eglitis (2002) for a discussion of the various complications of land restitution. The first land reforms happened already in Soviet Latvia, where a 1988 law on re-establishing individual farmsteads granted unlimited –term land usufruct rights with inheritance possibilities to individuals. Conflicts emerged when land restitution to previous owners began in the mid-1990s when some families had begun working the land under the 1988 law, but the land was reclaimed by previous owners.

¹⁶ Schwartz cites Purs in explaining that only certain types of farmsteads were considered “authentically Latvian” and included in the Museum, while those that might be more typical of the Slavic communities living in Eastern Latvia were systematically excluded. Purs, A. (1998). *Latvians as an Imagined Community. Annual Convention of the Association for the Study of Nationalities*. Columbia University..

¹⁷ The succession of different owners and abandonments during various political regimes means that many buildings have also taken on a mosaic form, showing the original shape of a window, patched in with cement during Soviet times, partially recovered now.



Figure 1.1: Traditional Latvian *pirts* or sauna reconstructed on an organic farm. Author's photo

Because the farmstead is part of the national imaginary of Latvia as a land of prosperous smallholder farms, it also represents the “potentiality” of the landscape. Works by famous Latvian authors such as Jaunsudrabiņš (1946) nostalgically recount happy childhood moments on the farmstead. Schwartz (2006) emphasizes that the romantic image of the farmstead as a happy place is itself an image recreated or invented in history. In 1789, Garlieb Merkel, a young German who is the first to describe the Latvians as a *volk*, described the crowded, run-down farmstead as emblematic of the poverty and oppression of the serfs (Merkel 1998 [1796]), but just over 100 years later in popular literature and imaginings, it has become the embodiment of a romanticized idea of the new national farmer.

Latvian family farmsteads today are also associated with painful histories and personal loss. This is true of many farms that were regained after independence in the 1990s. When forced collectivization happened in the 1940s in the Soviet Union, most farm families were not only forced to give up their land for inclusion in the *kolhoz*, but were also relocated to population centers, and their homes were either granted for use to other people or left abandoned. Thus, when people could return to their land in the 1990s, they often returned to a landscape of abandonment, filled with the resolve to transform it. Their first

several years of work were literally that of reclaiming the land from the bushes, shrubs, and weeds that had overtaken it, and which, to them, symbolized the history of oppression.

Many farmers with whom I spoke mentioned a conscious effort to recreate the landscape of their grandparents, and the prosperous smallholder past. Zinta, for instance shows me a picture of her grandfather, then of her mother and twin sister as little girls, and wipes tears from her eyes as she recounts their family farm's history:

Grandfather [in the 1930s], with [these] 30 hectares, could educate his children- all three children have a higher education- and build these stone houses, which are now in ruins....If you transpose that to today, we haven't been able to replace the floor in one room in these past five years...ok, they aren't exactly comparable things, but still, we have to 'clear the clearing'¹⁸ all over again. And for his good work, Grandfather was sent to Siberia...In the 1990s, when we could reclaim property, we claimed this. There were strangers living here, we watched as one building crumbled, then another...What to do? We were city people. In the city we had good jobs, an apartment, everything...But still some ancestor's voice, or some sort of bond called to us, that we have things to do here, that we have to leave the city, to come here. Of course it was all very difficult. Everything was ruined here...We came with three meat axes- everything was overgrown with bushes, the view was very depressing... But now, look how beautiful! There is a clearing here, a road there...

Many farmers echo this idea of a homecoming to the wild abandoned landscape and clearing it. One farmer brought his goat to help clear the bushes, and laughs that he couldn't find it again for over a week in the deep underbrush. Another had to shovel a meter's depth of dirt and trash out from inside the house and yard. This idea of land reclamation echoes the original landowners' efforts in the independence period: "Reclamation was a potent symbol of the new homesteader's daunting struggle to eke a livelihood out of the war-ravaged countryside and, by extension, the Latvian nation's struggle to build a state (Schwartz 2006: 51)." This metaphor has now been transposed by Zinta and others to the 1990s, when farmers were clearing their land from Soviet overgrowth, and now are struggling to make a living in the new European countryside.

¹⁸ In the 1930s, the image of clearing or reclaiming land (*līst līdumu*) from forest or swamp was also used as a literary trope, where Jaunsudrabiņš wrote about a new farmer's battle with the devil, who traditionally lives in the swamp in Latvian folklore (Schwartz 2006).

Other memories also persist in the landscape for farmers. One woman tells a story of how when she went back to her grandparents' farm, she was about to go pick raspberries at the edge of the forest, but then stopped suddenly, because she was haunted by a memory from her childhood that this was the spot where her family's cows had been left to die once they were taken from the family during forced collectivization. She also recalls that long after collectivization, the workers would still identify the various parts of the *kolhoz* as "my field," or "farmer Daiga's land." She adds that when she was a child, her mother had always taken her and her brother to show them where the borders of their land had been, so that they would know to find it "when they got it back."¹⁹

In these ways, then, Latvian organic farmers see their family histories embedded in these landscapes, first in the non-living grandparents or ancestors whose farm they are literally recreating, but also by incorporating the knowledge of living grandparents and older relatives. When people regained their farms, many of them, like Zinta in the example above, had not been farmers at all in the Soviet era, and thus lacked experience. Others, who had worked on a *kolhoz* had farming experience, but because of the way *kolhoz* work had been arranged, they might never have had experience on the particular land they regained. Moreover, they most likely would only have worked with one particular task such as milking, or driving the tractor.

Despite the sometimes traumatic memories of collectivization and the hardships of the early years, *kolhoz* memories were by no means all bad, and many older farmers remembered the glory years of the *kolhoz* with nostalgia, emphasizing the warm social relations that existed among people, and that people had time to look out for one another more than now. The process of land restitution also had profound impacts on social relations.

¹⁹ Verdery (1996) notes that in Romania most of the markers by which people had recognized their previous land boundaries, such as trees or buildings, had disappeared through the socialist period, thus confusing the land restitution question.

It changed the focus from more lateral connections fostered through collectivization to a more vertical focus on tracing ancestral lineage (Verdery 2003).

Once farmers regained their land, they had no experience being managers of a farm. As one exasperated farmer exclaimed, “Suddenly I have to be the entire management staff of the *kolhoz* in one person!” This was a difficult, or sometimes impossible, task. Many farmers turned specifically to their grandparents, the previous owners of the farm, for advice about what to plant where, how to organize the work, etc. Once the relatives died, several farmers spoke of the importance of honoring their advice and continuing in the ways they had shown them.

Those who no longer had living grandparents or relatives on the farm lamented openly about the disadvantage they had experienced because of this. “We were like thrown into cold water,” one farmer says, because they didn’t have anyone to tell them which land was good for potatoes, which would be better for vegetables, etc. Another woman admitted that no one in her family had originally wanted to take over the land because no one really knew what to do with it, but they felt that later their grandchildren or the next generations would blame them for it if they did not. On a trip together with some Latvian organic farmers to visit organic farms in Austria, several farmers commented that the element about which they were most envious was not the technology or the level of development they saw, but in hearing the Austrian farmers discuss the long history of how successive generations had managed, then handed down, the farm and farming skills to the next generation. This was the history or continuity that the Latvian farmers saw as having been broken on their own farms, but now hoped to slowly reclaim.

Thus the landscape for Latvian organic farmers embodies their ties to their ancestors and their obligations to their descendants. Reclaiming the land was for many a way of righting historical wrongs, and the ancestors’ way of arranging the farm was taken as either

literal advice or informed them in the shape of childhood memories. Their farming practices are not only a process of creating a current landscape, but also a continual process of recreating the ties to the past, and potential ties to future generations, by recreating the imagined national landscape.

If previous iterations of abandonment and reclamation were caused by wars, domination and oppression, many Latvian organic farmers are particularly worried now that the latest wave of abandonment comes willingly, as a result of the “freedom of movement.” Farmers complain that it is nearly impossible to find anyone to hire to help them expand production, because “everyone is in Ireland.” Thousands of people left after EU accession to work in the countries that allowed free movement of labor, and Ireland was one of the first to welcome the new immigrants. While many claimed to be leaving temporarily, to earn some money and return, four years later it is not only farmers but also the government that is wondering how to encourage people to return, even as new Latvian communities in Ireland have begun setting up schools, churches, and more permanent structures. To many organic farmers, this signals a failure of rural development policies, and a further cost to the landscape. This process has also amplified worries about Latvia’s decreasing population and “demographic crisis.”²⁰

Many of the farmers who are left on the land after so many historic changes are not using chemicals due to lack of resources. Many also have not wanted to use chemicals on their private farms, associating chemical use more with large scale industrial farming of the *kolhoz* era. This means that the wave of newcomers to the organic movement after support payments were introduced included many elderly farmers for whom the organic conversion

²⁰ Latvia’s population growth rate from the period 1990-2006 is -0.9%, which is one of the lowest in Europe or in the world. The growth rate from 1970-1990 was + 0.6%. UNICEF. (n.d.). "Latvia statistics." Retrieved 17 August 2008, from http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/latvia_statistics.html. Recent government maternity policies have been aimed at increasing birth rates.

was “simply the last straw to grab onto,” as one farmer put it. This has caused many to question whether the organic subsidies should in fact be functioning as a social support payment, or whether they should be changed to facilitate higher productivity. This also means that many small farmers who are not certified as organic are in fact “organic by default,” due to lack of resources.²¹ This similarity often confounds shoppers who enter the organic store and wonder why they should pay more for an ecologically clean product if their “aunt in the countryside” also does not use chemicals.

The vast majority of Latvian organic farms that I visited were integrated farms, having a “little of everything,” even if they specialize more in one area. Farms generally have fields dedicated to the production of vegetables for both human and livestock consumption such as potatoes, beets, carrots, cabbage, onions, and pumpkins. Many produce salad greens, herbs, tomatoes, cucumbers, beans, peas and other vegetables for home consumption, and most farms have an area of old fruit orchards and berry bushes. Most farms also have an array of animals, such as hens, roosters, and geese and piglets roaming the farmyard, and livestock such as cows, goats, and sheep stabled during the day and in winter, but grazing outside during the day, and pigs are generally kept in pens. Commenting on the vast array of daily tasks the management of such a diverse farm entails in trying to make ends meet in difficult financial times, one farmer said: “We have ten trades, and the eleventh is hunger.” This diversity of activities also contributes to the diversity of the landscape, and the agricultural landscape is one of interspersed fields, pastureland, and forest patches. I will discuss concrete organic farmer concrete practices related to the maintenance of this landscape in Chapter Two.

²¹ There has been some discussion over the term “organic by default” within the organic movement, because many people feel that to be “organic” includes much more conscious and planned practices, as described in the introduction, giving back to the soil and working with a certain philosophy rather than just not using chemicals.



Figure 1.2: Rural landscape with ruins of pre-socialist building, on left. Organic vegetable plot in foreground with natural grazing area in background, right. Author's photos.

Latvia's main agricultural activity throughout much of its history has been dairy farming. During Latvia's first independence period in 1918-1940, Latvia exported dairy products to Western Europe, and this is often a noted element of national pride and emphasized even in school textbooks and tourist brochures (Baltic Times 2006). Under Soviet rule, Latvia's collectivized dairy farms provided the Soviet cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg with dairy products, and the Soviet regime also emphasized in its own promotional materials the importance of the reformed dairy industry: "Latvia today produces far more milk per head of the population than either the United States or Sweden" (Lacis 1959). After independence and the loss of the Soviet markets, Latvia's dairy sector went through a serious downturn and took a long time to recover (Coffing 1997). From 2005-2006 Latvia tripled its export of dairy products (Baltic Times 2006), but in 2008 there was another price crash and farmers staged a protest in the old town of Riga, giving milk away for free to show their desperate situation (BNS 2008).

Due to the historical importance of the dairy industry, the dominant imagined landscape is one of meadows full of grazing livestock or haystacks. While traditional, hand-

piled haystacks have been increasingly replaced by machine-prepared rolls of hay covered in white plastic wrap, the importance of meadows in the imagined landscape has not lessened, and is reinforced by strong cultural symbolism as well. During the highly symbolic midsummer night festival of *Jāņi*, women pick meadow flowers to make *vaiņagi*, or wreaths, to wear on their heads. As midsummer's night approached in 2006, media campaigns to prevent farmers from burning last year's grass in their fields and thus reducing the amount of biodiversity of both plants and animals, focused in on the fact that women would be left on midsummer's night without *vaiņagi* if biodiversity levels declined. The most famous folklore singer in the country, who has held campaigns for the past five years to re-teach people the traditional songs and dances of the *Jāņi* festival, edited a botanical guide to the most important grasses and flowers, or *Jaņuzāles*, in 2007, thus further reinforcing the importance of the meadows for the national imaginary (Reizniece and Kaņepone 2006).



Figure 1.3: Typical *Jāņu vaiņags* left. Source: datuve.lv/raksts/1188/Priecigus_Ligo_svetkus/. Women wearing *Jāņu vaiņagi* next to traditional bonfire. Source: Aigars Jansons, 2008, www.latio.lv/.../?image=497.

For organic farmers, this significance is reflected in the fact that in-depth knowledge of the medicinal properties of various flowers, grasses and plants is considered an important part of their practice, as reflected in the numerous seminars about this topic offered

throughout the year. Meadows serve as collection grounds for a vast variety of medicinal herbs. Many farms dry the herbs and flowers, as well as assorted fruits and berries, and prepare herbal teas for sale, both for local consumption and increasingly for export to Germany and other Western European countries. Many farmers also specialize in organic honey production, bringing mobile bee hives to particular organic meadows in specific seasons to collect honey from certain types of flowers. So important are these two fields of tea and honey production in fact, that in certain seasons when organic farmers are participating in a food exhibit or fair, the only organic products on offer are herbal tea and honey. Various medicinal herbs and teas are also prepared for animal health. These practices reaffirm the centrality of meadows to the landscape and to the Latvian approach to organic agriculture.

The other important use for different herbs is in the traditional Latvian *pirts*, or sauna ritual, which is becoming the centerpiece of many agro-ecotourist offerings by the organic farming community. Every Latvian homestead traditionally had a *pirts*, or wood-heated sauna, usually on the edge of a pond for cooling off. Traditionally it was used on Saturdays for bathing, by heating rocks on top of the wood-burning stove, and pouring water on them for steam. The ritual process involves several repetitions of going from the hot steam to the cold pond water, but an essential component is a *pēriens* or gentle beating with a “broom” made of the leaves of birches. This is still a very common ritual in country homes on weekends. Organic farmers in the Eco-health farm network are also re-learning lost traditions of combining various herbs with the leaves depending on the desired medicinal effects.



Figure 1.4: Medicinal herbs being dried for teas and other uses. Author's photos.

Many farms in the "eco-health farm" network provide the services of accommodation in their farm, *pirts* services, organic meals, tours of the farm, and tastings of their products. These types of rural vacations have become very popular with local, and increasingly also foreign tourists. This particular type of tourist offering thus reinforces the narrative of the Latvian agricultural homestead as the bearer of tradition, as the point of reference for national identity, and positions organic farmers as the caretakers of these values.

Costa Rica: landscape of change

Costa Rica's agricultural history has also been heavily influenced by outside forces, even if not in the form of direct foreign rule. After 300 years of Spanish colonization, Costa Rica became independent in 1821, but the agricultural sector has been tightly tied to the US and Europe as the foundation of a succession of export crops as will be discussed more below. The agricultural history and landscape in Costa Rica is one of increasingly intense use, change, and transformation throughout this time.

Yet Costa Rica has a similar national narrative to the Latvian one of the importance of smallholder farmers, which is seen as the roots of Costa Rican "exceptionalism" today and

serves in some ways as the “potentiality” of the landscape. Many of the traditional history texts claim that Costa Rica’s long democratic tradition originates in the fact that under Spanish rule the colony was poor and had labor shortages due to low indigenous populations, which prevented strong class differentiation, because everyone had to work. Therefore it is asserted that Costa Rica became a country of “yeomen farmers” early on, which helped ensure democratic practices (Chaverri 1989). This theory still is used today to explain Costa Rica’s reputation as an island of peace, democracy, and development amidst the revolutions, wars, and poverty of Central America. Recently this theory has been challenged, revealing that this was only true in the Central Valley, while in other parts of the country haciendas and cacao plantations emerged in much the same way as elsewhere in Central America (Gudmundson 1986; Paige 1997). The image of the yeoman farmer is still heavily tied up with Costa Rican national identity, however, and even appears in the national anthem (Edelman 1999).

Costa Rica also has an image of an idyllic farmhouse which plays a role in the imagined national landscape. In Costa Rica this is the white-washed adobe house with a red-tiled roof. Ivan Molina Jimenez (2005:44) describes how these houses have typically been represented in Costa Rican paintings, which are found in great prevalence in the National Art Museum:

The usual is to find the adobe house isolated, in a context dominated by the colors of the national flag: the blue of the distant mountains, the sky...the white of the walls and the occasional cloud; and the red of the roof tiles, the [dirt] roads, and occasionally in clothing or bedclothes.

Molina points out how this landscape image, representing happiness and peace, was reproduced in paintings long after this housing style was common. Instead, it stood as a stark contrast to the extreme rural poverty that was prevalent until well after World War II. This reproduction was an effort to recuperate a lost golden era of agricultural development,

similarly as the recreation of the smallholder myth in Latvia. The paintings are still reproduced and sold at every art fair and found today in many Costa Rican middle-class homes.

Unlike Latvia, however, where many of the old farmsteads remained and are now being renovated, the rural countryside in Costa Rica holds extremely few of these traditional houses. The colorful concrete houses that line the roadsides in much of the Central Valley reflect instead a concerted national rural development policy that was instituted in Costa Rica starting with 1948, when the Armed Forces were abolished and the freed-up resources invested into social programs (see Edelman 1999 for a thorough discussion of reforms).²²

In Costa Rica, then, the rural landscape that has emerged is tied up with a history that is not just the history of the family farmstead per se, but rather a history of the changing land uses within the community and government policies governing them. Some, like Doña Maria, grew up as a child of “settlers” who cleared land to “improve” it, thereby claiming rights to it: “In that place one didn’t buy the farm...people came and....said ‘this space is mine’and no one said no....people took whatever piece, and didn’t have to pay for it...” She recalled childhood on the newly cleared land as enjoyable, wild yet full of hard work. Her family had moved after twelve years to an area where there was electricity, schools, and medical facilities. This practice of land clearing for settlement was encouraged and common practice in some areas up until the 1970s (Evans 1999).

Many other organic farmers I met are also first or second generation landowners, because they gained their land through land reform, whereby the Agrarian Development

²² The history of strong social services is visible in the farmhouses in very tangible ways. In contrast to the many farm houses in Latvia that are only now for the first time installing indoor plumbing, as well as in contrast to many farms in neighboring countries such as Nicaragua and Guatemala, nearly every farm I visited in Costa Rica had modern indoor plumbing, electricity, and phone service.

Institute (Instituto de Desarrollo Agrario or IDA)²³ bought large farms and redistributed the land. The IDA was created in 1961 in response to land invasions that were occurring in the 1960s due to land shortages. The institute was formed with the goal of “institutionalizing [solutions to] rural social conflicts” (Mora Alfaro 2006:21). The officially established objectives of the institute were to: promote ownership of land as a way to increase its productivity; contribute to the growth of republican virtues, a more just distribution of wealth, and nature conservation; and avoid land concentration and exploitation of workers (Mora Alfaro 2006). The first ten colonies established in the first four years were formed directly on the land invaded by peasants, serving almost 2,700 families (Vasco 1999). In total IDA has had a hand in establishing 962 settlements, with a total of almost 70,000 parcels throughout the country, and working towards giving people title to the land.²⁴ For instance, in the Central Pacific region, IDA purchased a large estate of 18,000 hectares and established various settlements, schools, health clinics, and infrastructure (Mora Alfaro 2006).

IDA was restructured in 1982 amidst neoliberal reforms (see Edelman 1999 for more on the neoliberal reforms). The reorganization changed the goals to a more “integrated rural development” agenda, consistent with policies of the World Bank and other development agencies at this time. While this allowed for more infrastructure development, it took the emphasis away from land reform per se. Many people have expressed great concern over the

²³ The original name was Institute for Lands and Colonization (Instituto de Tierras y Colonización or ITCO), established by Law 2825. It was renamed and reorganized into IDA in 1982 with Law 6735 (Mora Alfaro 2006)

²⁴ 3% of which were based on land invasions and 61% which where the land acquisition was initiated by IDA (Vasco 1999).

great decline in land purchases and redistribution by IDA. As of 2005 there were 13,629 people on the waiting list for land (Mora Alfaro 2006).²⁵

Many of the organic farmers I interviewed who were working land they had originally obtained from IDA mentioned they were grateful for the opportunity this had provided them, but also noted shortcomings of the institution. For example, one women's cooperative had had a battle to receive land at all because according to IDA regulations a woman was considered "half a man" in terms of the capacity for agricultural work and thus they, as a group of women, lacked adequate labor power to work the land. The cooperative eventually achieved a reversal of the policy and is operating successfully making cosmetic products from organic plants and herbs. By and large, however, IDA settlements are seen as an impressive and important addition to rural landscapes, and have facilitated access to land for many people who might not otherwise have had it. The houses and developments vary greatly, but each IDA settlement has a large sign identifying it as an *asentimiento* (settlement) and naming the number of families resettled on that land. These signs are a visible marker of social change in the landscape.

²⁵ A recent study undertaken of the effectiveness of IDA finds that after neoliberal policy reforms in the 1980s its functions, budget, and staff were seriously curtailed, and that it does not always achieve all of its goals in helping the most disadvantaged have access to land and resources. It also finds there are no mechanisms in place for adequate protection of biodiversity within IDA reserves, although this is a stated goal. In addition, it was recently found that many professionals and ex-functionaries also have IDA land, that not complying with the goal of redistribution (Moras Alfaro 2006).



Figure 1.5: A typical Costa Rican house in an IDA settlement. A sign proclaiming a 17 ha IDA settlement that has benefited 24 families. Source (Mora Alfaro 2006:43;141)

Farmers also told stories about how these policies and contradictory requirements of managing institutions influenced the landscape. One farmer, Andrea, whose father had been a day-laborer on the land that she now owns, explained:

My father tells me this used to be a big farm, and there were lots of trees...of different species.... Later IDA bought it and they made parcels.....One of the requirements that IDA made of the farmers was that they maintain the trees. Once they had their parcels they wanted to plant them, but the bank- they told them yes, they could get a loan, but they would have to cut the trees. The more trees you cut, the more area you would have to plant- and so they gave them this idea to cut the trees...so they could plant more... now you see areas that have practically no trees....

Landscapes also embody traces of these histories of land ownership in other ways. One day that I had been volunteering on Andrea’s farm, we had to walk into town to run some errand. She suggested that we take a shortcut, a small footpath that leads through the fields. When this land belonged to the large landowners forty years ago, she explained, they had granted the workers and residents rights to use the *trillo* or footpath, along the stream. In earlier times, these were paths to transport goods to market, and now allowed children to shorten their path to school. Once the land was divided into many parcels through land reform, the new owners kept the *trillos* in place. But “people are lazy,” Andrea told me, and kept making the paths wider and wider by walking off the path. This was angering some of the landowners, and some had even suggested closing access to the paths, but this had

engendered local resentment. You simply can't close them, she explained, not by law, but by social arrangement.²⁶ Paths, such as these *trillos*, thus serve both as the "taskscape made visible" (Ingold 2000:204), and as a connection to the past.

Other farmers are working land they inherited from their parents or grandparents, but are working only a tiny piece of it, because it was distributed among ten or more children.²⁷

For instance, Rocío, who has a 1.25 hectare coffee field:

We are sixteen brothers and sisters....and we never worked...with a *patrón* (boss)... When I got married, then my husband came to work here with us in the farm with the family. In that time it was all together 40 hectares...But it was divided because in one time the coffee came to value nothing- it went down and down- so we couldn't work with my brothers- the little bit that we would earn wasn't enough...I had to go work...in a restaurant at night.

This shows the effects of population growth and changing economic situations in land use patterns and the landscape, making land parcels even smaller. Population has also grown due to large influxes of Nicaraguan immigrants. Some came during the Sandinista conflict in the 1980s and others have arrived more recently. Many come to work on farms and as unskilled labor, and are often accused of being a strain on social welfare systems, resulting in powerful stereotypes and tension.

Many of these organic farmers who grew up on their parents' farms recalled fondly the diversified farms where no chemicals were used, and spoke of their hope to recreate that.

Rocío continues:

I remember when I was a child, we didn't use poison when it was my father's [farm]....we could eat all of it, we took the bananas...ate them with milk...we had yucca, chayote; there were chickens... milk....the only thing my father went down to buy - there was a *trillo* before there was a road - was rice. We even planted beans. Now we want to almost return to how it was before, but it's already impossible because the soil is very used up. But here we are, we are fighting...bit by bit.

²⁶ It turns out that the use of traditional paths is also protected by law, as was listed in a warning to people from the US looking to buy land in Costa Rica as "things to watch out for."

²⁷ Many families' land was distributed only to sons or only to the oldest children. Women often did not inherit land, or inherited worse pieces of land.

Imagine, we have *plátano* here on the farm now..[we].make *picadillo*²⁸And back here I have a greenhouse....

As in Latvia, then, Rocío's stories and those of many others include a wish to return to earlier ways of farming and living that include powerful associations with family histories. It is significant, however, that unlike in Latvia, where the idea of recreating the past is embodied in recreating the farmstead and land as a fundamental part of the landscape, in the Costa Rican organic farmers' narratives, it is the idea of recreating a diversified farm landscape and practices even on these small parcels. This reflects the different types of change and loss that farmers perceive make up these diverse histories.

Indeed, the landscape changes associated with Costa Rica's land reform and rural development policies reflect only one small part of what is seen on the landscape. Many other farmers commented on the landscape changes they see and feel all around them, associated with the long history of foreign, mostly US, agricultural domination and now real estate interests that have led to increasing specialization, successive changes in export crops, and altered farmer practices. There are great differences in the landscape from the uplands of the Central Valley to the low-lying coastal areas, each reflecting its own agricultural history.

Perhaps the most "typical" is the coffee landscape of the Central Valley, which has dominated the region since the early nineteenth century. Coffee became the main export crop almost immediately after independence in 1821 and was known as the "grain of gold." A strong coffee elite developed in the nineteenth century that has remained influential to today throughout the booms and busts of the coffee economy (Paige 1997). In contrast, the Pacific lowlands of Guanacaste and Nicoya were governed by Nicaragua until annexation by Costa Rica in 1824, and followed the more typical hacienda development pattern that was typical in Nicaragua. During that time large cattle ranches arose, and cattle ranching remains both a

²⁸ A picadillo is a like a chunky salsa with a variety of finely chopped seasoned vegetables, served with tortillas. Here made with green plantain (*plátano*).

strong economic activity there as well as part of the Guanacaste identity (Edelman 1992). The Caribbean coast featured cacao plantations, later tobacco, and then bananas.

Traces of these historical crop specializations are still visible today, particularly the hills covered in coffee-bushes in the Central Valley and the long expanses of low, dry grasslands dotted with guanacaste trees that serve as cattle ranches in the Pacific lowlands. The Central Valley highlands are also interspersed with pasturelands for dairy herds at higher elevations, and cold-weather vegetables like cabbage, onions, and carrots.²⁹

Many changes have also occurred in the landscape over time, however. A survey of land utilization in 1948 shows that only one third of the territory of Costa Rica had been cleared and developed for agricultural purposes by this time. Besides the crops listed above, one quarter of agricultural land was dedicated to production of the basic food staples of corn, beans, and rice (Leon 1948). By 1996, forty percent of the land was under forest cover, and studies have shown that the vast majority of land that was cleared was converted to pastureland or other agricultural purposes (de Camino, Segura et al. 2000).³⁰

Visible traces of such changes on the landscape go beyond just deforestation. The amount of shade provided by trees in coffee plantations has changed throughout time, giving way to almost full-sun coffee in the 1970s, with the gradual re-introduction of more shade trees now with the growth of interest in sustainable coffee markets.³¹ Also, cattle ranching on steep slopes has led to serious soil erosion, and it is not uncommon to see hilltops with bare

²⁹ IMF policies encouraged beef cattle production for export in the 1950s to 1970s, and have been widely blamed for encouraging deforestation de Camino, R., O. Segura, L. Guillermo Arias and I. Pérez (2000). *Costa Rica: Forest Strategy and the Evolution of Land Use*. Washington, DC: The World Bank, Williams, D. (2004). *Transformations in the Environmental Economy of the Upper Savegre Valley, Costa Rica, 1952-2002*. *American Society for Environmental History*. Victoria, B.C., Canada.

³⁰ It is important to note also that only one third of this converted land is deemed to have soil appropriate for agriculture (World Bank 2000).

³¹ The ecological significance of this is that coffee is an under-story shade-loving plant and was traditionally grown in agroforestry systems. In the 1970s high-yielding varieties dependent on heavy use of agrochemicals were introduced, and sun-grown coffee plantations began to dominate the landscape. Now various sustainable coffee certification programs require at least minimal shade. CITE?

soil and visible fissures. Most importantly, however, new export crops introduced with the “agriculture of change” policies of the 1980s, such as ornamental plants and other non-food items now cover vast expanses (Edelman 1999). During the rainy season entire hillsides are covered in protective black netting to protect these export crops. They are notorious for their high pesticide and water use and the groups of poorly paid migrant workers they attract for seasonal work.



Figure 1.6: Sun-grown, conventional coffee landscape, left; Black netting protecting ornamental plants during rainy season, right. Costa Rica. Author’s photos.

In the Caribbean, large banana plantations controlled by Chiquita, Dole, and other multi-national companies stretch along the roads, with signs warning of danger from aerial pesticide applications.³² Bunches of fruit are covered in blue plastic pesticide-impregnated bags that often end up polluting waterways after they are removed. These attest to the history of Costa Rica’s banana industry that began with the American Minor Keith’s acquisition of a large tract of land in exchange for building the railroad that led to the development of the United Fruit Company in 1899. The banana exports boomed with the new railroad, until

³² There are currently at least five different lawsuits involving over 5,000 workers about the health damages to workers on banana plantations, including long-term sterility. See news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7080143.stm

problems started with Panama disease and Sigatoka. In the late 1930s banana plantations were moved to the Southern Pacific coast area, and then returned to the Caribbean again in the late 1970s to evade Panama disease there. Social conflicts with Unions and health problems caused by work on the banana plantations are well-documented (Fallas 1989; Sass 2000; Abarca Vasquez 2005) and have been described in literature such as *Mamita Yunai* (Fallas 1957) and *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (García Márquez 1970). Unlike the history of coffee production in Costa Rica, which was seen as the “grain of gold” that helped the country develop early on, the history of banana production is very closely tied to the history of domination and conflicts. The Southeast of the country is the most recently settled, and dominated first by banana plantations and more recently by oil-palm, and now pineapple.

The expansion of pineapple plantations is the latest agricultural trend and is spreading rapidly in the Caribbean, the South, and large areas of the Northwest of the country. Costa Rica has become the largest exporter of pineapples worldwide in the last ten years, and profits from exports are approaching those of coffee. Pineapple plantations are in many cases replacing banana plantations, and sometimes fresh land is being cleared. A recent study undertaken by an NGO and union activists found that workers’ social and health conditions on the pineapple farms were also abysmal (Blythman 2006). Many organic farmers also comment that this is causing fresh deforestation and heavy use of agrichemicals. “This is not our historical landscape!” one rancher exclaimed about the rise of pineapple production, asking how to make people see and understand that.

Besides the high use of agrochemicals in these export-oriented farms, they have been criticized because most of the wealth goes to intermediaries and transporters rather than the farmers, perpetuating unequal development patterns and dependence (Faber 1992; Murray 1994; Conroy, Murray et al. 1996).



Figure 1.7: Conventional banana plantation with plastic-covered fruit, left. Conventional pineapple plantation, right, Costa Rica. Author's photos.

Perhaps the most dramatic changes in land ownership have been in coastal areas. There are unofficial estimates that several hundred thousand US Americans own land in Costa Rica, mostly in the coastal areas.³³ These are also areas that have been developed by large mostly foreign-owned hotels. This greatly affects development patterns and has affected the possibilities of local residents to pay their land taxes. As a result, many local residents and farmers have had to sell their land. One woman told me that farmers sell their land cheaply, then after a few years end up working in tourist hotels or in the houses of the foreigners who bought them. Some communities are openly trying to organize to prevent people from selling their land, and developing farmer groups to help one another.

Due to these differences in landscape development patterns, the approach to rural tourism in Costa Rica has also been very different than in Latvia. When I visited the tourist agency that cooperates with the organic movement, eager to find out about the local agro-tourism options similar to the Eco-health farm network, the director was a bit surprised by my questions. She said that the connection between farming and tourism was weak, and that

³³ It is difficult to get official numbers because US citizens can enter as tourists for three months, leave for a few days, and re-enter again, therefore many residents never apply for residency permits.

mostly those farmers who can't produce on their land any more due to economic problems or restrictions imposed by protected areas are the ones who get involved in tourism. Also, as opposed to housing tourists on individual farms, in order to provide them with the "authentic" rural experience, many communities have collectively built small lodges or cabins for tourists. The services offered almost always include a forest hike with a naturalist guide, visits to waterfalls or other areas of natural beauty, but rarely are farm tours or farm-stays included. The woman from the tourist agency explains to me that "people don't come to Costa Rica to see farms." This points to the fact that the smallholder narrative, while active among farmers in Costa Rica, does not have such a public face as it does in Latvia. Farmers and rural community members are positioned as caretakers of forests, nature, and biodiversity rather than the traditional farmstead.

In and amongst this landscape of change are perched many small organic farms that are struggling to keep their farms organic despite the practices of their neighbors. For instance, many organic farmers have almost daily struggles with erosion in many parts of the country where the terrain is marked by steep slopes. Walking along a the *trillo* with Andrea, she pointed out on one side a conventional farmer's weed-free cultivated potato field, commenting how recently pesticides must have been sprayed on it. On the other side she showed me how the banks of the stream are crumbling, diminishing the area of the path as well as eventually the field. A few scraggly bushes are planted sparsely along the edges. "If only they planted some trees, they wouldn't be losing all their soil," she exclaimed.

Thus, for many organic farmers, erosion is not just a scientific or environmental concept, but a daily reality. The soil on the steep slopes is fragile if not covered, and requires extra care. Andrea's husband, Carlos, tells me how his neighbors have laughed at him, because he works the land "uphill." In order to counter the trend of soil sliding further and further downhill, every time he works the land before planting, he takes each shovel-full, and

moves it uphill, rather than giving way to gravity. His neighbors laugh that he is expending extra energy uselessly, but he proudly demonstrates how over several years, he has almost evened out the slope in some places, through careful practices like these.

Organic farmers' frustration at the practices of their conventional neighbors come through feeling the consequences of living, literally, "downstream" from them. One morning I went to visit Julia's farm after a violent storm in a region where some people's property had been washed away. She and her husband were busy with damage control, and apologetic that normally their land does not look like this. They showed me deep holes and ruts which had been washed through their fields, with soil from the neighbor's conventional field washed onto their own organic one. The protective measures that Julia and her husband had put on their side of the border had not been enough. The neighbors' plot on the other side, however, had remained almost untouched by the storm, due to the anti-erosion efforts that Julia and her husband employ as part of their organic methods. Ironically, the ditches Julia and her husband have dug and the "live barriers" of bushes they have planted have protected their downstream neighbor. Because their upstream neighbor had not implemented such measures, however, Julia's farm had suffered. For organic farmers such problems with erosion are doubly problematic because they can risk losing certification if agrochemicals wash onto their land.



Figure 1.8: Erosion made visible. Conventional carrots washed down from field to roadside, left. Organic field damaged by flooding from adjacent conventional field, right. Author's photo.

This sort of visible damage was not a rare occurrence. When walking down the road by Andrea's farm, the ditches were full of fresh dark soil and bunches of carrots that had been washed off the edges of the conventional fields down to the road. Driving through the windy mountain roads, one can see bald hilltops used for grazing where deep cracks and fissures have formed and the soil has begun to wash away. Without trees or other vegetation to anchor it, the soil makes its way down the hills. Often organic farmers, who have planted every centimeter of their land with crops, fruit trees, or cover crops, using "live" or "dead" barriers (such as hedges or tires) to catch any soil, point across to their neighbors' bald pasture-lands. This is the landscape that they are trying to prevent through their own production practices.



Figure 1.9: Intensive organic vegetable production in foreground, with conventional, erosion-prone pasture land in background. Author's photo.

Thus, these landscapes represent to the organic farmers exactly the things against which they are struggling: foreign ownership of land and control of production processes, continued clearing of forest land to make way for new agricultural plantations, heavy use of pesticides and chemicals, and export-orientation of raw-materials versus local production of basic food staples.

The cultural politics of landscape

Returning to the landscape images portrayed at the opening of this chapter, Latvia's long history of foreign domination, brief period of independence and recent Soviet occupation are embodied and represented in the buildings that dot the landscape, the agricultural crops, and the land ownership patterns. Similarly, traces of Costa Rica's long history of independence with population growth, migration, land reform, and US influence in the agricultural sectors can be found throughout the landscape.

The enactment of organic farming practices is also a political process, because it is at every step related to the larger economic processes of regionalization and globalization in which the two countries are involved. Therefore it is important to ground the ecological and social practices of the organic farmers in larger cultural and political processes at the national and international levels. What I argue here is that organic farmers' practices together add up

to a cultural politics of landscape conservation, or creating and recreating imagined landscapes. Kennedy defines cultural politics as: “Attempts to influence and transform the meanings, identities, values, and representations accompanying the exercise of power and influence” (Kennedy 2008). As Escobar (1998:64) notes, an understanding of cultural politics often involves a broadening of the concept of the political:

This...assumes that meanings and practices can be the source of processes that must be accepted as political. This is rarely seen as such because of entrenched definitions of the political... Culture is political because meanings are constitutive of processes that, implicitly or explicitly, seek to redefine social power.

I wish to show how the practices of the organic farmers in Latvia and Costa Rica also constitute a re-imagining and re-configuration of social power and rural development alternatives as related specifically to the production and habitation of cultural landscapes.

In Latvia, organic farmers are restoring previous landscapes through recreating previous cycles of land reclamation. The recent history of independence and land restitution means that the historical moment of intervention is very different than in Costa Rica, however. The socio-cultural and ecological landscape within which organic farmers in Latvia are living and working is one that is not yet so different from their own, because most farmers, organic and conventional, only began with the process of reclamation and recreation of landscapes twenty years ago. Now those that are active organic farmers, through their practices, are making claims for a different future, and an alternative landscape than what some current policies seem to be encouraging. They are also negotiating their own idea of imagined landscapes and futures within the framework offered by the European Union, as will be shown in the next chapter. In Costa Rica, however, the organic farmers are already very different from the surrounding export-oriented conventional farms and landscapes that are dominated by heavy chemical use. Organic farmers’ struggles then, are very much against the past and the history of development within which they already reside. The future

imagined and contemplated is a direct alternative to that which they know and experience daily, and this is embodied in their practices and policy efforts, as will be discussed in future chapters.

Current policy debates are also contests that often revolve directly around the landscape and indirectly leave their traces upon it. One example of such contests that have directly involved organic farmers in both countries is debates over biodiversity conservation which I will explore in greater detail in the next chapter. I demonstrate this through examples of how farmers are implementing biodiversity conservation practices in their farms, and how these are integrated with broader conservation policies.

CHAPTER 2
Aforestation vs. deforestation:
practicing biodiversity in cultural landscapes

As we came out of the area of banana growth we came to a small pond. This was the first of two farm visits planned as part of one of the regional Agroecological Week activities in the east of Costa Rica. The visitors included consumers who regularly buy organic food and now wanted to see the farms, other farmers who wanted to share experiences, representatives of several environmental networks, and even a regional delegate from the Legislative Assembly and his wife. We spent the morning touring Victoria's farm, where she has shown us the variety of bananas, plantains, and other fruit, and the fields of diverse tubers they grow. In the middle of the tour we sat down inside a pavilion with a roof, where the walls are lined with samples of a collection of native tree seeds that Maria collects. When school groups come to visit the farm, she takes them to the pavilion and explains about the different seeds. This morning she and her husband took us through the small forested edge of their land, where they plant these trees, explaining the different origins and uses of the different trees. Now, as we approached the pond, we saw next to it two large covered bins. Victoria broke out into a mischievous smile. "And now we have a surprise for you: you must guess what is in the bins..." The visitors looked around, shrugging, venturing uncertain guesses, such as frogs or fish. "Wrong!" Victoria declared triumphantly. She took the tops off the bins to reveal three baby crocodiles, barely larger than an adult's hand. She explained that crocodiles are endangered, so as part of today's visit they have planned to release the three baby crocs into their pond. One visitor gave Victoria's young son a worried glance,

asking if it was safe to have crocodiles on the farm. She explained that the pond connects to larger bodies of water and they would migrate out before they got too big. “Go on, pick them up...,” she encouraged. Some of us looked around skeptically until one brave soul plunged his hand into the cold water and pulled out the beast, who seemed to be smiling just as mischievously as Maria was. The crocodiles got passed around, admired, and then ceremoniously released and wished a good journey.



Figure 2.1: On-farm conservation efforts include crocodile liberation. Photo: Felicia Echeverría H.

While the release of crocodiles was unusual, many organic farmers in both Costa Rica and Latvia are involved directly or indirectly in conservation efforts. This is the case despite the fact that biodiversity conservation has emerged in both countries as a somewhat contentious issue between policy-makers, NGOs, businesses, and rural inhabitants. In both countries, this is partially because “biodiversity” is a concept that was introduced as a policy arena quite recently, but also because of the way ideas of conservation intersect with imagined landscapes and rural development histories discussed in the previous chapter. While in Latvia these debates have centered on tensions between agricultural and environmental visions and narratives of the appropriate type of rural landscape, in Costa Rica

debates have been focused more on the models implemented for reforestation and protecting and utilizing biodiversity in rainforests.

First, I discuss the history of biodiversity conservation policies internationally, and how biodiversity is defined, measured and understood in the Latvian and Costa Rican contexts. While in Latvia the prime location of biodiversity is in meadows and grasslands, in Costa Rica it is in rain forests. Because of this the prime threats to biodiversity are seen as aforestation in Latvia and deforestation in Costa Rica. I relate some examples of how ideas of biodiversity conservation have been controversial in each country. Next, I examine examples of on-farm biodiversity conservation efforts in the two countries, and how they comply with or are integrated with national- level policies. I assert that while at national and international levels, fierce debates continue between large-scale conservation efforts and development schemes, organic farmers through their daily practices are negotiating a compromise between the two extremes of “development” and “conservation.” I suggest that for the farmers, however, this is simultaneously a struggle over the cultural politics of landscape change, rather than simply a matter of farming practices or conservation policies.

I also show how this hybrid role of producer and conservationist produces certain legislative unease. While regulations in Latvia are trying to make more efficient and productive farmers of the Latvians, legislative efforts in Costa Rica are attempting to promote organic farmers as better conservationists. Thus, the organic farmers and their practices fall into the “gaps” of policy illegibility described by Anna Tsing (2005) I show how incorporating anthropological understandings of landscape discussed in the previous chapter can enrich the way that conservationists use the concept of landscapes in planning for protected areas, and allow more room for policies to accommodate such hybrid conservationist - producers, rather than letting them “fall though the gaps.”

Defining biodiversity

Arturo Escobar (1998) asks provocatively: “Does biodiversity exist?” He asks this question in order to suggest that biodiversity is more than just lists of biological species or calculations of species richness- things for which we already had adequate vocabulary before the term biodiversity was introduced. Rather, he engages the concept of biodiversity as a set of discourses that have emerged from a particular socio-political moment, which is the signing of the Convention on Biological Diversity in 1992. Thus, biodiversity is not something new itself, but describes a new set of relationships that have emerged between nature and society, and has begun forming new networks.

As Escobar notes, the networks which are usually associated with biodiversity are the large conservation organizations and NGOs, and the intergovernmental processes surrounding the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The signing of the Convention itself marked a turn in conservation approaches, a shift from valuing biodiversity and nature for its own sake to calculating the economic benefit that can be derived from it (Oates 1999). Nature preservation became an international concern after World War II with the creation of the IUCN³⁴, based on the idea of protecting nature for its intrinsic value. The WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature) was then founded as an entity that would work to raise funds for nature conservation at national levels (Oates 1999). During this time, conservation and development were often seen as two completely opposed and mutually exclusive activities, and often resulted in the setting aside of land into reserves of pristine nature, protecting it from the harm caused by humans. Many ecologists and conservationists still hold this view, that nature should be preserved for its own sake, and furthermore, that humans are dangerous for nature (Terborgh 1999).

³⁴ Originally called the International Union for the Protection of Nature, later renamed the International Union for the Conservation of Nature

The trend to merge nature conservation with development planning started as early as 1970 in a Rome meeting attended by the IUCN, World Bank, FAO and other groups (Oates 1999). The signing of the CBD in 1992 was the culmination of this process and marked the beginning of a new era. The objectives of the CBD are “the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources” (United Nations 1992). These ideas of the “sustainable use” and “benefit sharing” have emerged as controversial points, because they imply that nature is no longer to be preserved for its own sake, but rather for utilitarian purposes (see Chapter Seven). The concept of biodiversity also allows species to be identified and counted, and ultimately used, bought or sold, rather than having an integrated idea of nature. Debates over the interpretation of these elements of the Convention have continued at every Conference of the Parties where signing countries work towards its implementation.

Oates and other scholars have also criticized the wave of “integrated conservation and development projects” and “community-based conservation efforts” that arose after the signing of the CBD. They claim that such projects often assume a romanticized, ecologically minded “noble savage” and do not take into account the complexities of local power dynamics, political struggles, and external influences on natural resource management (Agrawal and Gibson 1999; Oates 1999; Berkes 2004; Chapin 2004). Oates discusses his own efforts to start rainforest conservation projects that involved community members in various parts of Africa, and the difficulties involved. Furthermore, an exposé of the three main international conservation organizations (The Worldwide Fund for Nature, Conservation International, and the Nature Conservancy) revealed that even those attempting or claiming to work with local groups and indigenous populations often found such cooperation burdensome at best (Chapin 2004). Debates over the goals, means, and

participants of conservation efforts are still very heated, with strong proponents on each side (see Orlove and Brush 1996; Smith and Wishnie 2000 for review of this literature). In agriculture there recurring debates about whether land should be “spared” for conservation by increasing intensification on agricultural land, or whether interspersed forests with low-intensity agriculture in an agro-ecological matrix can actually increase both productivity and wildlife habitat (Fischer, Brosi et al. 2008; Perfecto and Vandermeer 2008).

Escobar (1998:54) contends that local social movements and communities in developing countries have approached the idea of biodiversity very differently than do scientists, large NGOs, and politicians. For these social groups, using the discourse and associated practices of biodiversity protection is a way of defending their culture and territory. Through their actual practices, these marginal groups become “emergent centers of innovation and alternative worlds.” He characterizes these communities’ attitudes towards biodiversity thus:

Aware that “biodiversity” is a hegemonic construct, activists of these movements acknowledge that this discourse nevertheless opens up a space for the construction of culturally based forms of development that could counteract more ethnocentric and extractivist tendencies. Theirs is the defense of an entire life project, not only of “resources” or biodiversity (Escobar 1998:61).

It is this framework that also sets them apart from the “integrated conservation and development” projects described above, because it shows that the idea of biodiversity conservation is one part of achieving their larger goals as a community, rather than positioning local communities within projects with the sole goal of being caretakers of park areas or natural resources.

In the following sections I would like to explore how some organic farmers in Latvia and Costa Rica are doing precisely this: actively creating alternate ways of understanding and protecting biodiversity, even as larger national and international debates on conservation vs. development continue. Organic farmers are in a unique position in this debate, because by

the nature of their activity, they are inherently trying to do both: make a living through agricultural production, while also protecting the environment and using sustainable practices. Following Escobar, I argue that for these organic farmers, the conservation practices in which they have been engaging are not their primary goals, but rather an integral part of engaging in the politics of the conservation and recreation of the imagined cultural and ecological landscapes discussed in the previous chapter.

Locating biodiversity

In this section, I first show how biodiversity, as a concept that originated only in the late 1980s, changes and is transformed once it “arrives,” so to speak, in two locations so different as Latvia and Costa Rica. I use the term arrival because once countries sign an international convention, it is up to the national level governments to devise policies for implementation and monitoring, and for regional agencies to negotiate this implementation on the ground level. I will not go into the intricacies of this policy-making chain specifically, but it is important to note that the signing of the CBD and thus the arrival of the term biodiversity occurs in two very different historical moments in these two countries, as reflected in the agricultural histories discussed in the previous chapter. In Latvia, the signing of the CBD happened only one year after independence, at a moment when all laws were being re-written for Latvia first as an independent state, and secondly, for eventual harmonization to EU policies. Implementation of laws undertaken at the regional level is often still carried out by Soviet era functionaries, who carry with them Soviet-era bureaucratic understandings of both the laws and their implementation processes.³⁵ In Costa Rica, in contrast, the signing came after the first decade of neoliberal restructuring, but also at

³⁵ Scholars of post-socialism have observed that people’s responses to large-scale changes are often created using familiar cultural symbols, therefore there are many continuities with the socialist past, rather than the “transition” signaling a radical break with that past. Burawoy, M. and K. Verdery, Eds. (1999). Uncertain Transition. Oxford, England: Rowman and Littlefield.

a time when the country itself had become a target of interest for biodiversity conservation and bioprospecting (see Chapter Seven).

According to the National Communications that countries submit to the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the type of biodiversity, and thus the threats to posed to it are very differently distributed in each of the two countries, which I briefly outline here.

Latvia: the threat of afforestation

Latvia's conservation history began under foreign rule. The first nature reserve, *Moricšala*, was founded in 1912 under the rule of Czarist Russia, and its first national park, *Gaujas nacionālais parks*, was founded in 1973 during the Soviet era. Latvia today has seven categories of protected areas. Three more national parks were founded after independence from 1997-2007; there are also four nature preserves, one biosphere reserve, and many smaller nature parks and protected areas, making up 687 in total (Lebuss 2007). Of these, 122 are new areas that were designated since joining the EU, and Latvia's system of protected areas has now been joined together with the European-wide Natura 2000 system (Dabas aizsardzības pārvalde 2008). This makes up for a total of approximately 12% of the country's land area under protection (Kabucis, Opermanis et al. 1998).

While varying degrees of restrictions on human activities are in place in these various types of protected areas, there has never been a policy of land expropriation. Only nature reserves have strict areas where all farming activities are forbidden. In fact, most of Latvia's protected areas are based on the German idea *Heimatschutz*, which protects not only pristine natural areas but also agricultural and cultural historical landscapes. Both in the Soviet times and in the post- independence period 1990s there were attempts to reframe this issue more towards a pristine nature approach, but these were largely unsuccessful (Schwartz 2006). In 2008 the Cabinet of Ministers adopted legislation about buying land from people whose land

was incorporated into a protected area after they gained property rights to the land, because many people do not like the restrictions that it imposes on them, but this is also a voluntary program (Dabas aizsardzības pārvalde 2008).

Thus, in Latvia the idea of conserving biodiversity, specifically, is still seen even by practitioners as a very different approach to conservation, so much so that the document prepared as the National Programme for Biodiversity begins with the sentence: “The term ‘biological diversity’ is relatively new and is not well understood among the general public” (Latvian Environment Agency n.d.). According to the data compiled for the Program, Latvia has a total of 27,400 identified species (Latvian Ministry of Environment 2005). The main site for protection of biological diversity in Latvia is in the perennial grasslands, which contain one third of the species known in Latvian flora, or 520 different species of vascular plants. These fields and meadows are an important habitat for up to 150 species of migrating birds. A total of 40 % of the country’s biodiversity is located in these meadows and semi-natural grasslands (Jermacāne n.d). Data show that the area of forests has increased from 25 to 44% from 1923 to 2005, while the area of grasslands has decreased from 31 to 13% from 1910 to 1995 (Latvian Ministry of Environment 2005; Jermacāne n.d). Specific grassland protection for biodiversity preservation began only with the EU’s Agri-environmental Support Payment programs, discussed in more detail below.

The biodiversity in these fields and meadows is now considered under threat primarily from two sources. One of these is land abandonment, which leads to a slow encroachment of fast-growing woody species. As mentioned in the previous chapter, after independence in the 1990s, many families received their family land back but had very few resources to manage it. While the steep decline in the use of agrochemicals and intensive agricultural activity after the fall of the Soviet Union has been favorable for the return of

many bird species, it may mean the loss of some of these grassland ecosystems if land abandonment is followed by afforestation (Jermacāne n.d).

This is because it is thought that the diverse grasslands and meadows are the result of centuries of human interactions with the land, through mowing and extensive grazing of domesticated animals. Thus, the environmental ethic that has developed in Latvia is also very much a human-centered one and connected with the agrarian vision described in the previous chapter. It is not an image of untamed wilderness, but rather of tidy, well-managed ecosystems (Bojāre, Kabucis et al. 2006; Schwartz 2006). As noted in the previous chapter, even if data about biological diversity was not calculated previously, meadows and grasslands play an important role in the landscape imaginary, but they are also part of a tidy and managed countryside. Thus, many rural inhabitants in Latvia today are dismayed by what they see as an ugly and untidy process of afforestation that began in the 1990s due to land abandonment. In a survey conducted right before EU accession in 2004, when residents were asked to list the features they considered currently typical of the Latvian countryside, the most frequent response by rural dwellers was "uncultivated, overgrown agricultural lands/ meadows/ fields" (Bell 2004). Throughout my fieldwork, one of the benefits of EU accession named consistently by the organic farmers was that the countryside was now more "kempt" due to funds for mowing or grazing the fields, which was preventing more land from falling prey to afforestation.

The other perceived threat for biodiversity is agricultural intensification. The decline of wet meadows began with drainage of agricultural land in the beginning of the 20th century to make it useable for agricultural purposes, and continued in massive drainage projects during the Soviet period, greatly altering the landscape (Jermacāne n.d). While the trend of intensification was interrupted after regaining independence, some land consolidation is beginning again. Some of the tidiest fields are grain fields that belong to Western Europeans

who bought the land at prices much lower than in their own countries, and have started up conventional farms in Latvia. But to the local organic farmers, these new foreign landowners also signify the return of agrichemicals in the countryside. This reflects one of the fundamental contradictions of recreating an imagined agricultural landscape under changed conditions.

Costa Rica: the problem of deforestation

Costa Rica, as a tropical country, has much higher rates of biodiversity in general, and has a broader system of protected areas than does Latvia. There are a total of 87,000 identified species, comprising about 6% of the total biodiversity identified on the planet. Almost 25% of the country's territory has been placed under some sort of protection (Ministerio del Ambiente y Energia 2006).

In Costa Rica, however, the highest rates of biodiversity are in the tropical rainforests. Thus, the greatest threat to biodiversity is deforestation. In the 1980s, Costa Rica had one the highest rates of deforestation in the world, with rates estimated to be at 30,000 to 50,000 hectares cleared per year (de Camino, Segura et al. 2000). As the agricultural history of Costa Rica suggests, up to 80% of deforestation is estimated to have been due to pressure for agricultural land rather than for timber (Brockett and Gottfried 2002). Deforestation has also been influenced by the history of agricultural exports described in the previous chapter. Thus, deforestation is a complex question connected to a multitude of other factors, such as population growth, rural employment opportunities, rates of landlessness, and other factors (Nygren 2000).

Concern for deforestation and conservation began only in the 1970s when, partially in response to public outcry from international conservation organizations, the government radically shifted its position towards forested areas. An expanding population and seemingly

endless expanses of undeveloped rainforest meant that, until the 1970s, forests were seen as largely worthless land that only gained value when cleared through the hard work of settlers, and cutting trees was seen as "improvement." Therefore the government supported colonization and clearing of forested lands, and granted ownership to whomever cleared a piece of forest. Various government programs began encouraging forest protection as early as the 1960s but deforestation peaked in the 1970s and continued throughout the 1980s. It is estimated that the lost economic value of the deforestation that took place from 1970-1989 is equivalent to one year's worth of GDP (Brockett and Gottfried 2002). During this time a series of new forestry laws were passed, requiring permits and sustainable management plans to cut trees, and the conservation areas were begun (Evans 1999). The signing of the CBD reinforced the trend of forest protection, but also made biodiversity a quantifiable value. The private, non-profit *InBio* Biodiversity Institute was founded in 1989 specifically with the goal of identifying and systematizing these resources, and was hailed a world leader in this field (Tangley 1990). The Institute later became extremely controversial for signing a bioprospecting agreement with the Merck pharmaceutical company (see Chapter Seven for more on this issue).

Practicing biodiversity

Because the highest levels of biodiversity are found in such different ecosystems in each country, they pose very different problems for conservation efforts. In the following two sections I give some examples of how organic farmers, through their practices, engage with larger national debates over biodiversity conservation.

Latvia: Towards environmental farming

‘Complete madness,’ That is how the Minister of Agriculture Mārtiņš Roze describes the requirement by the Rural Support department to cut juniper trees growing in meadows in order to qualify for EU support payments for Ecologically Valuable Grasslands...

‘Thank God that most farmers are sensible and knowledgeable enough, otherwise it would be the end for many junipers’... says Mrs. Kalvāne, the leader of the Talsu Farmer’s Union.

Disagreements began last year about how to manage ecologically valuable meadows in order to receive the support payments for preserving biological diversity in grasslands. Fearing that inspectors would consider junipers growing in the meadows as “bushes,” some landowners began cutting them down...

...In order to receive the EU support payments for preserving biological diversity in grasslands, one must follow Good Agricultural and Environmental Sustainability practices- including not allowing agricultural land to be overgrown with bushes...

‘We have come to an agreement with the regional Rural Support Agency office that juniper trees are a part of [biologically] valuable meadows,’ Mrs. Kalvāne explains...’The same cannot be said for the specialists at the Central office, who have prepared a letter indicating that junipers are just as much bushes as alders are...’

The letter explains that, ‘In this concrete case, junipers... are not permitted, because [they] in no way differ from birch or alder growth ... which then eventually turn into forest territory and are thus ineligible for support as agricultural land...’

-excerpt from newspaper article “Junipers senselessly cut for European money,” Latvijas avīze (Tomsone 2006)

Within Latvia, EU accession has reawakened fundamental questions about the future development of the Latvian countryside and policies aimed at encouraging that development. The article quoted above refers to the Biologically Valuable Grassland program, which is one branch of EU Agri-environmental support payments available to farmers, intended to encourage the preservation of "natural meadows" through extensive agricultural practices. Natural meadows are defined as unplanted grasslands that haven't been ploughed or seeded for at least 20 years but rather managed extensively with only mowing or grazing. Experts come to the farm and count the number of species, and if a minimum number of rare or endangered species are found, and the field meets other criteria, farmers are eligible for this additional support payment. The meadow must continue to be mowed or grazed once a year to prevent it from passing to natural reforestation which would eliminate these rare plants, but the mowing must occur later than July 10 when migratory bird species have already left the territory (Saktiņa 2003). The farm must also meet all the “Good Agricultural Practices” guidelines, however, which states that “agricultural land” should be clear of trees and bushes

(see Chapter Six for more on these guidelines). This norm is the basis for the conflict described above.

While EU support payments for organic agriculture (these will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Six) and the preservation of biologically diverse grasslands have brought a new source of income and hope to farmers, problems surrounding the administration of the funds, such as the one reflected in the newspaper article above, reveal much larger contests about the relative role of agricultural versus environmental priorities in defining rural landscape imaginaries and conservation policies.

Various authors have illuminated this debate in the literature on Latvian rural development. Schwartz (2005:297) identifies two prevailing narratives that have informed Latvian rural development throughout its history. As noted in the previous chapter, she calls one “agrarian nationalism,” which is closely tied to recreating the myth of the smallholder past. Although this is primarily an agricultural narrative, it is seen by many of its proponents to be closely tied to environmental concerns as well: “Closeness to nature was identified as a central element of Latvianness, but it was a closeness obtained through the labour of agrarian cultivation”. Thus open meadows and cultivated fields are important first because they represent agricultural labor, and by association prosperity, and only secondarily for biodiversity conservation:

In Latvia, as throughout most of the European continent, current biodiversity resources reflect centuries of human use in the form of cultivation, livestock herding, forestry and hunting. Like the majority of their Western counterparts, most Latvian environmental professionals see nature values as deriving not primarily from 'pristine' wilderness but from cultivated landscapes: from the fields, meadows and carefully managed forests that constitute the agrarian ethnoscape (Schwartz 2006:11-12).

The other narrative Schwartz (2005; 2006) identifies is what she calls “international liberalism,” a position that imagines Latvians as traders and middlemen historically situated at the crossroads of Europe. In the current context, she sees this narrative as reflected in the

globalizing discourse of sustainability and biodiversity conservation that has arrived in Latvia from Western Europe. This narrative transforms the traditional “agrarian” Latvian ideas of nature as being “primarily a reservoir of cultural identity,” (Schwartz 2006:136) into modern, scientific, and global ideas of biodiversity. This narrative is much more in line with the ideals of post-productivist Europe, and favors radically decreasing the amount of farmed land in favor of recreating “wild” landscapes.³⁶

Schwartz (2005; 2006) demonstrates the contest between these two narratives by describing a project to reintroduce wild horses to graze a territory of abandoned farmland in Southwestern Latvia for the purpose of preserving and restoring biologically diverse grasslands. The project was begun in 1999 by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Latvia office and a Dutch NGO, The Ark Foundation. They argued that Latvia’s grassland ecosystems were actually originally a result of grazing by large wild herbivores, rather than the result of human agricultural activity. Thus they brought from the Netherlands 18 *konik polski* breed horses, which is the closest descendant of the *tarpan* breed that went extinct in Europe in the late 1800s. The project stirred up controversy because it challenged the agrarian ideal of a populated and active countryside, and was thus seen as unpatriotic. Local environmental groups, such as the Latvian Fund for Nature, were opposed to the project and claimed that the WWF was introducing a "bizarre non-productive species" into the landscape. Local residents feared that the replacement of farmers mowing fields with horses grazing them was a threat to their Latvian national identity (Schwartz 2006: 162).

³⁶ Similarly, Eglitis also characterizes Latvian post-Soviet politics of the 1990s as a debate between two competing narratives, both of which sought to restore to the nation the "normality" that was robbed of it by the Soviet occupation. Normality was defined by some as a temporal normality, which meant a return to the largely agrarian models of the first Latvian independence period, and by others as a spatial normality, which can be understood as Latvia's "return to Europe," symbolizing progress and development. Eglitis, D. (2002). Imagining the Nation: History, Modernity and Revolution in Latvia. University Park, PA: Penn State Press.

As an interesting evolution of the conflict described by Schwartz over the introduction of wild horses, many organic farmers have now also embraced the idea of natural grazing to restore ecosystems, and have introduced wild horses and cattle onto one part of their territories. And it is exactly these farmers who have had the most problems with the payments administered by the Rural Support Agency for Biologically Valuable grasslands due to the presence of trees and bushes in their meadows, as described above. One such organic farmer, Anita introduced wild horses four years ago, and wild cattle two years ago, to graze on 50 ha of her land. She collects medicinal plants for teas, lotions and sauna treatments from the territory, which is now biologically much more diverse than it was before. The land had been farmed over 20 years ago, and when she acquired it, pioneer species from the forest had in fact started enveloping it in a homogenous mass of bushes. Now she keeps human disturbance to a minimum in the territory, and lets the animals form the landscape. She finds the regulations prohibiting trees and bushes absolutely contrary to the goals of organic agriculture and biodiversity conservation. During the four years, a fascinating mosaic pattern has developed, with clear paths and trails where the animals cross the territory, some patches where the grass has been cropped to only a few centimeters tall, but other patches with thick bushes where the horses take refuge from horseflies and the sun. She observed that the vegetation and animal life have changed markedly, and “it is not for nothing that the territory has now been ...recognized as a habitat for both the corn-crake and the [spotted] eagle, because the right landscape has been formed. But that is not the Rural Support Agency’s landscape.”



Figure 2.2: Wild horses grazing on organic farm territory. Author's photo.

In 2005 Anita received funding from the Ark Foundation to put up special information stands for visitors. One placard is dedicated specifically to the functions of trees and bushes, which serve as one of the main sources of nutrients for the animals, especially during winter months when the grass is covered by snow. Anita explained the uneven cycles of the system:

Natural grazing is a long-term process, it's not just that in a five-year period³⁷, if a tree has been there, that it will stay. Usually the animals eat it, they chew off the bark, until it finally falls over and dies. But then there is a moment like this one, when the bushes have grown very tall, but they will get nibbled off again. They hurry to grow, knowing that their demise is coming.

The mosaic-like patterns that develop on the landscape are not uniform, however, and thus do not conform to the 'Good Agricultural Practice' guidelines of the Agency. The mosaic pattern of meadows, paths, shrubs, and trees of various sizes and densities make it difficult to determine where the meadow ends and the forest begins, and thus to define which part can be considered "actively farmed land" and meet the criteria to be eligible for support.

³⁷ Farmers sign contracts for support for a period of five years, during which they are not allowed to make changes to the territory, or they risk having to pay back the money. See Chapter Six for more on this.



Figure 2.3: Natural meadows and wild horse grazing territory. Author's photo.

The debate over whether trees and bushes serve important ecological functions within farms, or whether they symbolize encroachment of forests on valued land is emblematic of the conflict between more ecological or agrarian approaches to organic farming. The Biologically Valuable Grasslands payments are administered by the Rural Support Agency that is subordinate to the Ministry of Agriculture, as the payments are part of the Agri-environment branch of the EU Rural Support program. The strict interpretation of the absence of trees or other signs of afforestation on the land is the embodiment of the agrarian ideal of a neat and orderly countryside, where unruly nature is managed by human intervention. For organic farmers who are producing traditional field crops, such as grains, potatoes or vegetables, for sale on the market, the idea of clearing all trees from agricultural lands might not be not problematic. While rigid interpretation of the prohibition of trees and bushes on “actively farmed land” may make sense in such agricultural contexts, it does not take into account important differences among the types of trees, or the dynamic ecological cycles involved in natural grazing, and is thus inappropriate for a biodiversity management program within an organic farming system.

For farmers such as Anita, and the wild horses who manage the territory, all trees and bushes are not created equal. Many farmers who have had conflicts with the Rural Support Agency due to the presence of trees or bushes are those who are working more with semi-wild products. For instance Anna, one of the first organic farmers and leader of the Eco-health farm network, produces herbal teas, and had problems with the Agency over her Organic support payments because some of her medicinal plants, such as wild roses, were considered bushes and thus disqualified parts of her land from the support program.

This conflict is also directly related to ideas about landscapes discussed in Chapter One. The cultural and ecological roles of particular trees in the landscape is one example of how “space” becomes “place” (see Chapter Six). In analyzing the various elements of a rural landscape in the 1565 painting “The Harvesters” by Bruegel, Ingold (2000:204-5) describes in detail the particular role the tree in the painting, under which people are resting, plays in the landscape:

But this is not just *any* tree. For one thing, it draws the entire landscape around it into a unique focus: in other words, by its presence it constitutes a particular place. The place was not there before the tree, but came into being with it... In its present form, the tree embodies the entire history of its development from the moment it first took root. And that history consists in the unfolding of its relations with manifold components of its environment, including the people who have nurtured it, tilled the soil around it, pruned its branches, picked its fruit, and- as at present- use it as something to lean against...In a sense, then, the tree bridges the gap between the apparently fixed and the invariant forms of the landscape and the mobile and transient forms of animal life, visible proof that all of these forms, from the most permanent to the most ephemeral, are dynamically linked under transformation within the movement of becoming the world as a whole.

The way in which Anita talked about the horses and their grazing patterns with the bushes reveals an intimate knowledge of the ecological processes occurring on that land that transform it from an abstract space into a particular place. Similarly to the role the tree plays in Bruegel’s painting, the trees and bushes on Anita’s farm serve as a link between the wild horses, the ecological processes in the meadow, and the people managing the farm.

Moreover, the wider controversy over the cutting of trees that was discussed in the 2006 newspaper article tap into the fact that for many urban and rural Latvians, trees are an important icon in the national landscape imaginary. In fact, Schwartz (2006) describes the “Great Tree Liberation Movement” that started as a veiled Soviet resistance movement in the 1970s and continued until the mid-1990s, led by one of Latvia’s leading poets. It was a symbolic effort to clear the underbrush that was encroaching on great old trees in the countryside that stood as monuments from another era.

Projects such as the wild horse grazing territories are an indication that some organic farmers are beginning to integrate Latvian traditional agrarian landscape ideals with European concepts of biodiversity conservation into their own conception of organic farming. Organic farmers like Anita are actually integrating the two narratives that Schwartz describes, rather than perpetuating their opposition. For Anita and other Latvian organic farmers that are working with organic practices that are aimed at biodiversity conservation, the agricultural and environmental narratives are not separate, but represent two halves of a whole that they are in fact trying to unify in their own everyday framing practices. They have begun to actively question what the European perspective can bring to the Latvian one, and vice versa. For instance, Anita tells me that she has heard on the radio that the European Union has criticized Latvia for not having enough territory set aside for bird habitat, and links this to what her daughter saw on a recent trip to the Netherlands:

There they are investing millions to transform human-touched areas back into very natural places. But we do everything to destroy natural areas- what are the regulations like? The field must be mowed or grazed, it must be gleaming and naked. But what happens beyond the border of the field- has anyone considered that?

This is simultaneously a realization that Western Europe is interested in biodiversity protection because they already feel a great “loss” thereof, and a fear that current policies in Latvia are not appropriate for preserving the diversity that does still exist.

Other organic farmers who do not have wild horses or cattle are also experimenting with the integration of what they see as traditional Latvian and European approaches to organic farming in different ways. For instance Dainis has spent much effort designing his farmstead in a traditional way, as well as exploring how Latvian folk songs and customs relate to nature and biodiversity protection. He feels that the Latvian model of organic farming, based on national traditions, is one that could improve the European model, and that sometimes European rules do not go far enough:

About love for nature, trees, birds- our ancestors have known this and understood it...We still have preserved in our people (*tauta*) an organic farming model, maybe even a biodiversity preservation model, that we haven't been able to take advantage of at the State level. In our farm, we have tried to join this together with the new breezes that Europe is bringing us. In many ways we are better than the European indicators or suggestions.... They could come – all the European farmers- could come here to learn, to see what it is like, when nature is in its place and fulfilling its functions. Our bureaucrats say we have to adopt their good practices, but I can say, we have had many visitors from Denmark, Germany, and they say that they are very impressed here- even in Sweden, the idea [of organic farming] is perhaps a little removed from real life. But on our farm, we try to make it alive, by taking a little bit from history, and looking into the requirements of Europe today. For instance if I have a corncrake calling in my field, then I cannot mow it by the date required by Europe. I can't afford that- I think a little differently. And if it [the bird] is in these [biologically] valuable grasslands, which are meant to be for protecting bird species it is one thing. But if the corncrake isn't there, and it is in another field [of crops], and I protect it where it is, then that is a higher level. That's what I wanted to say.

Thus, Dainis is actively analyzing how the European rules affect biodiversity, rather than simply seeing them as a European imposition.

The integration of these agricultural and environmental narratives, as we see in the words and practices of Anita and Dainis, is in fact exactly what the reform of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy was intended to facilitate. The goal was to promote rural development that is not focused on commodity production, but rather on sustaining humans, along with ecosystems and animals in rural areas. The fact that exactly those Latvian organic farmers who have most directly embraced this integration of narratives are the ones who have had the most problems with getting support from the EU Agri-environmental schemes brings

into stark relief the shortcomings of the system as it is currently being implemented. This calls into question how effective the reform of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), and its implementation in Member States has been in moving European rural policies to more integrated agri-environmental approaches, an issue I return to in Chapter Six.

Costa Rica: replanting forests, reclaiming diversity

In the case of Costa Rica, the main conservation conflicts have been about the development and use of protected areas for forest preservation. In particular, there have been numerous conflicts surrounding the creation of the extensive system of National Parks and Protected Areas. The wave of designating National Parks was influenced by the US model of exclusionary parks. The new director of the Parks Department visited National Parks in the US and attended courses on park management there. There was little consultation with communities in the process of designating the first parks, and land was expropriated, resulting in numerous conflicts (Evans 1999). Evans describes several of the original conflicts in evicting ranchers from the Santa Rosa territory in Guanacaste, where months after declaring the territory a park, cattle were still being grazed there even by the Minister of Agriculture.

In Cahuita, on the Caribbean coast, a coral reef was declared a national monument in 1970, and later a National Park in 1978, forbidding a wide array of activities in the area, including agriculture, forestry, and industrial activities, and involved land expropriation. Negotiations with the community led to amendments in the regulations, but disputes continued for over twenty years. The culmination came in 1995 when the park administration proposed to triple park entrance fees. The community feared this would drastically reduce tourism in the area, which had become one of their main sources of income. The community formed a *Comité de Lucha* (Committee of Struggle) and peacefully

occupied the park. Negotiations continued for a year, and eventually resulted in a compromise of creating a co-management system with the community (Giroto, Weitzner et al. n.d.). These are just a few of the many conflicts that have emerged over park management with varying degrees of successful resolution with communities.

Furthermore, while Costa Rica's park system has been lauded for encouraging conservation inside the parks, deforestation outside of the parks was still at times the highest in the world, and the isolated approach has meant that development outside of parks has also been very unsustainable. Many scholars have pointed out this apparently two-faced paradigm of conservation on one hand and destruction on the other. They contend that conservationists, by paying attention only to what is going on inside the parks, are playing a hand in the destruction of biodiversity outside (Vandermeer and Perfecto 1995).

Nevertheless, the drastic policy shifts in forest conservation starting in the 1970s were accompanied by concerted efforts by the government and NGOs and other institutions, a so-called "conservation cartel" (Evans 1999), to change the national environmental perceptions of the population as well, by implementing environmental education initiatives, research programs, and ecotourism schemes. Although it has been only a period of 30 years, there is some evidence that the environmental consciousness and narratives of Costa Ricans are beginning to catch up to the policies. Based on 67 interviews conducted in communities surrounding the La Amistad National Park Schelhas and Pfeffer (2005) found that educational efforts have greatly contributed to the idea of Costa Rica as an environmentally conscious nation and to the internalization of forest values by local residents. They found that people view the earlier periods of colonization and deforestation (in which many respondents participated) as driven by ignorance about the importance of the forests, and as destructive, whereas now they see an active role for themselves in forest conservation.

Organic farmers in Costa Rica are certainly among the part of the population who are actively involved in reforestation and biodiversity conservation, but following very different models than those of the national parks. Their activities include reforestation, adapting their farming practices to lessen the need for additional land, increasing and managing diversity within their farms, and teaching others about such practices.

On farm after farm, one of the things that farmers would proudly show me was the small area of forest that they had planted. Some had planted only a few, some hundreds, and some even thousands of trees of various species. For instance, Victoria, as we were walking through her farm, took me especially to see her reforestation area, pointing out which trees are endangered species, and commented that even some foresters that have visited her farm do not know all the species.

At first I thought that farmers were engaging in these efforts due to participation in the Payments for Environmental Services (PES) programs that pay farmers for planting trees. It turned out, however, that the vast majority of farmers felt these programs were geared more towards big farms or were more paperwork than they were worth. One farmer with ten hectares told me he had originally participated in the program, and had planted 4,000 trees, but had various problems, for example that fruit trees didn't count, so the paperwork was difficult. Another farm I visited had a sign out front by the road that it is part of the PES program. The farmer said that he has 6 of his 17 hectare farm set aside as forest conservation, but commented that, "It's not worth it. You couldn't imagine the number of transactions involved," and added that they would not continue with the program. Therefore many farmers were now continuing to engage in these reforestation and preservation practices on an entirely voluntary basis.

The farmers working with reforestation efforts take seeds from native trees in the forest and start them as seedlings, and then transplant them along one edge of their often very

small farms, in effect sacrificing productive area for conservation efforts. One farmer, Arabella, who started in 2000 with a native tree nursery, told me about her experience and what it has meant to her:

When you find in a forest, that is obviously large, that there is only one tree of a species... you begin to notice how ...there are monkeys, for instance.. that depend on the seeds of that certain [tree]... [So] if we don't have those trees in the forest, we won't have the monkeys, [either]...All the animals and people...who isn't dependent on seeds? ...The seed is something that...we need and that needs us- In the seeds are our destinies....That is why when we have had [farmer] seed exchanges here, we almost always bring tree seeds as well; we have to save them. We don't plant only a row of crops, we plant native trees, to see some birds again... So I started with native trees. Maybe we have [only] one tree here- [so] we thought we need to improve the genes of this tree. So we started looking for seeds of the tree from other parts [of the country] to cross them, so that these trees will be strong in the future, to improve [them].

This work with tree seeds was what had actually influenced Arabella's decision to start with organic agriculture, and she and many others have taken the work with seeds to the maintenance of agro-biodiversity, as well. There is a very active network of seed exchange among farmers, done with the goal to preserve and improve the genetic diversity of the plants through circulating and mixing the seeds (see Chapter Three for detailed description).

Organic farmers also contribute to biodiversity conservation by consciously changing their farming practices in order to utilize less land, and thus not contribute to loss of forests and biodiversity. Many organic farmers told me that after acquiring their land, either from relatives, other farmers, or from IDA, they converted it back from pastureland to more productive land, adding nutrients to the soil to enable it to produce crops and vegetables. They explain that this is a way to reduce the need for deforestation and combat the erosion of precious soil.

One of the most striking things about many of the organic farms I visited in Costa Rica was the sheer diversity of crops being produced in these incredibly small areas. Many farms were not much more than a hectare, but still produced over 50 different products, and

several farms in the five to ten hectare range told me they have from 150- 250 different products on their farms.

This diversity is the result of conscious efforts by farmers to produce as much as they can from a small plot of land. Antonio inherited his six hectare farm from his father as pastureland fifteen years ago, but now produces 160 different products. He says that many small farmers are surprised by the diversity of his farm, but he emphasizes that there are no “recipes.” He takes lessons from the forest where there are no weeds, and he mimics the forest system in his planting, encouraging diversity rather than having clear and tidy plots and rows of crops. His agriculture is “more than organic,” he explained, it is more like “natural farming.” Through this, he said, he had found a spiritual equilibrium as well, for both his family and his soil.

Many farmers in Costa Rica speak about trying to mimic natural systems, and many are working with microorganisms from forest ecosystems, to make a fermented compost fertilizer, called “bokaschi” which was introduced by the Japanese advisor who was one of the first to bring ideas about organic agriculture to Costa Rica in the late 1980s. Using these methods has helped farmers maintain soil fertility and diversify their farms. Others are using more intensive vegetable cultivation methods to produce more food from a smaller area. “Grow biointensive” is a production method trademarked by John Jeavons of California, that combines “ancient farming” methods such as raised beds, composting, companion planting and other elements in order to produce vegetables more intensively in small areas (Ecology Action n.d.). The method is spread through seminars, and one such seminar was held in Costa Rica and then replicated for other farmers.

These methods often mean that farmers no longer rely on extensive grazing. Rather, they stable only a few animals for milk, manure and biogas production. They “cut and carry” the pasture grass and other feed to the animals, using the rest of the land for vegetable, grain,

and fruit production. One farmer complained to me that his father is still using his land very inefficiently with extensive grazing, but that his own dream is to stable only a few animals for manure and cheese production, in order to use the resources more efficiently.

Those organic farmers who are still grazing animals take extra precautions to avoid erosion. At one seminar, a discussion formed at lunch about studies of the benefits that trees have within pasture areas. Farmers commented in turn that they help maintain moisture, the leaf litter provides nutrients to the soil, and the fruits provide extra nutrients to the animals. Thus, rather than eliminating trees from grazing territories as in Latvia, farmers are considering ways to reintroduce them.

These changes in production practices are closely associated with the landscape changes discussed in the previous chapter. Because so much deforestation and erosion has been attributed directly to the conversion of forests to pastureland, many farmers are very directly trying to reclaim the land and recreate the forests of the landscapes of the past.

This combination of conservation of forests and biodiversity with sustainable agricultural production methods is fundamental to the vision that many of the organic farmers have for the future. Several of the larger organic organizations are now working within projects like the Talamanca Central Volcanic Biological Corridor that was established in 2000 to protect over 70,000 hectares of land (Ramírez Chávez 2006). This is not a protected area in the sense of a National Park that automatically excludes people, but more of a “soft conservation” approach. The approach is to make landholders’ practices more sustainable within the area, rather than expropriating their land and excluding them.

The Association of Organic Producers of Turrialba (APOT) farmers’ group is on the steering committee for the project, and their role is to work with the agricultural communities in the zone to try to teach them more sustainable or organic farming practices, using

campesino a campesino (farmer-to-farmer) education approaches. Martin, who is working with APOT explained:

What we never want to say to the people is “expropriate” because it sounds like something terrible. Those who want to sell can sell, who aren’t interested in the land. Where we are, we are talking about soil that is not good for agriculture... [but] people are producing sugar cane and coffee ... This soil is not for that, so it is causing soil degradation and has been affecting the environment ... There are at least 20-25 lakes that have dried up; there has been lots of damage. ...So we are trying to get money from the Ministry of Environment as Payment for Environmental Services to support families who want to work with improved pasture-grass, with trees in the pasture lands... to get them involved in organic or sustainable production processes.

I went one day with two organic farmers from APOT who visited a community of conventional farmers to teach them seed-saving and soil improvement practices. The conventional farmers, who until now had only ever purchased seed and fertilizers, were visibly impressed. After listening for two hours about the different compost recipes and methods, one farmer looked up in amazement and said... “So God gave us everything we need- the fertilizer, the land, [the seeds]...” This shows that not only are the organic farmers contributing to conservation through their own reforestation and seed selection work, but they are also doing far more to encourage others to participate in conservation than the previous approaches of excluding people from protected areas.

Back to the landscape

These examples from both Latvia and Costa Rica show how organic farmers, through engaging in a set of agricultural practices, are also actively contributing to biodiversity conservation efforts. At the ecological level, they are engaging with the same problems as the scientists and policy-makers, but on their own terms. They are integrating conservation into their farming in ways that are beneficial to them but also combat the main problems that have been identified, be it afforestation or deforestation. Through these practices, the farmers are developing social networks that support these conservation efforts,

not only with other organic farmers, but in Costa Rica beginning to involve conventional farmers, as well, and in Latvia, building new partnerships with animals like the wild horses and cattle.

All of these examples show that for these organic farmers, their land is part of a cultural landscape that they are helping to create. In Latvia the natural grazing areas contain important microelements that only the farmers have observed and know, and that are intimately related to both to ecological processes and their own farming practices. Similarly in Costa Rica, farmers like Araballea observe interactions among the forest, the animals, and the seeds, in ways that transform their land from any abstract plot to a particular place and landscape with which they have very personal experiences and connections.

Thus, these are not examples only of how organic farmers are attempting to conserve endangered plants and animals. Rather, the integration of these elements in these farmers' practices are reconfigurations and reimaginings of the cultural and ecological landscapes described in Chapter One. For example, each time Arabella and other Costa Rican farmers exchange seeds to improve the genes of trees or crops, and every season that Anita lets the wild horses graze on the encroaching bushes - these are all transformations of the landscape that become embodied as steps in the long-term processes of landscape change.

Falling through the gaps....

Tsing (2005:195) notes that when biologists and social scientists talk past one another, they leave "gaps" of reality that are intelligible to neither group. She describes how shifting cultivators of the Meratus mountains plant and harvest crops and "claim" trees in ways that do not conform to either developers' or conservationists' understandings of the world. She describes gaps as "zones of erasure and incomprehensibility. Gaps occur where

metropolitan projects do not reach so far or deep as to change everything according to their plans...Gaps are always being produced as discriminations are made.”

We see, then, how the organic farmers in Latvia and Costa Rica also seem to fall into a gap of the kind that Tsing identifies. Their practices, as described above, are often not taken seriously as the actions of efficient and productive farmers, and their land does not meet the criteria of “actively farmed land.” They are also not, for the most part, involved in official community-based conservation programs, and thus do not “count” as conservationists. It is clear that there is still some discomfort with groups who do not fit these ideas by the way that laws in both countries deal with these new farmer practices. While there is a push to make Latvian organic farmers into more efficient farmers, there are efforts to institutionalize Costa Rican organic farmers as conservationists.

In Latvia, the EU Agri–environmental support program for Biologically Valuable Grasslands described is part of the EU's efforts to reform the "trade-distorting subsidies" of the Common Agricultural Policy, by decoupling subsidies from production, encouraging instead low input agriculture and rural development. This European "post-productivist" approach to rural development has not been entirely uncontroversial however, within the post-Soviet context of Latvia, where production has already fallen dramatically and farmers and Ministry officials alike feel that production needs to be supported in order to be able to compete with older EU member states. For instance an article on the Latvian Fund for Nature website states that "it is wonderful that in the Latvian countryside the love for orderliness and work has not disappeared, but it is a shame that neither the hay, milk, or cows are needed by anyone anymore" (Bojāre, Kabucis et al. 2006). Indeed economic hardships mean that many small farmers no longer produce for market, and the EU support payments are one of their only sources of income. The article concludes by saying that even "ordinary" meadows should be properly cared for and managed, and then they too may someday become

"biologically valuable," and thus be an additional source of income. This can be seen as a sign that in the eyes of policy-makers, simply conservation of nature or biodiversity is not the appropriate role for a farmer: even if farmers are protecting nature, then there should at least be a productive element to it as well.

In 2008 the Agri-environment payments were in fact changed to tie them to production as an attempt to increase productivity of the farmers. This policy response reflects an interesting counter-reaction to the EU CAP reform, because it is a re-prioritization of production as a criterion to receive support payments in a post-productivist Europe (see Chapter Six).

In Costa Rica, there is a legislative push in the other direction, attempting to define organic farmers more as conservationists. One of the big accomplishments of the Organic Law (described in more detail in Chapter Seven) is that it defines organic agriculture as a part of the public interest, thus making organic farmers eligible to participate in the "Payments for Environmental Services" program that until now has been designated only for reforestation activities. Now their farming practices themselves would make farmers eligible for the support payments, in effect turning all productive activities into a form of conservation.

Biodiversity as a process

The organic farmers who are engaging in biodiversity conservation practices are doing so as a way of creating and recreating cultural and ecological landscapes. Through their practices, organic farmers are actually adapting the idea of biodiversity conservation to their own situation- and broadening the concept in each case- to move towards a new model that includes national agricultural traditions, modern innovations, and in-depth knowledge of the ecosystems in which they live and work as cultural places and landscapes.

The idea of landscapes has also become a term that is used in conservation planning. Landscape ecology approaches take the heterogeneity of the landscape into account. From this perspective, it is important for protected areas to cover a large enough territory to meet the needs of “landscape species,” mostly the large mammals at the top of the food chain, and for there to be areas through which animals can migrate from one piece of habitat to the next (Sanderson, Redford et al. 2002). Thus, the type of agricultural development that surrounds protected areas also becomes very important. Vandermeer and Perfecto (2007) show that low-intensity agricultural production, such as organic shade-grown coffee, make for easier migration of species through a fragmented habitat. Many studies have also shown that having more integrated and diverse farms that form a mosaic pattern, or agricultural matrix, rather than large monocultures, will be much more conducive to forming this landscape that is better both for the animals and for the humans (Rosset 1999; Vandermeer and Perfecto 2007).

Given these problems caused by dividing landscapes into zones of conservation and zones of development outlined by scholars such as Vandermeer and Perfecto (1995), it is crucial to take the practices of organic farmers seriously as ways of redefining both biodiversity conservation and agricultural production. Much of the literature on landscape ecology, however, still considers humans at best as stakeholders with something to gain, or at worst as a type of threat posed to conservation (Sanderson, Redford et al. 2002), or have argued for the intensification of agriculture in order to spare land for conservation. Various authors have also noted that it is crucial to rethink the role of communities in conservation projects, and the role that anthropology can play in widening that understanding (Berkes 2004; Remis and Hardin 2007).

The examples described here perhaps show that it is also necessary for conservation practitioners also to imagine landscapes not just as heterogeneous physical spaces, but also as

cultural places, where people, animals and ecosystems form particular places. These places are in a continual process of change, where histories leave their traces and futures are envisioned and embodied in practice. Trying to understand the role of human communities in this context may lead to policies that can help facilitate, rather than deter, the types of practices described here. This is particularly important in attempting to develop new schemes for encouraging conservation in non-park areas, such as Payments for Environmental Services programs that have not always been effective.

Extrapolating further from the anthropological literature that views landscapes as a process (Hirsch 1995; Ingold 2000) it may be useful to think about biodiversity as a process as well. Until now, biodiversity has been in part a global political process that prioritizes certain types of ecosystems as “hotspots,” such as the tropical rainforests of Costa Rica, over less diverse, but perhaps equally ecologically and culturally landscapes such as the meadows in Latvia. This reinforces and perpetuates the position and relative “importance” of such regions in the global imaginary. Rather than focusing only on indicators of species richness, lists of endangered species, or the classification of threats to ecosystems, a process-based understanding of biodiversity, and the cultural practices that contribute to it at the landscape level, could be a more dynamic way of approaching and understanding the complexity of actions of human populations and their interactions with the environment. Rather than just presuming humans to be stakeholders with the potential to destroy nature, or enlightened noble community members with the sole intention to conserve the resources, it is important to value their combined conservation and productive practices and the larger cultural and ecological processes within which these practices are embedded.

SECTION II: COMMODIFICATION AND NON-COMMODIFICATION

CHAPTER 3 Seeds of kin, kin of seeds: the production of organic seeds, subjects, and social networks

Seeds are a gift of nature, of past generations and diverse cultures....
Seeds are the first link in the food chain, and the embodiment of
biological and cultural diversity, and the repository of life's future evolution.
- Manifesto on the Future of Seeds
(International Commission on the Future of Food and Agriculture 2006)

As we turned back from the field to head towards the house, I reached into my “research bag” and pulled out a little satchel of organic herbal tea from Latvia that I had brought over as gifts for people in Costa Rica who had taken the time to talk to me and show me around their farms. I thanked Victoria and handed her the little bag. As I was explaining to her about the tea, she looked closely at the slightly crushed dried leaves and flowers and looked up at me expectantly, asking, “Are there seeds in there?” I laughed, and said that probably there are some, but that I’m not so sure how well they would grow in tropical soil. “Well, we’ll try it,” she reassured me, smiling. As we were saying our goodbyes, her teenage son came out, looked casually at the bag on the table and asked: “What seeds has she brought?” A similar version of this dialogue happened over and over as I presented my

interview subjects with the samples of tea, reflecting the importance of seeds and seed exchange for Costa Rican organic farmers.

This chapter explores the role that organic seed production and use play in the different cultural and historical contexts of the Latvian and Costa Rican organic agriculture movements. In Costa Rica, a long tradition of seed saving and exchange exists, and was recently recognized as a right in the new Law on Organic Agriculture. In Latvia, seed saving traditions and legislation have changed along with changes in political regimes. A longer tradition of specialized breeding programs exists, dating back to the late 1800s, as well as a history of centralized seed production and sale. Now, according to EU laws, seeds must be certified and adhere to intellectual property rights regulations.

Metaphors of kinship and relatedness are used in strikingly different ways in these two sets of legislation. In Costa Rica, they emphasize the genetic mixing and social exchange networks of seeds, while in Latvia they promote the genetic purity and protection of registered varieties. I argue here that the displacement of kinship from the social networks to the seed itself is a necessary step for the commodification and control of seeds, and brings significant environmental and social consequences. The model of farmer seed-saving, selection, and exchange used in Costa Rica promotes on-farm biodiversity conservation, strong social networks and farmer knowledge systems. In contrast, expert breeding and use of exclusive varieties has already contributed to considerable genetic erosion in the European context, promoting in Latvia expert-farmer hierarchies and devaluing farmers' experiential knowledge.

Seed stories

When we arrived at the University of Costa Rica campus in Turrialba at 7 am on a Saturday morning to help set up for the market, it was already bustling. Tents had been set

up, for the very likely occurrence of rain in the afternoon, and one was already being moved to evade the attack of ants in one area of the yard. In another corner, tortillas, *gallo pinto* (a traditional meal of rice mixed together with black or red beans and assorted spices), and coffee were being prepared, and in another musicians were setting up their instruments. Before long, the first guests started to arrive, looking for organic produce. A few farmers were selling fruits and vegetables, baked goods, and crafts. The food and the consumers were not the main focus of this market, however, because it was the Third Annual Festival of *Semillas Criollas* (creole or heirloom seeds) in Turrialba, northeast of San Jose in the coffee-producing foothills.

From my perch at the information and t-shirt table, I watched as farmers moved back and forth between stands. About 20 small tables had been set up, with farmers from all parts of the country, some having traveled for two days on various buses in order to arrive. On their tables were a somewhat messy array of roots, split-open fruit, seedlings, cuttings, and seeds. Some had carefully packaged and labeled the seeds, but many had simple plastic bags with names scrawled on them in a way legible only to themselves, or no labels at all. Farmers seemed to be following unwritten rules, taking turns to visit the other tables, so that everyone was not away from their posts at the same time. Some brought a pen and paper to take notes; others just listened to the instructions and nodded as they filled up their bags of goods.

I strolled around the tables asking people both what they brought in to exchange, and what they had received from others. One farmer proudly showed me the assortment on his table, describing the properties and uses of each of the seven varieties of beans, three varieties (and colors) of corn, and an assortment of herbs and tubers. He mentioned which are best at preventing erosion, which are good for improving the soil, and which are used to feed various animals. He had selected some of the plants that were resistant to fire, others

that proved strongest after acid rain. Some farmers also mentioned that the exchange of seeds works as a security mechanism. If farmers have exchanged seeds with a neighbor and their own crop fails for some reason, they can recuperate them. And if farmers have seeds, they don't need to go to the supermarket to buy food. Some farmers told me they participate in these seed exchanges to preserve the genetic diversity of the seeds, others as a way of practicing food sovereignty and resisting the threat of transgenics, and still others to recuperate their identity and culture as farmers.

But besides these properties and uses, each seed also had a personal story. "This one came from my father, who had had it for over 50 years. This one comes from my grandfather. And this amaranth I got from an indigenous farmer several years back." This scenario repeated itself as I spoke with various farmers. I was impressed by the detailed memories that farmers have of where each seed or plant came from. "This one I got from an abandoned field, this one I got from a *gringo* I knew 10 years ago, and this one is from my husband's father. These my cousin smuggled from Mexico...." There was a tangible excitement also as farmers told me what they had received from other farmers that day. Andrea's eyes shined as she showed me what she had collected. Her bag was full of no fewer than 20 different types of plant material, about most of which she could tell me from whom she got it, and what its optimal growing conditions and properties were.

The detailed memory of the origin of each seed shows that seeds are more than a mere input in Costa Rican organic farming systems. Many of the farmers said that they never purchase any seeds at all, and use only seeds inherited from their parents or received in exchange from other farmers. A few said they buy some lettuce or carrot seeds, because vegetable seeds are more difficult to obtain in their climate, but that's all.

Many farmers spoke in particular of the personal connections the seed exchanges foster with their families and with other farmers. For instance, Juan has a farm that is more

like a backyard, less than half a hectare, but had brought 19 varieties of beans, several types of chiles and fruit. He summed up by telling me that it is important to reproduce the seeds so as not to lose them, because if he lost the seeds, he would lose his commitment to his father and grandfather, as well as to his daughters. He felt he must respect this commitment to his family, as well as to the other farmers with whom he exchanges, to plant and reproduce what he has gained from them. Throughout time, people come and go, but the seeds are the link that must continue, he concluded.

Juan also told me his father used to exchange seeds with his bothers, but now they are conventional farmers, and are more interested in quick economic gains, but seed selection and reproduction is slow. Another farmer, Carlos, also told me that his brothers are conventional farmers, and that his ties with them have been weakened through his conversion to organic agriculture. This made the connections to like-minded organic farmers, fostered through the seed exchanges, all the more important. Seeds have thus become a mediator of these new social networks.

Janet Carsten (1995) has introduced the term *relatedness* as a way of describing how Malay people become kin by living and consuming together, rather than through blood ties. This is part of recent literature in anthropology that has been exploring non-biological ways of understanding social networks after Schneider's (1984) critique of the Western assumptions implicit in biological kinship theory. The relation between seed knowledge and kinship networks has also been reported elsewhere. In Kenya, a recent study found that seed knowledge is mostly passed down through kinship ties (Kiptot, Franzel et al. 2006).

The stories of Paolo and Carlos suggest that the social networks created through seed exchanges in Costa Rica are an extension of earlier kin networks, where seeds were traditionally exchanged with family members, to a network of relatedness with peers. These new relationships may also begin to mimic family relations. Andrea summed up her

experiences with seed exchange thus:

Seed exchange has given me the possibility to meet people in all parts of the country. The exchange of seeds with people changes the relationship to them, makes them more familiar, and later these relationships are maintained. I see them as part of my family. I have the possibility that they can come to my house, stay with us. Now we have a closer relationship.

The voices of these farmers show that the social networks that they are forming through seed exchanges are emerging into fictive kin groups, sometimes replacing ties with family, and at other times complementing relations to family members. The exchange of seeds, then, is used to affirm and create relationships and social networks, with both biological and fictive kin.

Saving seeds

Seed-saving and selection are important elements of their farming practice for many organic farmers. When I visited farms, they showed me the bins upon bins of seeds that they collect. They try them first in a small plot on the farm, to see if they take at all, and if so, plant more the next year. One farmer from Costa Rica wrote passionately about her seed-saving practices for the Planet Diversity meetings in Bonn in 2008:

Farmers used to harvest and save their seeds, but now it is different. It is easier to go to the grocery store and buy canned food than to plant something. People ask me why I like saving seeds, and I explain: I prepare the soil, make a hole, place the seed in it, and cover it up. Then I wait patiently for the seed to germinate, asking my God to give me a hand. Finally the first little plants emerge from the soil. This is the moment to give them a little organic fertilizer, and they climb with the help of a post, and begin to flower. It is very moving to see the various pollinators arrive, such as bees, carpenter bees, ladybugs, butterflies, hummingbirds, and orchid bees... There is no greater emotion than to see a pod full of eight or ten beans of an intense red color when you are about to harvest them, or when you select the best pods for saving seeds (Mora 2008).

Many farmers also mentioned that an important commitment comes with seed exchange. One older woman says she always remembers to whom she has given seeds, and asks the recipient if they have planted them. If they have not, she will stop giving them seeds: “Once, twice, maybe, but after that...” she commented, her voice trailing off with a dismissive wave of the hand. Often as I walked through farmers’ fields, they showed me

along the edges their small experiments: “This amaranth I got from some colleagues from Talamanca a few years ago. The first year it didn’t work so well, but look now, it’s looking better...” The farmers’ fields, then, are embodiments, quite literally, of the seed exchanges in which the farmers have participated. These fields can thus be seen as an agricultural variation on the notion of personhood in Melanesia, where persons come to be composed of other persons with whom they have engaged in ceremonial exchanges (Strathern 1991). The commitments and communication that continue after the act of exchange serve to reinforce the importance of the seed exchanges socially.

Seed symbols

I attended four such seed exchange festivals in Costa Rica. They were organized by MAOCO and its member organizations, intended to promote the exchange of seeds and knowledge about seeds, and in later phases, help a few farmers devote larger areas of their farms specifically to improving seed production methods and techniques. A larger seed project, funded by the United Nations Development Program, was an attempt to bring together the experience of several similar projects that had been or were still being carried out by smaller farmer-NGO networks. What all these projects have in common is that they are based on an understanding of the farmer as the expert on seed production and the necessity to promote the sharing and exchange of that knowledge, along with the seeds.

While the seed projects were ways of promoting farmer information and knowledge exchange, seeds were also being used as a powerful cultural symbol, intended to spread information to the broader public about both the importance of organic and traditional agriculture, and the threats that farmers perceived the passage of CAFTA would hold for their way of life (Carazo, Lizano et al. 2007).

Several of the seed exchange festivals were held in conjunction with cultural

festivals, in one case together with the 30 year anniversary of Agua Zarcas' student orchestra, and in another with the celebration of the patron saint of the town of San Ramón. In San Ramón there were two days of activities planned for the seed festival, and on Sunday, all those present participated in a mass, where arrangements had been made with the Priest that the mass that day would have the theme of seeds.

When we arrived to the Cathedral, it was still half empty, and everyone walked around looking at the floats and statues of other towns' patron saints. In the next half hour, however, the Cathedral filled up to the point where not even standing room was left, and many people were still crowded around outside the various entrances. About halfway through the ceremony, various representatives of the town had the opportunity to bring objects up to the altar to be blessed. As part of the procession, an older gentleman and a young woman representing MAOCO, each took one side of a basket of seeds and brought it up to the altar. After the seeds had been blessed, the Priest addressed seeds in the sermon too, connecting them directly to families, emphasizing that love and nurture are the most important elements in maintaining a family, just as they are in cultivating plants and seeds.

At the end of mass, as people embraced those next to them to spread peace, the representatives of MAOCO began handing the blessed bean seeds around. As the beans slowly progressed, hand-to-hand, throughout the Cathedral, I saw people excitedly reaching for them and discussing them. One of the organizers told me later on the way home how moved she was as she handed the seeds to people in the Church, because people had really wanted them, and some had even come up and asked for more. She explained that she could tell that many of them were farmers by their calloused and worked hands, and that for them these seeds were a real treasure.

The popular appeal of this seed ritual in the crowded Cathedral suggests that the importance and symbolic value of seeds, and their exchange, is much more widespread than

just among a select group of organic farmers. Indeed many farmers told me that their conventional smallholder neighbors don't buy all of their seeds either, but save them. Thus for conventional farmers also farmer-saved seed represents a degree of autonomy in farming that they have maintained despite their increasing reliance on other inputs.

Seeds were used repeatedly as a cultural symbol at other events as well. At a Sustainable Schools project event, children released balloons with little paper bags of organic seeds tied to them, so that wherever the balloons land, organic plants would grow. A seed-spreading ritual similar to the one performed in the Church was planned by MAOCO later that year at a large anti-CAFTA protest outside the Parliament building, because passage of the free-trade agreement would introduce new laws regarding intellectual property rights for plant genetic material, thus potentially threatening the tradition of seed exchange.³⁸ So worried were farmers in Costa Rica about the future of their seeds, and the social networks with which they are linked, that when I casually mentioned to an organizer in San Ramon that they are fortunate to have such seed exchanges, because they are in effect already illegal in Latvia, I was immediately taken over to a journalist with a microphone, and asked to tell the story on a radio interview for farmers, to demonstrate the type of threats that they foresaw the ratification of CAFTA could bring.

Downgrading “seeds”

The story I told during the interview in San Ramón was of a very different scene that had unfolded in Latvia only months before. As I was taking notes at the LBLA General Assembly, I looked up in amazement. ‘Am I really understanding this correctly?’ I thought to myself. I checked later with some other participants, and they confirmed it was true. It

³⁸ After the CAFTA Referendum, however, as the struggle against the so-called Implementation Agenda continued, several organizations were planning a protest at the houses of the Members of Parliament who were planning on voting for the UPOV intellectual property rights agreement. The end of the protest was planned as a “shower of seeds” to be directed at the doors and windows of the houses. This changes dramatically the symbol of the seed from one of connections to one that shows new divisions in society.

was now two years after the EU Regulation on Mandatory Organic Seed had taken effect in Latvia, and an official from one of the organic certification inspection agencies was explaining the new rules. As part of the “field to fork” organic approach, the regulations had been made stricter, requiring organic farmers to use organic seeds for all crops where they were commercially available. For the new EU member states, with few or no commercial organic seed producers, and only a few State Breeding Stations that produce organic seed, this regulation would cause a headache, to say the least. According to the regulation, if organic seed was not readily available, farmers could request a derogation, or temporary exception, to use conventional seed. In the first year of implementation, there was a blanket derogation for everyone, and little had changed.

For the second year, the Ministry of Agriculture had decided that it was not helping the situation to have a blanket derogation, because they at least needed information on who was planting what, in order to know what types of organic seeds should be produced or imported. At the General Assembly, farmers’ jaws dropped as they listened to the proposed changes. Starting with the current season, there would be no more blanket derogation for use of conventional seeds, and each farmer would have to ask in advance for a permission to buy the specific variety and amount of conventional seeds that he or she needed.³⁹

More shockingly however, farmer-saved seed was no longer to be considered “seed” at all, but was now to re-classified as *dīgstošie graudi*, or “germinating grain.” Although farmers would be allowed to continue using their own saved *dīgstošie graudi*, all seeds they were planning on obtaining from outside their own farm had to be certified seed, meaning that they have to be registered with and tested by the State Plant Protection Department to meet varietal purity and minimal quality standards, in effect criminalizing farmer seed

³⁹ They were told not to worry, that as long as the forms were filled out correctly (which often is not as simple as it sounds- see Chapter 6 on land surveying and administrative problems), they would be granted the derogations.

exchange or trade.

This meant that organic seeds must henceforth be double certified- first as seed, and then as organic. This was the result of the simultaneous implementation the Organic Seed regulation together with the EU Seed Marketing laws that require seed certification (requirements explained in more detail below). While the Seed Marketing laws had been in effect since EU accession in 2004, organic certifiers had not been checking where seed came from. The requirement for double-certified seed caused a variety of problems for farmers, who since they regained their farms, had begun saving and trading seed with neighbors. Initially at least, this was done mostly to save money. Verdery (2003) notes that in Romania farmers returned to seed-saving practices in the times of economic hardship immediately following the collapse of socialism. But during the 15 years of independence, some organic farmers in Latvia had invested much energy in adapting seeds to local and organic growing conditions. The new problem for most farmers now was not ensuring that their seed was certified organic, because all of their farms were already certified as organic. The real problem was ensuring the “quality” of the seed through seed certification. The perverse effect that emerged from the implementation of these two sets of laws together was that the use of imported, conventional seed was favored over native or locally-adapted organic seed.⁴⁰

At the meeting, as farmers began to raise their voices in protest, asking various questions about the way the new system of obtaining permissions for conventional seeds would work, the discussion was soon cut short by an official: “Really, you, as organic farmers should be thinking about how to produce or obtain organic seed, not how to get permissions for conventional seed. I was told by the seed company ‘*Kurzemes sēklas*’ that they have imported organic seed that no one is buying.” While many organic farmers agree

⁴⁰ An official at the Plant Protection Office noted in 2007 that unofficial and barter exchanges were certainly still happening and could not be effectively controlled.

that organic seeds are important for the production of organic food, I heard many grumblings afterwards about the new regulation. Some claimed they had called *Kurzemes sēklas* and all the Breeding Stations and that there were in fact none of the seeds they needed. Others were dismayed that they could no longer buy seeds from their colleagues, whose “germinating grains” they knew and trusted.

At various points I also heard exasperation from state officials about the fact that so few farmers had registered as seed growers, despite the fact that new subsidies were being offered to encourage this specialization. In the first year, most of the subsidies went unused. From the perspective of the farmers, however, the process is not so simple. At a seminar an older farmer, Natālija, told me that she still recalled how her mother used to produce carrot seeds in a special plot further away from other fields, and she remembered the various stages in the process. She was considering taking out the seed growers’ subsidy, because she knew that most of the younger people in her vegetable cooperative had never actually participated in the seed production process. She explained that only their grandparents would remember, because seed production had been centralized on *kolhozes* during Soviet times. She wanted to share her knowledge with her younger colleagues. At the next meeting of the vegetable co-op, they discussed the possibility. One by one people started saying what they knew about the requirements, however, and many feared that they wouldn’t be able to meet them. They would also need large initial investments that they could not afford at the moment, and finally decided not to apply for the subsidy.

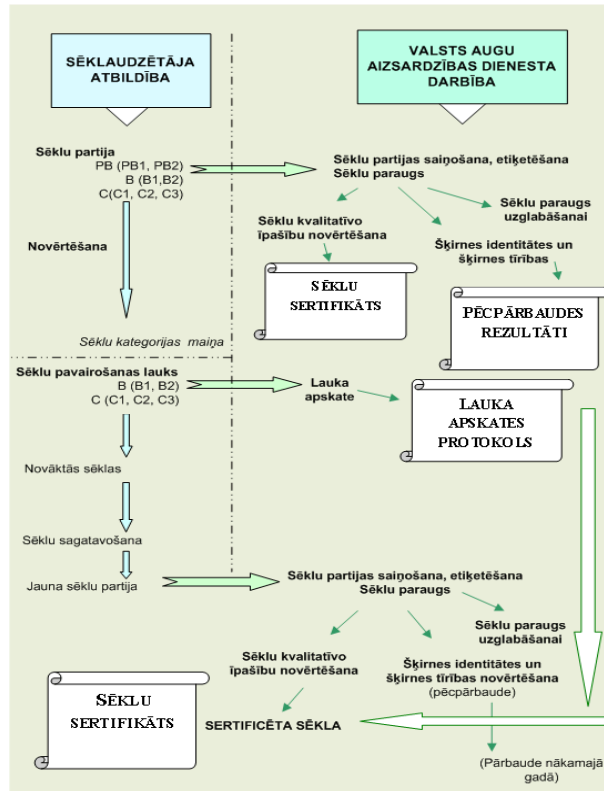


Figure 3.1: Diagram of steps required for seed certification in Latvia (please refer to text below for explanation) Source: <http://www.vaad.gov.lv/default.aspx?tabID=12&lang=1&id=49>.

According to the complicated diagram on the State Plant Protection Agency's website (see Figure above), in order to certify seeds, the grower must be registered in the seed growers' registry, and the seed variety he or she is growing must be registered in the Latvian plant variety catalog. Then the grower must obtain permission from the owner of the variety to reproduce the seed. The seeds are tested for germination rates, moisture percentage and disease, but also for exhibiting the characteristics of the variety, and the uniformity of the sample. All in all, the process includes six steps and twenty different types of administrative paperwork. This does indeed add a whole new dimension to the process of seed production, and a whole new skill set to that which Natālija recalled that her parents used to do.

In 2007 I met some Latvian colleagues at an international conference, eager to find

out about what had changed and how the implementation of the regulation had proceeded. They explained that the Ministry had changed the rules once again. Apparently there had been problems with too many people asking for derogations to use conventional seed, so they had introduced a 7 Euro fee per derogation. This would add to the burdens on the farmers, but not necessarily improve availability or use of organic seeds.

Seed papers

As of the end of 2006, only four farms and several plant breeding stations in the country had registered to produce double-certified seed. I visited one of these farmers, Marta, who conceded that she had had several problems getting her seed certified. For instance, she grows both red clover and timothy grass together in one field, because the clover helps to fertilize the timothy in the organic system. This was considered contamination by the seed inspectors, however, and they told her they could not certify a field with mixed crops. Marta was certain that more people had not registered as seed growers because the regulations were too strict.

As a seed grower, Marta must buy fresh “foundation” seed stock from the breeding station every few years to ensure that the genetic purity of the material is not contaminated. I asked Marta what would happen if she didn’t purchase new seeds every few years, but simply let the grasses cross-pollinate, and selected her own seeds. At first she was puzzled by the idea, and said, “But then my documents would be out of order...” Thinking about it more, she added that the seed quality would be lost. She explained that the variety would lose its characteristics, but prefaced her answers with an ambiguous “they say...,” and seemed to become less and less certain of her answers as she spoke. Finally she concluded that after all, “selection is selection” and should be done by the breeding stations, not her, because they have all the appropriate technology.

There appears to be a relatively wide range of seed practices in use. Some younger farmers, like Linda, were surprised to hear about seed-saving practices in Costa Rica, because it is not something that has ever occurred to her. She studied in an agricultural vocational school in the last years of the Soviet Union, and they were never taught anything about seed-saving. She regained her family's land in the early 1990s, but seeds have always been something she buys. Some older farmers told me somewhat secretively, however, that they save and reproduce tomato seeds, and several grain farmers mentioned that they use only their own seeds. When I asked one grain farmer how often he purchased fresh seed stock, he replied, "Well, if you select the best ones, then you can keep using them. It's just that most people don't." And many farmers who have been working organically for a number of years do have some old varieties- onions and fava beans, and some they have gotten from other farmers.⁴¹ One grain farmer told me he has been selecting his own varieties and has adapted some dinkel wheat from Germany to local conditions. A representative of the State Plant protection office confirmed that there is no reliable data about how many people are following the rules, and how many are still purchasing germinating grains from their neighbors. If farmers do so, however, they may have problems with the organic certifiers, and their papers won't be in order. In Latvia, then, it is papers and permits, rather than seeds, that are mediating social relations. Furthermore, the relationships get transformed from relations among farmers, to relations between experts and farmers.

Legislating diversity or preserving purity

In both Costa Rica and Latvia, very recent changes in legislation have had a key role in the way that certain types of seeds, and processes associated with the reproduction of those

⁴¹ After independence imported seed became popular and many farmers who had been saving seeds from old vegetable varieties in their private gardens throughout the Soviet years lost their seeds. In the last ten years several genetic resources projects have sent scientists out to the countryside to search for old varieties still in use with little success.

seeds, are being promoted or prevented. While the emphasis in Costa Rica is on preserving diversity, both of plants and growers, in Latvia it is on the purity of the seed stock. In Costa Rica, the use, exchange and protection of *semillas criollas* is included as a measure in the new Costa Rican Law on Organic Agriculture, approved by the Legislative Assembly on September 7, 2006⁴² (see Chapter Seven for more on the process). The law carries strong language about the significance and protection of “creole” seeds. The law defines *semillas criollas* as:

seeds that correspond to varieties cultivated and developed by agricultural persons and local communities. *Independent of their origin*, they are adapted to local agricultural practices and ecosystems [emphasis added] (La Asamblea Legislativa de la Republica de Costa Rica 2007).

This definition indicates that it is not the genetic material that is of primary importance, but rather the people, practices, and environment in which they are cultivated. This is noteworthy given the term *criollo*, which originated to describe people of Spanish descent born in the Americas:

Let us clarify that the essential and determining condition of having been born in the New World is not a mere phrase or an accident. The land, vegetation and climate that the colonials found on the recently discovered continent were so different from those which they left on the other side of the sea, that in the process of adapting to these new physical conditions, they improvise cultural solutions, as well, that are distinct from those in their communities of origin (Arrom 1951:172).

This shows that even in this original usage the idea of adaptation was an incredibly important aspect of what defined *criollo*.

This is not to say that in *semillas criollas* the genetic material is not of any importance at all. The law goes on to declare that it is the role of the State and its institutions to:

promote, stimulate and protect the right of agricultural persons and organizations to access, use, exchange, multiply and save *semillas criollas*, with the aim of preserving

⁴² Due to a procedural error, the law had to be re-approved by the Legislative Assembly in June 2007, but passed unanimously again.

the *creole genetic heritage* for the benefit of current and future agricultural producers [emphasis added].

The combination of these two clauses reveals that according to this law, the genetic heritage that is worth preserving is not limited to certain scientifically determined types, varieties, or qualities of seeds, but rather to all the seeds and propagating material that local farmers have selected, preserved, and exchanged throughout generations. Furthermore, the local adaptation and mixing themselves are crucial. Therefore it establishes the social relations surrounding production, reproduction, and exchange of seeds as the most important elements of the system, and relates them directly to the mixed genetic heritage of the seeds.

This emphasis on the exchange of seeds has direct connections with and implications for biodiversity, because it promotes the use of a large number and wide variety of species, and the continuous cross-pollination of landraces and establishment of locally adapted varieties. These landraces and local varieties, due to their mixed genetic structure, are more likely to be resistant to pests, diseases, or adverse growing conditions than are introduced “improved” seeds (Cleveland, Soleri et al. 1994; Brush 1999; vom Brocke, Christinck et al. 2003).

The emphasis on seeds as diverse and embedded in local cultural practices in the Costa Rican context contrasts sharply with the emphasis on purity in the European legislation in place in Latvia. As noted above, the scenario I watched unfold in Latvia was a result of the simultaneous implementation of various EU regulations. The first one is the EU Regulation on Mandatory Organic Seed (1452/2003), described above. In addition, seed certification is mandated by a set of European Council Directives on the Marketing of Cereal, Beet, Fodder, Seed Potatoes, and Seed of Oil and Fiber Plants, the first of which were passed in the 1960s.

To take one example, the Preamble to the Directive on the Marketing of Cereal Seed (66/402/EEC) establishes the rationale for the law:

Whereas satisfactory results in cereal cultivation depend to a large extent on the use of appropriate seed; whereas to this end certain Member States have for some time restricted the marketing of cereal seed to high-quality seed; whereas they have been able to take advantage of the systematic plant selection work carried out over several decades which has resulted in the development of sufficiently stable and uniform cereal varieties which, by reason of their characters, promise to be of great value... (1966).

The law does not define explicitly the terms “high quality seed”, or “character”, but establishes minimal standards for varietal purity and identity, and detailed criteria for seed certification, such as specific distances that must be maintained between certain types of crops to avoid “foreign” pollination. It also sets out maximum allowable levels of “contamination” from seeds of other species or pests, and minimal moisture content. The law goes on to define the descent lines and generations of seeds that are acceptable at various stages of seed certification to maintain the genetic purity of seeds.

The emphasis on purity has the opposite effect on biodiversity than *semillas criollas*, by restricting the number of varieties of seeds that can be marketed. Genetic erosion, or the loss of old varieties, has been attributed directly to the exclusion of countless varieties of plants from the European Common Catalogue (Maggioni 2004). It was not until 1998 that the EU began working on a Conservation Variety directive for the production of seeds in small quantities for conservation purposes rather than for marketing as agricultural commodities. Even the Conservation Varieties directive, however, does not really go far enough in the eyes of its critics, because it limits the use of these varieties to certain geographic areas of their origin and to very restricted amounts (GRAIN 2008). Thus the potential for genetic exchange to the extent seen in Costa Rica, and still practiced throughout many countries with traditional agricultural systems, is still limited.

Moreover, this emphasis on the genetic purity of the seed for seed certification, in combination with the environmental purity required for organic certification, puts a double emphasis on purity, but in a way that can be contradictory. The regulation for organic

agriculture prohibits the use of chemical inputs, but also is aimed at maintaining ecosystem health and biodiversity by using a holistic approach, for which the promotion of landraces and genetic mixing are also very important. Interestingly, however, while derogations can be obtained for the use of conventional seed where organic seed is not available, the same is not true for obtaining derogations for use of old varieties or landraces that are not in the Common Catalogue.⁴³ Thus, the organic integrity of the seed is subordinated to genetic purity. The issue of seed certification was also not, until recently, a key lobbying point by the organic movement in Europe, because it is much broader than just an organic issue.⁴⁴

In addition to the requirements of EU regulations, Latvia's new situation is also influenced by its membership in UPOV, the Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants. This is an international convention protecting breeders' intellectual property rights and regulating the registration of new varieties. This Convention became incredibly controversial in Costa Rica in 2008, but in Latvia passed very quickly after independence with hardly any debate from social movements (see Chapter Seven for more on the UPOV controversy in Costa Rica).

Displaced kinship, cut networks

For rural persons, the cultivation, care and exchange of *semillas criollas* is a fundamental right....*Semillas criollas* are the future of our Latin American countries, or Latin America will be left without a future. They are part of our ancestral culture, part of our history, and a piece of our lives.

-Manifesto on the *Semilla Criolla* (MAOCO 2007)

To provide and promote an effective system for plant variety protection, with the aim of encouraging the development of new varieties of plants, for the benefit of society.

– Mission of the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV)

The fundamental difference then, as captured in the two quotes above, is between

⁴³ I did hear unofficial reports that inspectors in some old Member States were making exceptions, but this is unconfirmed.

⁴⁴ Some members of the IFOAM EU group are active on the Conservation Varieties directive, but the idea of criticizing the entire system of seed certification was controversial within the group.

placing value on the diversity of seeds and the variety of people who cultivate them, as an embodiment of local cultures and histories, to valuing *particular varieties* of plants, with the genetic characteristics that they exhibit, and the breeders who have “created” them, for the benefit of an anonymous and generic “society”. On one level, the difference between the two legislations has elements of a “nature-nurture” debate, the European legislation putting emphasis on the genetic characteristics of the seed and the Costa Ricans on the adaptation of the seeds to local conditions and their nurture by cultivators.

Both of these legislative frameworks for seed production rely on metaphors of kinship or relatedness, but emphasize different elements of it. In Costa Rica it is the network of kin (real and fictive) who trade the seed that are important, whereas in Latvia in the EU legislation, it is the genealogy and heritage of the seed itself that matters. Rather than interpreting this as simply a difference in context between two field sites. I suggest that this is a necessary transposition, to displace the idea of kinship from the social networks within which the cultural significance of the seed is produced, to the seed itself. This is a necessary step in order for the seed to be commodified and controlled, and has important implications for the social networks associated with seeds. This is similar to Marx’s concept of alienation as a step in commodification, whereby a person is separated from the fruits of his or her labor. Only here, exchange is what in fact produces the seed in its current form, rather than labor per se. The communities who are doing the exchanging are thus being separated from the fruits of their labor if their seeds are removed from exchange circles.

Franklin and Lury (2000) discuss the rise of heirloom seed companies in the US, which market landraces and old variety seeds as a way of preserving both natural and cultural biodiversity. They emphasize the kinship metaphor that is used in marketing these seeds as “heirloom:”

In such claims molecular genetic kinship is evoked as a fabric of interconnectedness,

manifesting the biological imperative of diversity, and thus the basis of life itself. Genealogy is the master trope in this web of connections uniting ancient farmer-cultivators with their modern-day descendents, who are similarly engaged in the preservation of lineages of seed-value (81).

What is striking in comparing this analysis to the Costa Rican example above is that by taking heirloom seeds out of the context in which they have been selected, saved, and exchanged for generations and turning them into a commodity in a global niche market, the meaning of kinship in these seeds has been displaced and changed. For the Costa Rican farmers, seed exchanges embody their kinship and friendship ties. Rather than being an anonymous and imagined link between “ancient farmer-cultivators and modern-day descendents”, the exchange of seeds is a very real network of past, present, and future ties. Farmers inherit seeds from their parents and grandparents, yet also exchange them with friends. They perhaps even expect the gift of seeds, as shown in the farmers’ reactions to my gifts of tea, and in gifts of seeds I received despite protests that I did not have any place to plant them.

The new social ties are also maintained after the moment of the exchange, through following up how the seeds have grown in the new soil and returning new cross-pollinated seeds to those who had supplied the original. At the seed festival in Turrialba, Andrea introduced me to her friend Anna and said, “We first met at a seed festival, and now every time we go to the festivals, we hope to see each other again.” And of course, the seeds are also being preserved for future generations. But the genetic lineage of these seeds is directly linked to, and dependent upon the social kin networks through which they are exchanged. This means that the seeds themselves are actually made up of the all of the previous kin and exchanges, in another variant of Melanesian personhood. And if the exchange stops, then so will the preservation and potential of diversity, because the genetic mixing will be arrested.

In the example of the heirloom seed company in New Mexico, this sort of connection

with people has been made impossible in a scenario where a seed from some distant culture is chosen from a catalogue, purchased by a gardener in a North American suburb and most likely not saved or exchanged again. Thus, the kinship metaphor gets placed onto the seed itself- it becomes the seeds' genetic history (rather than people's social history) that makes it "heirloom." And while the seeds may in fact *reproduce* the genetic history of a culture up to a certain point in time, they do so in the absence of the social structures of exchange that have made those seeds into a cultural value to begin with. Unless they continue to be exchanged and planted afterwards, they will slowly lose that "heritage." At a seeds and biodiversity conference in Germany an African farmer stood up to express his disbelief at the very idea of gene banks as a form of conservation, because this "freezes" the seed's development, thus missing the point all together in his eyes. This poses a fundamental challenge to the claim, and many people's belief, that simply purchasing and planting heirloom seeds will somehow preserve cultural, as well as natural, biodiversity.

The changes associated with this displacement of kinship from the growers' social network to the seed itself are an example of what Strathern (1996) has called "cutting the network." She describes how imposing property rights or patents truncate social networks by restricting the number of participants and curtailing relations between persons. This displacement of kinship and cutting of the network is evident in the European seed system, where it is the genetic purity of the seed that is traced and monitored. The seed reproduction process necessary for seed certification relies on various genealogical idioms. Seeds are reproduced in various "generations" and "lines." The first generation is the "foundation" or "basic" seed, or in kinship terms, the ancestor "created" by the breeder. The careful attention to, and documenting of, the lineage of each seed by the breeder detracts attention from the fact that the exchange of seeds among kin and friends has been replaced with monetary and paperwork transactions, transforming the nature and possibility of social networks.

This emphasis on different elements of the kinship metaphor - on the social network or on the seed itself- has a parallel to the distinction that Roberts (2007) draws between the way in which US discourse surrounding embryos for in-vitro fertilization emphasizes the “life” of the embryo, while in Ecuador, what is important is the embryo’s kin. This leads to reservations about freezing and preserving “extra embryos” in Ecuador, because they would in effect be abandoned by their parents. In contrast, in the US each embryo is considered a “life” that has been donated by an anonymous donor, and that could be adopted by any, anonymous, kin. This facilitates both the preservation and the “free trade” of the embryos. Similarly, the reversal of exchanging seeds with kin, to tracing the kin of seeds, enables seeds to become anonymous commodities.

Bad seeds

This displacement of the kinship idiom has important effects on how seed quality is defined and how seeds interact with other elements of agricultural systems. First, it isolates distinct characteristics of the seed or plant, as distinguished by its variety, from other factors in the agricultural system. This renders them elements that can be improved upon, rather than seeing food production as a holistic system. Dunn (2004), in describing the privatization of a Polish baby-food company by Gerber, describes the effects of the turn towards “total quality management” that has swept through industries with the implementation of various standards like the ISO (International Organization for Standardization) and others. This breaks the production process down into many repeatable, measurable steps. The qualities of the inputs or products, like carrots, also get measured individually in order to determine if the carrots are useable. Similarly, then, the isolation of the seed and its genetic characteristics that must be met to be designated a uniform and stable variety, divorces the seed from the rest of the agricultural production process, and renders the seed replaceable. This is a version

of atomization in the steps towards commodification.

The normative language of the EU regulations establishes a clear difference between appropriate, or good seeds, and bad ones. In Latvia, I often heard representatives of the Association and various lecturers at extension courses mention the bad quality of seeds in Latvia, referring usually to germination rate and yield. This was considered one of the main reasons why seed certification was important. There was a general concern that yields are lower than in Western Europe, and that promoting the use of certified seed will help resolve this issue. When I shared some stories with Mudīte from LBLA about colleagues from other groups within Europe who were working on trying to fight double certification, she said: “Yes, but we have the problem with quality...” The connection between seed quality and varietal purity is also taken for granted by many farmers in Latvia, as shown by Marta’s response about her seed papers and quality.

Indeed, the concern with quality of Latvian seeds is widespread. When I followed up with some Western Europeans about their experience with these regulations, I got a reply from a colleague who noted that some farmers should be urged to specialize in seed production, because at any rate, “to ensure high quality” it is best to have seeds certified. In fact at a European conference on organic farming, a Swiss researcher who had been to Latvia approached me after I had asked a question about how new Member States like Latvia should deal with implementing these new regulations. He said to me, “But you really do need to improve the quality of seeds in Latvia.” I explained that from what I had seen, organic agriculture in Latvia did not have one simple problem that could be solved by buying better seeds. On many Latvian organic farms, there are many issues interacting at once that make the issue of “seed quality” a moot point. Take, for instance, the case of Anita, who had no stable market to sell her organic potatoes due to low consumer purchasing power in the countryside and high transportation costs to transport them to the capital. There were also no

certified processing facilities where she could sell them, so most of the potatoes were used in the home, given away to friends and relatives, and fed to the pigs. The pigs, of course, could also not be sold as organic, because there are no certified slaughterhouses, so they were also mostly used at the subsistence level. So what would she gain by purchasing “higher quality” seed potatoes, besides more expensive pork for home use? The purchase of higher quality seeds would not help resolve the broader range of socio-economic issues that attribute to the problems that Latvian organic farmers are experiencing (see Chapter Four for more on the economic problems). And if problems do lie at the level of seed quality, is seed certification the only way of solving them, or could carefully monitored farmer seed-selection accomplish the same goals?

In contrast, in Costa Rica no one ever mentioned bad quality seeds. Whenever farmers spoke of traded or saved seeds that had not grown successfully on their land, they explained it either as a case of the seed not taking to the soil, climate, or even the farmer him/herself, but never talked about “bad quality seeds.” This is not to say that they did not recognize that there might be some seeds that would not germinate because they had not been stored properly, etc., but “quality” was not used as an umbrella category for problems at the farm level. When asked to define good quality seeds, they looked just as puzzled as Marta had looked at my suggestion that she could select her own seeds. “Well, it starts with the whole growing process....you look at the healthiest plants, the vines with the most pods, the pods with the most beans, the intensity of the color....”

This attention to the entire growing process, rather just measuring certain isolated qualities of an isolated seed point to the fact that in Costa Rica seeds are embedded not only in a social network of people who exchange them, but in an ecological web as well. Since seeds are not considered good or bad, then it is the growing conditions, or the techniques used, or most likely, a combination of factors that determine a seed’s success. Thus, a

grower may try unsuccessful seeds in a different place, or give them to others who have different growing conditions. This approach encourages more experimentation as well. Indeed, nearly every farmer with whom I spoke about organic farming mentioned experimentation as one of the most important elements of their farming practice. And another element in the new Costa Rican law on organic agriculture is support for “farmer-experimenters” who use innovative approaches on their farms.

Assuming that improving quality is the main intention or effect of seed certification is perhaps misleading. The history of seed certification in the US is instructive for understanding the role that it might play in Latvia during its continued post-socialist, post-EU accession transition. Collection of plant genetic material began in the US in 1839 with the Global plant germplasm collection at the US Patent Office, and the first seed certification programs in both the US and Western Europe began in the early 1900s (Kloppenborg 1988). Seed certification was useful to US farmers at first- to help fight against deceitful seed companies. This effect was quite unlike the deskilling effect that came with the introduction of hybrid corn 30 years later (Cooke 2002). After the introduction of hybrid corn in 1935, however, there was much greater incentive for private seed companies to invest in plant breeding. This is because they had gained control over the seed as a commodity by separating the functions of production and reproduction, by making hybrids where the first generation of plants is extremely healthy, but the second one practically unviable. This kept farmers coming back to the seed store. In the succeeding decades private seed companies tried to eliminate competition from public institutions and land grant Universities in breeding. In the 1960s when negotiating the US Plant Variety Protection Act, seed companies fought hard against mandatory seed regulation, and against including “quality” as a criterion for seed certification. This allows US seed companies to register and market almost identical seeds, thus making certification more of a marketing tool than insurance of quality

(Kloppenburg 1988). In fact Kloppenburg sees the two spheres of science and marketing as so closely linked in this case that he concludes: “A novel and useful way of thinking about agricultural research is to view it as the incorporation of science into the historical process of primitive accumulation and commodification”(10).

Seed certification in the EU is also closely connected to the marketing and commercialization of seed. The series of EU directives which mandate seed certification for commercial agricultural crops are the Seed Marketing Directives, and while they do still include quality measures, these are not their main objective. On the contrary, the point is to restrict marketing to only the highest-yielding varieties. This is partially because the laws were introduced in the post-War Europe when productivity was a prime concern. Now, however, large seeds companies own the majority of the global seedstock, and do not want to let go of that power. In 2000, the top ten global seed companies controlled 31% of the global seed market, and owned hundreds of small seed companies. The largest companies are in fact the largest agro-chemical producers as well, such as Pioneer, Monsanto, Novartis, Syngenta, Dupont, and others (RAFI 2000). In Latvia, however, the distinction between quality and control over commodities has been particularly obscured because implementation of the Seed Marketing laws came together with the regulation on Mandatory Organic Seed, and many farmers did not realize that it was actually two separate laws.

Making seeds legible

The EU’s Seed Marketing laws are also a good example of how the EU laws attempt to make “legible” the various complicated practices of its Member States and their farmers. The first laws passed in the 1960s, when the EU was also interested in what could be considered the “high modernist” goals (Scott 1998) of promoting high-yielding varieties and increasing agricultural productivity. The laws are structured by commodity groups, which

correspond directly to the ideas of monocropping that were part of the post- World War II Green Revolution agricultural model. The EU has made considerable progress in reforming its agricultural system in the past ten years to dismantle many of the productivist tenets of the Common Agricultural Policy and introduce alternative practices such as Agri-environmental schemes and Rural Development programs to decouple payments from production and place a greater emphasis on the environment. Given this, it is surprising that exactly these trade laws have not come under tighter scrutiny and still carry such weight. Thus, much like the forestry and agricultural schemes that Scott (1998) describes, the seed marketing laws simplify and standardize breeding procedures and requirements, with the aim of producing a common variety catalogue for the European Community. This is an “administrative ordering of nature and society” (4) that will make the make plants and seeds easier to “count, manipulate, measure and assess” (15).

This rendering legible of plant breeding practices also has social implications, because along with the isolation of particular characteristics of plants and varieties, it isolates the producers and deskills them. Several authors have shown how the increasing emphasis on “quality” in food production, as described above, has also put new demands on the laborers. In the Gerber plant in post-socialist Poland, Dunn (2004) points out that through the process of testing the quality of the carrots and the baby food, the workers themselves get “privatized” along with the food products, or reduced to an aggregate of qualities that can be measured separately and improved upon, or ultimately replaced. In Alaskan salmon fisheries, the demands of having wild—caught fish meet the same quality standards as farmed fish puts new pressure on fishers to handle and clean the fish, and even the boats, differently than they had traditionally (Hébert 2008).

While a similar phenomenon can be observed in the implementation of organic food certification in Latvia, the issue of seed quality is different, because it in effect takes testing

for seed quality out of the realm of the farmer completely. Quality, based on objective measurable values such as germination rate and incidence of pests, is through the UPOV Convention on variety protection also associated with the exhibition of the “true” characteristics of the variety, and its stability and uniqueness. This means that ordinary farmers can never test all elements of their own seed quality; it must be done at a laboratory by professionals and officials. Furthermore, it encourages specialization in seed production, thus breaking the insurance of self-sufficiency for farmers who produce their own seeds and food. Only breeders can now produce legible, distinct, and uniform seeds that meet official standards. This creates hierarchical relationships between farmers, scientists, and officials, mediated through the exchange of bureaucratic documents, rather than vertical connections among farmers, mediated through the exchange of seeds.

Hébert (2008) discusses how for salmon, ensuring “quality” comes down to a process of erasing the marks of labor, so that it appears that the fish have “sprung effortlessly from the water to the plate.” For seeds then, it is the process of erasing nature- there should be no cross-pollination or adaptation – the seed, as reproduced in the field, should be as identical as possible to that which the breeder “created” and certified in a laboratory. Thus, both “nature” and the grower are controlled by the state, in conjunction with the “invisible hand” of the market. In the modern quality control systems, the paper trail also becomes Foucault’s “paper panopticum” which controls the worker (Dunn 2004). This is certainly true of seed certification, where both the seed producer and the variety have to be registered, and each step must be controlled and tested along the way, but also applies to organic certification in general (see Chapter Six).

Knowing seeds

The production of legible seeds mandates legible subjects, as well as a particular type

of knowledge. If at the Costa Rican seed exchanges the farmer is the expert, the one doing the cultivating, selecting, and protecting, in Latvia, the farmer, and his or her knowledge, get “downgraded” together with farmer-saved seed.⁴⁵ Consider the contrast between the atmosphere of friendly exchange of seeds and information among farmers described in the seed festival above, to a Latvian organic agriculture course on seed production which I attended.

At first the room went silent, as the organic farmers started working on their assignment, then slowly hands went up to ask the instructor questions, and people began consulting with one another, whispering or speaking out loud. “What does ‘a’ stand for again?” one farmer asked, with a frustrated expression. Suddenly the organic agriculture courses, free on a first-come first-served basis for the first time in 2005 due to funding from the EU, had turned into a high school math class, as farmers tried to apply the new formula they had just been taught for testing the germination rate of their seeds. The instructor asked them how many had done this before for their seeds, and most sheepishly looked down, while a few protested that they simply judge by inspecting their fields which seeds will be worth harvesting and did not test them.

I saw these frustrated expressions on farmers’ faces at a variety of extension courses and EU-funded seminars. In one seminar on animal feed, the instructor was teaching farmers to calculate the exact amount of grasses and proteins their cows need, depending on the animal’s weight, sex, and whether the animal is pregnant, lactating, etc. At one point the instructor asked the audience: “Do you know what the unit is called for calculating feed

⁴⁵ There is a conscious effort by many of the NGOs that support and cooperate with MAOCO to develop the expertise and confidence of the farmer. The most important is the *Campesino a campesino* (Farmer to farmer) program run by Coprolade, where a few members of each local group become agroecological promoters, or consultants that visit their colleagues’ farmers and give advice as consultants. This model, widespread throughout Cuba, Nicaragua and other countries in Latin America is both a way to make up for the lack of adequate extension services and to take back the idea of extension as something that is done by experts or *técnicos*.

rations?” One participant offered a response: “*barības vienība*” (feed unit). The instructor seemed almost a little pleased to say, “No, that’s the Soviet unit that we used to use. It’s been out of date for almost 20 years. Now we use ‘ADF’ and ‘NDF,’ which are used all across Europe.” As he explained the English acronyms for “Acid Detergent Fiber” and “Neutral Detergent Fiber,” and how their calculations differ from the Soviet “feed units,” some participants took notes. The farmer sitting next to me, Sandra, who is also a trained veterinarian, leaned over and whispered to me, “But if you just put out enough hay and silage, the animal eats what it needs.” But as we go through the grueling calculations of just how much of each food source is needed in the given example, she seems to second-guess herself: “Well, maybe it is wasteful, to have too much there that they just trample with their feet. The little bit of extra adds up over time.”

The new names, units, and formulas brought into the Latvian countryside along with EU accession have replaced the Soviet terms, which in turn replaced the Latvian terms from the first independence period, and represent a succession of political shifts of domination and control as embodied in farming practices and policies. One farmer recalled how red clover for cattle feed had been identified as a “bourgeois holdover” by the Soviets when Khrushchev tried to introduce corn production. Her theory was that the Latvian workers on the *kolhoz* had secretly sabotaged the corn harvest through overfertilization, so that they could plant barley or more traditional crops afterwards. While on one level there is a clear qualitative difference between Soviet occupation involving forced collectivization, and peaceful, voluntary EU accession that has brought a variety of benefits, in practical everyday terms, it makes little difference to the farmers *who* is telling them how to farm. EU skepticism has been growing steadily since accession, and it was not uncommon at seminars to hear exasperated farmers conclude that they had been simply thrown “from one Union to another,” and that Moscow had actually been easier to understand than Brussels.

Seeds of the past vs. seeds of change

Why is the issue of seeds being dealt with so differently in these two contexts, even by the farmers' organizations, and what does it tell us about how these two movements understand the role of organic agriculture in rural development in the context of regionalization and globalization? The history of seed legislation in each country helps to explain the different reactions by the two movements to these issues. This shows how the notion of certified seeds fits into the history and cultural imagination of each movement. These different attitudes towards seed re-production reflect different histories of seed production, use, and testing in the two countries, and also shed light on the different ways in which each country's organic movement sees its role in an increasingly regionalized and globalized world.

The Latvian State Plant Protection Service website proudly proclaims the long history of Latvian seed testing and control. The first testing office, mostly for research purposes, was opened in 1875 (still under the Russian czars), and the first commercial testing began in 1923, during Latvia's first, and brief, independence period. The site states that it was discovered that more than half of all seeds were "completely useless for planting." This led to implementation of voluntary seed-certification guidelines based on the Danish model in 1924. Due to low participation in this scheme, however, it was made mandatory in 1929, and the office soon also began controlling exported and imported clover and linseeds (Valsts augu aizsardzības dienests 2005). Finally, the department underwent various name changes but continued functioning through the Soviet period. The history of seed control and testing is presented as continuous and almost seamless from 1875 to the present.

On several occasions representatives of LBLA and of scientific institutions told me, "The biggest problem is that they made seed control and testing voluntary after independence. That's where all these problems come from," referring to problems with seed

quality. The brief removal of control between independence and EU accession, then, had been the break with the system according to these officials, not the current renewal of seed certification. As discussed in Chapter One, in Latvia the first independence period is also the reference point for many farmers as a prosperous time, romanticized by many who felt that the Soviet period was a break with the European history that began then (Eglitis 2002). This means that going back to the traditions of the independence period in the post-socialist era is seen as a “return to Europe” by integrating into the current form of the European Union. Thus the fact that seed certification and breeding started as early in Latvia as it did in other parts of Europe also symbolically affirms Latvia as a part of Europe. Drawing on these “seeds of the past” is in its own way a reenactment of the kinship metaphor, by tracing Latvian national ancestry in the family of Europe.⁴⁶

This situation is different in Costa Rica. Although at an international conference I did see a Nicaraguan farmer wearing a baseball cap with the logo “I use certified seed for a better crop,” which he said he had received from the Nicaraguan extension service, it is significant that during my whole initial period of fieldwork in Costa Rica, no one mentioned the National Seeds Office or seed certification, and not only until I began looking it up, did I realize that similar seed certification procedures did already exist in Costa Rica, even though they were not yet legally required and were not used by any of the organic farmers.

The history of the National Seeds Office in Costa Rica is very different than that of the Latvian history of seed certification. The Office was created only in 1981, as an outcome of the 1978 Seed law. This coincides with many of the neoliberal reforms that farmers

⁴⁶ As I will discuss elsewhere in the dissertation, however, the romanticized notion of “returning to Europe” is complicated by the fact that Europe itself has changed so much, especially in terms of agricultural policies. Thus, while seed certification in the 1920s and 1930s might really have been more about ensuring quality, as Cooke claims it was in the US, it has clearly taken on new functions for marketing and commodification that may be less compatible with the needs of Latvia’s current farmers. Cooke, K. 2002. Expertise, book farming, and government agriculture: The origins of agricultural seed certification in the United States. *Agricultural History* 76:524-545.

protested so vehemently in the 1980s, because they saw them as a breach of the traditions of the social welfare state (Edelman 1999). CAFTA is seen by many as the next and final stage in that “take-over” of the agricultural sector by US interests, because it would force seed certification and variety testing on them through the UPOV convention (see Chapter Seven). Thus, rather than symbolizing the “seeds of the past,” CAFTA, UPOV and seed certification are the “seeds of change” and the “cutting of the network” that the Costa Ricans are trying to prevent, just as they are trying to minimize the “landscape of change.”

CHAPTER 4

Between “conventionalizations:” organic markets on the margins

In April 2006, I accompanied a group of Latvian organic farmers on a tour to visit organic farms in Austria, Hungary, and Slovenia. On the first day in Austria, before leaving the city, the bus stopped in an organic supermarket. For some of the participants on the tour, this was their first time in such a large exclusively organic store in Western Europe. Farmers began walking through the dizzying array of fruits, vegetables, countless cheeses, meats, breads, grains, wines, processed foods, cosmetic products and textiles. People were mostly browsing as tourists, but occasionally also picking out items to bring home as souvenirs. After a while, one farmer turned and asked incredulously “Do you really think all of this is organic?” Farmers’ discussions after the stop included a series of similarly skeptical questions about how it is possible to do all that processing according to regulations, how people afford the food, and surprise that so much of the food was imported from all over the world. These farmers’ surprise and disbelief reflects the very different situation in organic stores and markets in both Latvia and Costa Rica from the one that many consumers take for granted in North America and Western Europe, and other industrialized countries. While organic sectors in the “North” and “West” are concerned primarily about the “conventionalization” of organic markets, or their becoming more similar to and slowly bought out by conventional agri-business industries, those in the “South” and “East” are still having trouble getting off the ground. This is a two-part chapter in which I analyze, in part

one, what and how is being sold in a range organic markets, stores, and regular supermarkets in Latvia and Costa Rica, and in part two, what and why is not being sold.

Part I: To market, to market

Agnew (1986) has argued that markets in England were transformed from a place to a set of processes from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, and compared the development of markets to that of the theater. Organic markets and marketing in Latvia and Costa Rica are a complex intermingling of local, national and global level processes that influence the determination of the physical market spaces and the possibilities that farmers have for selling their products. The first part of this chapter will discuss the various organic markets and sales points in each country and the movement strategies that have led to these market designs to construct them as particular places and to achieve certain goals.

Market-places

Organic markets, like all markets, must serve various functions at once, combining the social, cultural and economic spheres. Yet because organic sectors are positioned somewhere between a productive sphere of the economy and a social movement, they often try to add other elements as well, such as the environmental and health spheres and a political agenda.

Markets are quintessentially social spaces, given how trade and exchange is related to social interaction and social relations. For example, Clark (1994) has shown how “market queens” in Ghana negotiate their gender and family relationships at and through the marketplace. Market locations and locations within markets can also serve to marginalize certain groups, as with the proliferation of non-food markets with imported goods that sprang up in Lithuania in the mid-1990s that were pushed further and further away from the capital because they were seen to harbor dangerous elements (Hohnen 2003). Callon et al. (2002)

have called markets "hybrid forums" because they involve an ever greater variety of actors, and through this become ever more complex interminglings of actors' ethical and political stances with the qualities of the products they are selling.

Next, markets are inherently performative spaces, where the organizers and merchants assemble things in a particular way at a particular site for a particular audience (MacKenzie, Muniesa et al. 2007). In the organic sector, this performative aspect is amplified because the seller must demonstrate to consumers the benefits of the goods and convince them that the product is healthier, more environmentally friendly, and often worth a higher price. Because these are qualities mostly imperceptible with the senses, the producers are up against what Ulrich Beck describes in *Risk Society* (1992) or what Adam (1998) calls the timescapes of modernity: the same logic of not reacting to imperceptible risks that prevents people from worrying about chemicals or radiation because health-risks are so far in the future may make consumers loathe to pay extra for imperceptible potential long-term health benefits. This makes it even more necessary for organic producers to position their products as the assemblage of qualities that will meet consumers' needs (Callon, Meadel et al. 2002).

Finally, and most fundamentally, a market must serve the economic function of selling goods and providing a livelihood for the producers, and for many of the organic farmers this is their first and primary concern. The necessity to pay attention to all the other aspects of market performance mentioned here is considered a burden by many organic growers who lack marketing experience. Hohnen (2003) has described a similar situation in Lithuania, where people had to learn and in part invent how to be a trader in the post-socialist era. Many organic farmers in Latvia declare openly that they would rather just concentrate on production, and have someone else take care of the selling. There is not agreement on this, however, and others are quick to call anyone an unnecessary intermediary who is taking

money from the farmers. Tensions often arise over the various priorities given to these different aspects by one actor or another.

Such debates over how best to organize the market, however, become part of what Smith has described the reflexive reinvention of the rules of the game that govern markets (cited in Callon, Meadel et al. 2002). In organic markets in Latvia and Costa Rica, movement leaders, sector organizers and farmers have been engaging in a constant reimagining of the best ways to address various problems they are experiencing in the face of the limitations they perceive.

Costa Rica: Staying local

My arrival to Costa Rica in the summer of 2006 coincided with the main organic event of the year in San José: the *Semana Agroecologica* or Agroecological Week. During the week, there were numerous panel discussions held at the University of Costa Rica. An award ceremony for elementary school student drawings on the theme of organic agriculture in conjunction with the Sustainable Schools project took place at the National Museum. On Friday morning, there was a breakfast discussion with policy-makers and the press about the progress of the new Organic Agriculture law, which brought needed press attention to the issue, and ultimately helped to push the draft law that had been in progress for four years to a parliamentary vote (see Chapter Seven). On Saturday, there was an all-day planning workshop with the environmental movement on opposition to CAFTA.

The culmination of the *Semana Agroecologica*, however, was on Sunday, with a full program of events held by the National Museum in the very center of San José. It included an immense organic market with representatives from producers' groups from all parts of the country. The colors and smells were overwhelming, as was the sheer abundance of tropical fruits, vegetables, crafts, and organic meals stretching the length of an entire block.



Figure 4.1 The yearly national organic market during the Semana Agroecologica in San Jose. Author's photos.

On either end of the market were information tables, talks and video presentations about the health, environmental, and nutritional benefits of environmental products. Inside the courtyard of the museum, chefs prepared organic meals, clowns entertained children and painted their faces. Organic food was available for breakfast and lunch for free for all farmers and volunteers, and for purchase by guests and visitors. At midday, a group of *gigantes*, the traditional masquerade figures that dance in Costa Rican street festivals, came out to entertain the crowd. The day ended with afternoon performances by several nationally renowned artists who had agreed to accept baskets of donated organic food in lieu of royalty payments.



Figure 4.2: Traditional *gigantes* dancing at the *Semana Agroecologica*. Author's photo.

The *Semana Agroecologica* is thus the prime performative event of the year, and the Sunday market and events are intended to do much more than just sell organic products. During the week all newspapers were teeming with information about organic agriculture, and lawmakers started taking the issue more seriously as well. The *Semana Agroecologica* was an idea that had been imported by colleagues from Belgium, who had been among the first donors to support organic educational activities in Costa Rica. It was implemented for the first time in 2003 as a one day celebration or *Fiesta Agroecologica*, but this year was the second time that they had planned a full week of activities to promote organic agriculture to the public. Each year the location, the events, and the approach are changed slightly, trying to gauge what is most effective. After the week's activities have concluded, a whole day evaluation session is held, trying to establish what was achieved and how to change things the next year in order to better achieve the delicate balance between informing the public, selling food, and using limited resources effectively. At times the discussions are difficult, but the changes agreed upon every year are intended to improve the performance.

For example, the 2006 Agroecological week, as any such event, was not problem-free. Despite the full tables of goods that had been on display and for sale at the large market

at the National Museum, many producers who had confirmed did not show up. Of those who had traveled far distances, many did not sell all of their goods. They had understood that MAOCO would reimburse them for the products they did not sell, which turned out not be the case, and so they returned home with spoiled food and dampened spirits. These problems reflect some of the larger problems faced by the organic movement with transportation, packaging, infrastructure and communication. Despite these problems, however, the larger market helped to bring organic food to the attention of San Jose consumers, and hopefully attract them to the permanent weekly organic *feria*, or market.⁴⁷

The long discussions about the *Semana Agroecologica* and the changes that happen every year in the specific configuration of the location, events, and engagement with the public signal also how this event is performative not only in the sense of a theater performance, but also experimental. Muniesa and Callon (2007) show how economic experiments of this nature are performative in that they attempt to not only observe but also enact certain types of market relations. Because the week's events were successful as a performative event, they were widely covered in the press, and anyone arriving in Costa Rica that week would have felt that organic agriculture was a vibrant and growing sector. But by creating this image in the press and to the outside world, the movement was also trying to create itself in that image in a way that would last longer than just that one week.

Everyday organics

On the Saturday morning of the Agroecological Week, as on any other Saturday morning, an empty lot next to the Lutheran church offices in the Paso Ancho neighborhood on the south side of San José gets transformed into a small and friendly weekly organic market. The lawn is covered with tables, tents, and small stands where fifteen to twenty

⁴⁷ There is a vibrant tradition of conventional *Ferías de agricultor* that take place every weekend throughout the country. This is important, because it means that many consumer are accustomed to doing their shopping for weekly fresh produce at the *feria*, so going to an organic one is not so much more effort.

regular participants sell lush tropical fruit, such as mango, papaya, pineapple, star-fruit and citrus fruit and a wide selection of vegetables, such as carrots, potatoes, tomatoes, broccoli, cabbage, and a variety of beans. Others sell home-baked breads and pastries, ice creams, yoghurts, cheeses, chicken and eggs, and crafts and clothing.



Figure 4.3: Weekly organic *feria El Trueque*. Author's photos.

The name of the organic market is *El Trueque*, meaning barter, signaling the original intent that organizers had of creating a market space that was alternative not only in the produce it sells but also in its economic relations. Although most Saturdays there is no sign of barter exchange happening, on the Saturday of the *Semana Agroecologica* organizers had encouraged people to bring anything from their homes that may be useful to someone else. Some people brought in knick-knacks for exchange, and one woman walked around offering a used purse to all the producers until she finally found a taker, but most exchanges still took place in cash.

While many of the growers are certified organic, a fair number of them have farms in transition, or that are not certified at all and are labeled accordingly. Instead, they have earned consumer trust through years of personal contacts and inviting any doubting consumer to come see the farm for him or herself. Opting out of certification cuts down on costs and

paperwork for producers who sell primarily on local markets. This system of trust-based sales has also inspired a move towards innovative “participatory certification” processes, where panels of farmers and consumers do the certification on behalf of the local community, rather than relying on paid third-party certification by officials (see Chapter Seven for more details). This sort of trust has arguably grown directly out of the decision to create the market as a deliberate social meeting place.

Although this market location has been stable for a number of years, it did not start out here. The first market experiment took place for a short period in 1994. Thereafter the first permanent organic market was located inside a conventional farmers' market in 1995, but lasted only one year due to disagreements among members about the appropriateness of the location. Only in 1999 was the market reinitiated, with a conscious decision to create a "meeting space which transcends a mere commercial encounter, but rather builds personal solidarity between producers and consumers" (Chaves and Qesuada Chanto 2003:23). One organizer explained to me that it was intended as a place where people can make “organic friends,” pointing at the tables set up along one edge of the market. Since the move, this location has enjoyed stability, and a small but loyal group of consumers come every week not only to shop, but also to enjoy the free organic coffee or to purchase breakfast and sit and chat. A publication analyzing various experiments and changes in the market’s location quotes some of the regular consumers as calling the *feria a tertulia* (Chaves and Qesuada Chanto 2003), referring back to a tradition of informal literary and cultural gatherings of the 1700s in Madrid and later in Iberoamerica (Anderson and Anderson 1962). This implies that the strategy of the market organizers is working, transforming it from a simple shopping area to a social institution.

Thus, this organic market is less showy but more stable than that of the *Semana Agroecologica*, and has a loyal crowd of followers who wake up earlier on Saturdays than

workdays in order to get the best products. The market attracts many foreigners as well as locals, but very few simple passers-by due to its intentionally marginal location. Through choosing this market location, the organizers have chosen to prioritize social relations over ease of access.

The growers who participate in the *feria* are also organized into their own association, and petitioned MAOCO to be included as a cross-regional organization, because this market has come to define their affiliations and identities even more strongly than their local and regional groups.

Neither the Agroecological week nor the local organic markets are confined to the capital however. Agroecological week events took place in 2006 in six different areas throughout the country where strong local organizations were interested in taking on coordination of the event, though on a smaller scale than in San José. And in eight other towns, organic products can be regularly found, either in a few separate stands of the conventional farmer's market or in a small dedicated organic market. These venues vary in size and abundance of products, yet still do not seem to recreate the atmosphere of a *tertulia* that is achieved in San José. Nevertheless, they are all part of a concerted strategy on the part of MAOCO and its affiliated organizations to make organic food available first to local consumers, and only secondarily for export.

Big organics

Besides these organic markets, however, organic food in Costa Rica is also available in several supermarkets. The first one to support organic products was the slightly more upscale national chain *Automercados*, and this was seen as a positive step in reaching a wider consumer base. But changes began when several of the largest supermarket chains, as well as a vegetable packaging intermediary, *Hortifrutti*, were bought out by Wal-mart in 2005.

Hortifruti had been the first large buyer of products from the most stable organic vegetable cooperative in Costa Rica. According to representatives of the small *Oro Verde* organic marketing company, this radically changed market dynamics. Soon after entering the market, Wal-mart announced to organic producers that it would pay no more than a 10-20 per cent premium above conventional prices on organic products, regardless of production costs. This arbitrary calculation was a shock for organic producers. Discussions began that under such conditions, organic carrots, for example, would soon become extinct. Because Wal-mart now controls such a large segment of the supermarket sector, this decision was putting downward price pressure on other chains, such as *Automercados*, who must compete with supermarket prices. This development made alternative sales points even more important.

Despite the concerted emphasis on local markets, there is also a significant export market to both Europe and the US in commodity crops, such as coffee, bananas, cocoa, sugar, orange juice, and pineapple (MAOCO 2008). These export sectors have been growing steadily in the last several years, but the direct economic benefits to producers from these exports are varied. Only in some cases have these markets been able to secure significantly different conditions than the export-oriented conventional markets that are widely regarded as exploitative. Examples from coffee and bananas will be given in the second half of the chapter. It is significant to note, however, that the activities of MAOCO have largely not been directed at the sectors that are working with export, partially because these groups handle their own negotiations with buyers, and partially because MAOCO has made local market an explicit priority over export sectors. I will discuss this in more detail in the second half of the chapter.

Organic strategies

This history shows that the main market approaches promoted by MAOCO have been to stay local, small, and socially oriented. This has a direct influence on the type of market arrangement that has been promoted, and can be seen as an attempt to demystify the commodity relations of typical capitalist markets and to reconnect consumers and producers (Allen and Kovach 2000).

The strategies outlined here are the combined effect and work of several different NGOs and networks working within the Costa Rican organic sector, some with more political agendas, others more market oriented. Due to the long and sometimes difficult history that Costa Rica has had with large foreign business interests operating in the agricultural sector, the organic movement has sometimes been more politically than economically oriented. This was particularly true in the run-up to the CAFTA referendum. The main approach has been to function as a social movement, and to demonstrate alternative forms of livelihood. This has raised some controversy within the movement, however, and some feel that there should be more emphasis on market initiatives.

The cost of this approach, some argue, has been that trade is limited mostly to fresh products, direct sales, and a segment of the population that is willing to make a significant effort to find and purchase organic food. One member expressed frustration that the mere mention of markets and entrepreneurship has been seen as somehow taboo, or a sign of selling out. An NGO member noted that the weakness of MAOCO is that it has developed its political and social positions at the expense of strong economic propositions of how to move forward. For example, work on developing an easily recognizable logo for local organic products had continued for years, but was still not firmly in place in 2008. The fact that most organic products do not bear an organic label and logo makes it difficult to attract more

mainstream consumers. Although in 2008 MAOCO began designing various courses on entrepreneurship and marketing, it remains to be seen how actively this branch will develop.

Many of the market developments have been supported by CEDECO, a local NGO committed to alternative development and education. CEDECO was formed in 1984 and has made organic market development one of its main priorities. One of their initiatives was to help found OroVerde, a socially responsible company that processes, packages, and markets organic products. They purchase only certified organic ingredients but provide professional packaging labels and help make contacts abroad. They are the first such company, however, and most of the organic products found in Costa Rica are still fresh fruits and vegetables. Even though most of CEDECO's market projects are socially oriented, one of the organizers explained laughingly that they have been accused of being the neoliberal arm of the movement.

Many of these projects in Costa Rica have been possible due to funding from a variety of international donors, such as the UNDP, and several European funding agencies, such as HIVOS, VECO, and Ecomercados.⁴⁸ Two of these donors have already pulled out from Costa Rica partially or completely, however, to poorer nations, which makes the necessity to convert to self-sustaining financing an imperative.

Latvia: Shifting markets

In the fall of 2001 and summer of 2002 while living in Riga before beginning my PhD studies, it was my Saturday morning ritual to go to the organic farmers' market at Alberta laukums, and my impression of this organic market and its organizers was at least

⁴⁸ Full names of these organizations are the United Nations Development Program; the Dutch NGO- the Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries (HIVOS), founded in 1968 that invests heavily in Latin American projects; the Belgian NGO Vredeseilanden that has been working in the region since 1990; and Ecomercados is a project financed by the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs of Switzerland, executed by INTERCOOPERATION (Switzerland Foundation for the Development and the International Cooperation) that began in 2005.

part of what inspired me to pursue the development of the organic agriculture movement as a research topic. It was exciting because it was the first year that the city had had its own regular organic market, and it was a big success. Located on the edge of the historic old town of Riga, in a cobbled, small square sandwiched between buildings from various centuries, the space temporarily hosted a replica of a wooden Liv⁴⁹ village thought to have existed on the spot in the 1200s. The replica had been built for the 800 year anniversary celebration of the founding of Riga in 2001. The replica was still standing, and it was agreed that the organic market was the perfect thing to bring the structure to life on Saturdays.

Farmers would arrive early from all over the country to set up their wares. In one corner, Dagnija would put out her cheeses at six in the morning, with a long line of buyers already waiting for her. The cheese and the organic eggs usually disappeared within the first hour, but latecomers would not be disappointed. The bakery *Zelta klingeris* (Golden pretzel) had a stand selling *sklandarauši* (a rye pastry with potato and carrot filling typical of the Western region of Kurzeme), and pumpkin and cottage cheese pastries, as well as some of the best *pīrāgi* (bacon rolls) in town. They were also selling their certified organic sourdough rye and a dark rye bread by the loaf. Several growers had baskets of countless varieties of apples heaped high. Others were selling Brussels sprouts, carrots, potatoes, onions, garlic, and other vegetables. Reproductions of medieval silver and bronze jewelry, handmade straw ornaments by local craftspeople, and the latest issues of the environmental magazine *Vides vēstis* complemented the array of food items.

⁴⁹ The Livs were the original inhabitants of the coastal areas of part of Latvia and Estonia. They are part of Finno-Ugric language group, and the language is now considered extinct because less than 200 people speak it. This choice of location is symbolic for its association with history, traditional ways of life and authenticity.



Figure 4.4: The Liv village was the first location for an organic market in 2001. Left: J. Sedols, <http://www.panoramio.com/photo/10658158>; Right, www.videsvestis.lv/content.asp?ID=100&what=6

By far the biggest attraction was on the far side of the market, however, where shoppers would gather after completing their purchases around the steaming cauldron of the weekly organic stew prepared by the local chef and organic supporter Mārtiņš Rītiņš. His restaurant, *Vincents*, had been known for years as the best, and one of the most expensive in Latvia, and he regularly catered various embassy and government events and served visiting foreign dignitaries such as Prince Charles and the Japanese Emperor. But on Saturday mornings at the organic market, anyone could sample his affordably priced creative culinary concoctions made from market-ingredients, supplemented with organic meat he had purchased directly from the growers, since the weekend market did not have a permit for the sale of meats.

Organic entrepreneurs

This organic market had in fact been the brainchild of Mārtiņš Rītiņš and the editor of the magazine *Vides Vēstis*, Anitra Tooma-Rijniece (Vaivare and Tooma-Rijniece 2002). Mārtiņš had been inspired by cooperative efforts he had witnessed between chefs and organic farmers while working as a chef in Canada, as well as by one of San Francisco's premier chefs, Alice Waters' approach to food and cooking. Anitra, as a woman with a farm herself

but who worked daily in Riga, was driven by sympathy for all those “poor people” she saw in Riga who did not have easy access to good, healthy, local products from the countryside. The collaboration was a great success, but after initiating the process, they felt it was time for the organic farmers to take over the organization themselves.

Besides Mārtiņš Rītiņš’ restaurant, there is also an organic cafe in Rīga, *Ekovirtuve* (EcoKitchen), run by Sandra Stabinge and her husband, that caters home-style meals from organic products to a weekday lunch crowd (Benfelde 2005). In one corner of the cozy cafe is a cooler and a display case where people can also buy some organic products to bring home. Neither restaurant is organically certified however, because they are unable at this point to purchase all organic ingredients, nor to guarantee that the organic and conventional products will be kept separate from one another. They do, however, use an asterisk on the menu to indicate dishes that are made primarily from organic products. Through this they try to educate consumers and encourage the wider use of organic products.

When I returned to do fieldwork in Latvia in 2005, one of my first questions was when the market would start. The leaders of LBLA explained that the market was no longer operational. Alberta laukums had not been available, and it had been difficult to get permits from the city for a different space. They noted that there had been many logistical problems with the Alberta laukums location anyhow. On one hand, producers could not sell fresh meat or dairy products because there was no electricity for setting up refrigerators. The location in the old town made it difficult for farmers to pull up and deliver their products, and made it inconvenient for consumers, who could not drive and park their cars for their market expedition. Also new EU hygiene regulations prohibited most of the farmers from selling their pre-prepared or packaged products on the market.

Many farmers with whom I spoke missed the market, however. For them, it had been a great opportunity to earn some money and build connections both consumers and with other

farmers at the common luncheon held after the market every Saturday. In place of the weekend market, twelve farms had founded a cooperative, ZT (for *Zaļais tirdziņš* or Green market) that had opened a permanent stand in the Central Market. While the new stand was more convenient for the sale of meat and milk products, its location in the urban market, known more for lower prices and pick-pockets than for the high quality of products, disadvantaged it in other ways. Its location inside the meat pavilion made it possible to sell meat and dairy products, but eliminated it as a social center for consumers wanting to chat over stew, and made it a less logical stopping point for vegetarians or others who simply wanted to pick up some fresh vegetables. The market's location also did not solve the parking and transportation problems that the Alberta laukums space had had.

In response to these concerns, in 2006, the ZT cooperative decided to open another new store in the business center of Rīga, where street parking was available. The cozy interior with a few tables in the corner to sample organic tea and read *Vides vēstis* made it more attractive as a meeting spot and more accessible to a larger group of people. Although the beginning was slow, with almost no publicity, and nearly a year of losses, the popularity of the store grew increasingly, with the number of shoppers doubling within the first year (Būmane 2007).



Figure 4.5: New organic store opened by ZT cooperative in Riga, Latvia.

In the first years, however, the store had great problems with supply of fresh fruit and vegetables. Tomatoes, for instance, were in such high demand that people reserved them in advance. This is not for a lack of tomatoes in the countryside, but because each farmer grows only a small amount, which makes transportation costs excessive. Even farmers who are in cooperatives fear that if they invest in a specialized vehicle that is certified by the health and hygiene department to transport goods to market, that they will not be able to fill it to capacity every week in order to recover the expenses for the vehicle, since many vegetables and greens are lightweight but take up lots of room.

Meanwhile, the growing success of the new store took business away from the only other local store that had until then been selling organic products in the city center, a small health-food store located unfortunately only a few blocks away. The close proximity of the only affordable piece of real estate available to the ZT cooperative had meant that the new store posed competition for the existing health food store rather than attracting entirely new clients. The health food store ultimately closed a year later.⁵⁰ There have been similar

⁵⁰ There may well be other circumstances that led to the closing of the health food store. The owner declined an interview at various points.

attempts to start small stores and market stands in two or three other cities, but they have been struggling to keep the shelves full and customers coming in, and some have closed as others open.

By 2008, the ZT store was doing much better, and had a wider variety of fresh products that a few farmers closer to Riga had begun to bring. It had also benefited from a large-scale EU- funded marketing campaign run by LBLA that tried to get information about organic products into mass media outlets from 2006-8, and organized several special markets and events. In the past two years, there have also been several new developments in organic marketing venues. In 2007 Mārtiņš Rītiņš helped to reinstitute a biweekly Saturday farmers' market, but this time in *Berga bazārs*, an upmarket outdoor shopping area in the center of town. The setting in *Berga Bazārs* is more formal and up-scale than in the previous market in the Liv village, and the clientele also accordingly so. A small but regular group of organic farmers participate, as well as farmers from the new Latvian branch of Slow Food. And rather than cooking up a stew in a cauldron, Vincents staff prepare gourmet delights on an electric hotplate, as cafe guests sip their cappuccinos in the shopping area.

In addition, the first official internet-based organic home delivery grocery service, begun by two young women who had traveled to Western Europe and been inspired by box schemes and the type of rural–urban connections these fostered, began in 2007. They try to pay organic farmers a fair price, but must cover their own expenses, and want to foster professional and aesthetically pleasing packaging materials. Therefore their final prices are relatively high, and again encourage a more up-market clientele. By 2008, some loyal customers were beginning to buy directly from the farmers rather than go through the delivery service.

Consumer interest in and recognition of organic products is growing, but substantial barriers remain. One of these is that there is a competing logo called “*Zaļā karote*” (Green

Spoon), that was developed by the Agricultural Marketing Council and is used to designate foods produced in Latvia. Because of the association with “green” however, many people actually believe that this is the symbol for organic products. The LBLA organic logo, “*Latvijas ekoprodukts*,” bearing a horseshoe and a clover leaf (see photo above), is much rarer, and therefore less recognized. Despite all the efforts made by the Association to date, 95% of organic products still do not bear the organic logo (Saktiņa 2007), either because they get sold to conventional processors, are sold to private clients who do not ask for a logo, or never make it to the market at all.

Broadening organics

The various shifts in the history of organic market initiatives in Latvia reflect the various priorities and problems of the organic sector. For many farmers, selling their products was still a piecemeal activity rather than a routine part of their schedule. In one farm where I volunteered between the ending of the Alberta laukums market and the beginning of the *Berga bazārs* market, for example, a consumer called one day to say that he wanted some meat and vegetables delivered to the capital and had a few friends who might also be interested in some products. This resulted in a whole unplanned day of suddenly weighing, packaging and pricing items for sale, which was in effect a disruption of the farm rhythm rather than a part of it. Even now that there are many different venues to sell products, farmers tell me that the processors, shopkeepers, and cafes owe them backpayments for deliveries that makes it hard to invest in other farm needs. Coordination between farmers and the small business-owners regarding supply is difficult, because for a small cafe or store it is risky to make purchase contracts one year in advance not knowing how business will be, while for farmers it is difficult to promise a certain amount of products in advance, fearing potential problems with weather and bad harvests. Thus the imperfect dance of supply and

demand is coordinated on a weekly or monthly basis, with frequent disappointments for both sides, rather than humming along as a well-greased machine.

The changes in market locations have all been coordinated to try to move closer to the consumer and make products available in more central and convenient ways. This is largely a response to increasing trends of consumer shopping in supermarkets rather than traditional markets, and many in the Association have the ultimate goal of selling to supermarket chains. To date only a few individual producers have entered supermarkets with products such as sprouts, bread, and goat cheese. Imported organic products such as coffee and tea are available in several of the larger chains, but almost no fresh organic products are available.

Although the last years have brought the first signs of disillusionment with the big chain supermarket stores as prices have begun to rise, it is undeniable that their embodiment as the complete opposite of the empty shelves and drab labels of the Soviet era held a real draw for consumers in the first years of their expansion. There are also signs, however, that in the emerging disillusionment with the EU, the organic sector is starting to take back some of that simplicity as well. One of the large advertising posters included in the EU marketing project proclaimed: “We know our labels are simple...just like our list of ingredients.”

Quite the opposite from the Costa Rican movement, LBLA has organized itself more as a producers’ association than explicitly as a social movement. EU funds have been targeted at trying to make farmers individual entrepreneurs, and indeed the amount of business planning in which small farmers now engage to manage their grants, bank loans, and bookkeeping is impressive. Many farmers feel, however, that the ever increasing amounts of paperwork prevent them from actually farming. Similarly, the attention to these issues and the new regulations has kept the movement too busy trying to understand, negotiate and

implement the minutiae of the current EU regulations to begin to develop new market initiatives.

The constant changes in market and store locations and approaches have also meant that there is not one clear performative message being sent to one clear audience, and has prevented the sort of organic social group from forming as has at the *Trueque* market in San José. The recent move towards targeting more upscale consumers leaves out a certain segment of the population. The marketing campaign funded by the EU left some farmers disappointed because so much money was spent on brochures and items with the logo imprinted on them, but not on actually improving market circumstances.

In the second part of the chapter I turn to the complex problems that prevent a larger variety of products from being sold by more farmers in both countries.

Part II: The non-commodification of organic food

In July 2006 I attended my first board meeting of MAOCO. As I listened to the discussion around me, I got a strange feeling of déjà vu. I had traveled west across the Atlantic Ocean and south nearly to the Equator, and yet suddenly the conversation happening around me made me feel as if I had never left Latvia. Producers and movement organizers in Costa Rica were debating the very same issues as what the organic farmers' association in Latvia had been discussing only a few weeks ago: problems with insufficient levels of production, expensive and overly bureaucratic certification procedures, lack of processing facilities, and poor infrastructure and transportation opportunities for selling their organic products. It was striking that the two movements were experiencing such similar problems despite the fact that they had taken such different approaches to developing their movements and markets. These differences were also markedly different than the “conventionalization” experienced by organic sectors in developed countries, as I will discuss later in this chapter.

If the first part of this chapter explained what and how is sold in organic markets and stores, this one will seek to show what *doesn't* get sold, and why. The social sciences have a good record of writing about what is happening in the world, but perhaps less about what is *not happening*, despite the fact that the latter is the great preoccupation of the majority of NGOs and social movements that are struggling to bring about change. While there are dozens of books and articles about the commodification of everything, and the effects this has on social relations and subjects (Appadurai 1986; Buck, Getz et al. 1997; Haugerud, Stone et al. 2000), there are surprisingly few that talk about the potato that awaits spring in the potato cellar, uneaten and unsold, or the sausage that does not get made, the bread that does not get baked. Yet in both Latvia and Costa Rica, and I surmise that in many organic and other productive sectors and social movements in what are considered second and third world countries, there is an impressive number of things *not happening*. Or at least not happening in the way that the organic movements would like them to.

This is not an ethnography of collapse, crisis, or bankruptcy. For in both countries, as I have tried to show in other chapters, a lot *is* happening, and there are few signs of acute crisis. Rather there is a protracted concern and inability to get to the bottom of why certain things are not happening. Thus, perhaps more than anything, this part of the chapter is an ethnography of frustration. I propose here that, as the farmers and movement organizers who have been working for years to make things happen know all too well, there is no one simple cause, no one institution, organization, or trend to blame. Rather, it is the combination of a variety of marginalities on one hand, and uneven connections on the other, that combine to produce these webs of frustration. Somewhat similar to the cumulative effects of everyday common sense decisions that result in a cumulative tragedy in Biehl's (2005) account of social abandonment, the situations that have emerged here are accumulations of historic and current events and trends that add up to a sense in both movements of being "stuck."

In the remainder of the chapter I analyze the ironic situation that despite the fact that the organic movements in Latvia and Costa Rica are situated in such different ecological, historical, and political contexts and have taken nearly opposite strategies both to movement organizing and to marketing of organic food, they seem in many ways “stuck” in a similar position. They face similar barriers in terms of processing, selling and distributing food at the local and international levels and to further developing their organic sectors. I analyze how these problems are related to the marginality of the organic sectors within their national economies and of the countries’ marginality within regional and global economies. I reflect on what this indicates about the geographical and structural positions and possibilities of these smallholder farmers in small country economies located on the margins of capital-intensive development patterns, and the implications it holds for the future of these organic sectors. I consider the extent to which signs of conventionalization, as discussed in the introduction, are appearing in the two organic sectors, and the relationship between conventionalization, marginality, and globalization.

The nested marginality of places

Anna Tsing has investigated the term *margins* as “a conceptual site from which to explore the imaginative quality and the specificity of the local/global cultural formation.” She defines margins as “the zones of unpredictability at the edges of discursive stability, where contradictory discourses overlap, or where discrepant kinds of meaning-making converge” (Tsing 1994:279). Thus, unlike the concept of the “peripheral” from world systems theory (Wallerstein 1974) that conveys mostly conditions of structural and geographical limits, marginality is an interplay of those limits with the creative tension they might imply.

I will explore here the nested marginalities that influence the development of the organic sectors in Latvia and Costa Rica. I suggested in Chapter One how differently these

two groups of organic farmers are positioned in relation to their agricultural histories and cultural landscapes. While Latvian organic farmers have recently emerged from one system together with all other farmers in the country and are starting a new trajectory, Costa Rican organic farmers are engaged in resistance against historical processes of global economic integration that they see continuing into the future. Yet in both cases organic farmers are still somehow marginal to the idea of development, and still fall into the “gap” of incomprehensibility between conservation and agricultural production. This idea of being on the margins of mainstream agricultural sectors came out frequently in conversations with farmers in both countries, where farmers shared stories of how their neighbors thought they were crazy when they began with organics, and many still feel this stigma attached.

The concept of marginality is also useful for understanding the position of the Latvian and Costa Rican organic agriculture sectors vis-à-vis the global marketplace. As many of the problems described in this chapter show, in the Latvian economy, as a “second-world” nation, the infrastructure and administrative bureaucratic culture are still disorganized in ways that make it difficult to imagine that development and growth could happen at the nation-state level through local investors developing a national organic sector that is equivalent to that of Germany, Austria, or other old EU Member States. In short, for the organic farmers to imagine the Austrian organic grocery store in Latvia is a far-off or nearly impossible dream.

Costa Rica’s history positions it very differently within the global economy. The long history of being in the periphery of US economic developments has fostered a growing resentment and resistance not only among organic farmers but also in a large segment of the broader population. The connections to global markets have come at a cost, thus organic farmers foster a desire to forge new or different connections than implicated by that history and the status quo. Thus the Costa Rican movement places an emphasis on local markets,

and the idea of an organic supermarket such as the one in Austria, might even be viewed with suspicion.

Thus, the organic farming sectors in these countries are dually marginal, falling through the gaps of comprehensibility within their national settings, and as countries, positioned in subordinate roles to Western Europe and North America. Likewise, there is a third geographical marginality that occurs within these countries. These differences have a great influence on the way markets and production have developed in different parts of the country. Because both Latvia and Costa Rica have heavy concentrations of population and resources in and around their respective capital cities, the areas further removed are peripheral to the core of the capital. In Costa Rica, this is particularly pronounced geographically, as traveling from the Central Valley to the lowlands requires crossing mountain ranges. For example heading east, one must cross the ominously named *Cerro de la muerte* (Summit of death), the highest point along the highway at an altitude of 3,500 meters, which is notorious for the accidents caused by the heavy fog that obscures visibility. The Inter-American highway itself is only a recent route connecting these areas, and the cultural separation between the “cosmopolitan” Central Valley and the “backwards” province of Limón, home to Afro-Caribbean communities and indigenous populations, stems from the 1700s and is still quite marked (Palmer 1977). The majority of indigenous groups farm using traditional methods and thus are in effect “organic by default,” even though they are less active in movement activities. At meetings they often express disappointment that they should be the ones to need certification, rather than those using chemicals. Thus their marginality connects them to the organic sector in particular ways.

In Latvia the perceived distance among regions within the country is not less pronounced, despite the lack of such obvious physical and geographical barriers. The Southeastern region of Latgale still proudly uses its own dialect and cultivates its own

traditions. It is also the region with the highest percentage of Russian-speaking minorities, had the highest rates of people voting against the EU in the 2003 referendum, and has the highest proportion of people converting to organic agriculture. The closer one gets to the eastern borders of the country with Russia and Belarus, the more pronounced was the feeling of loss of eastern markets as contributing to current problems of market stagnation.

Thus, these perceptions of organic farmers as being not-quite-farmers, not-quite-developed, and geographically and culturally separated from the mainstream and the center combine in various ways, much like the Cohen (1999) describes how the intersections of race, class and sexuality position gay, black, AIDS-victim communities on the margins of the margins. Throughout the following sections of the chapter I will come back to these various types of marginalities that are influencing movement strategies and possibilities. But these positions do not imply complete static immobility. In this and subsequent chapters I will also discuss how the organic movements imagine their possibilities and have been organizing to attempt to overcome their structural limitations through markets, politics, re-positionings and re-imaginings.

Mainstream marginalizations, creative connections

Throughout my fieldwork, I attended numerous seminars, meetings, workshops, discussions and planning sessions in both countries, in larger and smaller groups, that were devoted to solving the host of problems experienced by the movements. Some were run more autocratically, others were very participatory; some were facilitated by local organizers themselves, others by expensive professional consultants using state-of-the-art methodologies; and some were aimed at strategic organizing skills, while others were targeted at entrepreneurial development. Nearly all of them, however, included an activity on the identification of problems. It seemed that if one could just identify the key problem, it

would be possible to start working together to overcome some of the barriers and contradictions that were preventing the organic sectors from developing beyond the marginal positions they occupied.

In many ways there were striking similarities in the problems identified in both countries. To summarize, at the farm level, farmers lack resources to expand their farms and increase the amount of production for sale. Furthermore, they do not have access to a wide range of stable markets to sell their food. Newcomers either are not joining the movement, as in the case of Costa Rica, or are converting en masse but not increasing the amount of organic produce available on the market as in the case of Latvia. Bank loans that would allow farmers to expand and increase production are costly and risky, yet donor or government funds are targeted more at training than at production. Strict certification and hygiene regulations often prevent people from certifying their farms or processing facilities. A lack of local investment capital hinders new processing initiatives from starting, severely limiting the amount of organic food that can be labeled as organic on the market. The lack of processed food and poor infrastructure and coordination limit the diversity and availability of products at sales points. Small processing facilities have problems selling their products or repaying their loans. Consumers, besides a small group of loyal supporters, do not have information about the products that are available. Due to the limited supply, however, it is risky to advertise too widely for fear that demand will increase more quickly than supply.

The biggest differences in the problems identified by the movements were that while in Latvia, problems with paperwork and bureaucracy associated with new EU norms and support payments were among the most often cited, Costa Rica had more problems with private sector entities, such as Wal-mart. In Latvia, for example, the management of the new ZT store in the center of town was not easy as strict hygiene regulations both for processors and vendors meant that the selection of organic products remained limited, and the sale of

highly demanded products like farm-smoked bacon were still not legally possible. Farmers and consumers alike consider home-smoked products of higher quality than factory-produced products, and several farmers commented to me that "none of our ancestors ever died from eating home-prepared products," yet it has proven difficult for these facilities to get hygiene certification, and thus the products can not be legally sold in the organic store. There is only one certified organic slaughterhouse for cattle, one for fowl, and none for pigs. In addition, paperwork and filling out of "self-control" registers took up much time and energy in setting up the new store. Disputes with the hygiene control inspectors arose over issues such as the newly renovated naturally-stained wood floor, because the larger cracks between the floorboards that gave it a rustic look were deemed to be open breeding grounds for bacteria. Also, to meet the regulations, staff were required to engage in redundant tasks such as recording several times a day the readings on fully automated refrigeration units. All of these activities focused on meeting regulations made people feel like it kept them from farming or developing their businesses.

Given how many of these problems in both countries were focused not on farming or selling, but on the intermediary steps of processing, packaging and labeling organic food, many of the proposed solutions focused on these stages. I will therefore analyze how multiple marginalities converge by examining a few attempts at solving the processing barriers in each country.

Adding value

One of the best known "traps" for developing countries is that they have traditionally been exporters of raw materials, while intermediaries in industrialized countries reap the

benefits from the processing stage.⁵¹ The proposed solution to this sort of exploitation is generally seen as “adding value” to the product thorough adding labor, or somehow processing the product, in order to capture more of the return.

A seemingly technical economics term, the idea of “adding value” was very present on the lips and in the minds of many organic farmers in both countries. Indeed, one of the most commonly discussed proposed solutions to the problems in the organic sectors in both countries was to “add value” to the agricultural products, either for sale on local markets or for export. At one seminar on entrepreneurial development in Costa Rica, the facilitator stressed that farmers’ groups should try to imagine a product that is innovative, processed or preserved to increase shelf-life, attractively labeled and packaged. This product would become their image, and embodied the solution to the problems of transportation and short shelf-life of fresh products by adding value.

In both of these countries, some of the main attempts to add value have been with some of the traditional agricultural crops. In Costa Rica, the two most notable attempts I observed made by groups associated with MAOCO were with coffee and bananas, which have historically been two of the main export crops of the country. In Latvia, it was in the traditionally important dairy sector and increasingly in herbal teas from the meadows. The type of processing initiatives that were taking place in each country were still primary processing and packaging, rather than more complicated preparation of pre-assembled meals or frozen foods as is characteristic in industrialized countries. In Costa Rica these included transforming bananas to banana puree or banana vinegar and roasting, grinding and packaging coffee before selling it, while in Latvia they included packaging milk or making cheese and drying and packaging herbal teas and selling dried herbs for use in other products.

⁵¹In the late 1970s, Latin American scholars of development coined the term “dependency theory” to describe how this trend toward underdevelopment works, and promoted import substitution as a way of countering this trend. See for example Fernando Henrique Cardoso 1979.

These initiatives have met with varied degrees of success, however, in part due to the way various marginalities and connections interact.

Costa Rica: Reclaiming export markets

While there have been some initiatives in Costa Rica to experiment with processing original products, such as “cat’s-claw” candies, and some farmers were baking products for sale at the organic markets, processing initiatives were much more visible for the two traditional export products of bananas and coffee.

The experience with bananas shows how a series of nested marginalities can make it difficult to sell products, or at least to sell them equitably. At one of the first board meetings of MAOCO that I attended, I was surprised to learn that almost a third of all of the organic producers in the country were in Talamanca, the lowland zones of the Caribbean in the northeast of the country. Despite these numbers, this region was among the least visibly active in the movement. Their main products were bananas and cacao for export, although many producers had moved away from the production of cacao because of problems with a fungus. Many of the main production areas were in indigenous zones, and most of the growers were members in one of four main organic producers’ organizations.

Banana is a crop that many rural houses have at least a few trees of themselves, therefore it has more chances as an export crop than to be sold in large quantities on local markets. Yet bananas are very susceptible to blemishes, which make organic bananas difficult to transport as a fresh product. This is one of the reasons that conventional banana plantations use pesticide-impregnated plastic bags to protect the fruit. Instead, organic farmers in Talamanca bring truckloads of bananas every week to each organization’s packaging center, where they are paid according to weight, and the cooperative or organization manages the sale to intermediaries, who process it into banana puree for export.

Some indigenous zones have no road access and bananas are transported by boats down the river to the main collection points.



Figure 4.6: Transporting bananas to the intermediary downriver in Talamanca. Author's photo.

While the high rates of organic production and organization in the region are positive, the coordination among the four main organizations has suffered for years. Old conflicts linger and prevent the groups from negotiating jointly with their one primary buyer, Gerber, despite growing dissatisfaction with the terms of contract that they offer. Gerber has a processing facility where it makes the bananas into puree for baby food, thus adding and capturing the value of the product, and paying farmers rock-bottom prices.

At the time of my research, Gerber had decreased prices paid to cooperatives from 20 cents/ kilo to 13 cents/ kilo, meaning that individual farmers received even less, since the organizations had to cover certification and transportation costs. One farmer calculated that he sold 120 kilos a week from his one-hectare farm, earning approximately 10-12 USD per week. Others may sell up to 300 kilos per week, but poverty in the region was extremely visible.



Figure 4.7: Very basic living standards are still common for small scale producers in Talamanca. Author's photo.

Each organization was granted a quota, but Gerber could, and often did, change the quotas at a moment's notice. This had just happened the week I visited one of the packaging centers. Their quota had been 16,000 kilos a week, and had just been reduced to 13,000. The sales manager of the organization was on the phone, scrambling to find where to sell the extra 3,000 kilos that they could no longer sell to Gerber. One organization had begun working with Fair Trade, which at the time was paying 18 cents a kilo, thus also not significantly reducing the poverty of the producers.

The Gerber organic baby food website proudly proclaims:

Deep in the lush tropics, your baby's bananas are growing naturally. And once they're harvested, they'll be peeled by hand to make sure your baby gets a naturally sweet ripe banana taste. It's just another way we take the extra step to make Gerber Organic just right for your baby (Gerber).

Two 3.5 ounce containers of Gerber's organic baby food sell for \$1.89 as a special online price.

Although each of the four organizations lacked real power to influence their contracts with Gerber, each was trying to find alternative value-added products into which to transform the bananas. One group was producing dehydrated bananas and had started their own chocolate production. Another was trying to make its own banana puree. Representatives

from such organizations must then travel to large international trade fairs like Biofach, held every February in Nuremberg, Germany, to search for export clients. Although the process of looking for clients for their products was time consuming and expensive, there was a sense that one successful long-term contract could dramatically change the outlook for the producers and the organic sector. At one seminar in the eastern part of Costa Rica, an enthusiastic entrepreneur showed up trying to convince uncertain banana farmers to get involved in the production of banana and plantain chips for export to the US. “Why let the gringos do it, if we can do it here?” he asked provocatively.

Another one of the organizations came up with the innovative idea of producing banana vinegar and selling it for use in Caribbean recipes, salad dressings, etc. The leaders of the organization studied production methods, invested in processing facilities, and began to try to market their product both domestically and internationally. The vinegar sells for \$1.40/ liter. Progress has been slow, however, and hundreds of bottles of organic banana vinegar linger unsold in the small warehouse next to the packing center. At the entrepreneurial development seminar, when the facilitator suggested that producers need to think of products that are innovative, processed, and attractively packaged with a long shelf-life, an organizer from Talamanca responded, “But our banana vinegar is all of those things, so why do we still have so many bottles left in the warehouse?” His comment reflects the fact that “adding value” is often easier said than done, and that despite many years of continued efforts, the development of organic markets for traditional export crops under more equitable conditions remains difficult.

The organic coffee sector has been trying to slowly begin recapturing lost markets through a series of creative connections. The tumultuous recent history of coffee production in Costa Rica was most visibly encapsulated for me on a trip with friends to the south of the country. An exhausting seven hour drive from San José over mountains and through

enormous potholes on the highway, the region is right on the Panamanian border and has in many ways more connections with its neighbors than with the capital. We visited the old Coopabuena coffee *beneficio*,⁵² which brought home in a very visceral way the coffee crash of the 1990s.⁵³ Our host, José, was a coffee producer with a farm of four hectares, who used to be involved in the local coffee cooperative. The cooperative was founded in 1963 on land abandoned by a large landowner. The coffee in the area had been conventional and sun-grown, and for many years it was a successful coffee exporter, processing three million pounds a year at its highpoint. After coffee prices fell, the cooperative started experimenting both with fair trade and more sustainable agricultural practices, but neither had been enough to save the coop (Smith 2007).

When we drove up to the *beneficio*, a chain with a lock on it was blocking the entrance. In the yard stood a sign proclaiming the facility to be property of the bank. The huge facility had been seized when the coop went bankrupt in 2004. The guard let us in however, because he recognized our guide as a former employee and colleague. José showed us around with a bittersweet pride. It was a huge facility which used to process coffee from 800 small producers in the area, and had made investments in new processing facilities not too long before the seizure. Now, because the bank had reclaimed the equipment, it was slowly rusting to beyond repair. Though it had been seized and was officially for sale, it was of no use to anyone, because given the coffee crisis, there would be few buyers for a large *beneficio*.

In 2005, a new cooperative was formed by 46 families that are now working with shade-grown coffee, sustainable practices, and cooperating with the Community

⁵² The Spanish term *beneficio* refers to the coffee processing plant. The term itself embodies the idea of adding value, or benefit, to the coffee.

⁵³ Increased world-wide coffee production from entry into the market by various new producers such as Vietnam, as well as abandonment of the International Coffee Agreement that helped stabilize prices caused a severe price downturn.

Agroecology Network based out of the University of California at Santa Cruz to bring interns to help them develop direct marketing initiatives with the University as an alternative form of fair trade (Smith 2007). To see this empty structure standing there rusting away, however, brought to mind the other 750 families in this town, alone, that were now out of work. The town itself was also changed from the crisis, with the departure of the bank, theater and other institutions. In a cruel irony, the newly formed coop has to rent a *beneficio* in San Vito, an hour away on a rough road, with high transportation costs. On the way, they must pass by the old Coopabuena *beneficio*- a ghost of the invisible hand of the market, rusting away in the middle of town.

Smith (2007) uses the Coopabuena example to show how Fair Trade has not lived up to its promise. Many other scholars point out the benefits which it has brought to consumers (Raynolds 2002). When coffee prices crashed, many producers turned to organic coffee production as a way out. Once conventional prices began recovering again, however, and approaching organic prices, many producers converted back to conventional production. This is one of the main explanations for the drop in the number of certified organic producers in Costa Rica from 2004-2006 (MAOCO 2008).

Some small organic producer groups, however, are now trying on their own to overcome the problems of the market and to “add value” to the organic coffee beans before selling them on the local market or exporting them. APOT is one of the associations that has taken on coffee roasting and packaging, and trying to sell it directly to clients both locally and abroad, rather than through intermediaries. In an impressive operation, APOT has rented an old *beneficio* from CATIE,⁵⁴ hired several employees, and begun learning about and experimenting with coffee processing. Farmers from the region bring the green coffee beans

⁵⁴ The Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza or Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Center. This was only a temporary arrangement, after which APOT acquired its own facilities.

to the *beneficio*, where they are sorted into categories and set out to dry. Several employees move the beans around periodically to keep moisture from accumulating and mold from growing. Once they have reached the proper dryness level, they are brought to the warehouse in large sacks. Two women work in the warehouse and are responsible for the roasting, grinding, packaging, and negotiating with clients, and have become experts at telling the quality of the green coffee beans by their look and smell. In 2006, the two women were roasting and packaging 50 kilos per month for sale on local markets. Although these first steps have been small, they have made some progress in breaking the traditional model of export-oriented production, and demand has been growing steadily. They now have several institutional clients in Costa Rica and a few direct export clients in the US. Several other small coffee farmer associations had also started processing and roasting their own beans for sale on local markets, thus adding value to what has traditionally been exported as a raw material.

These examples from Costa Rica show the multiple marginalities that combine to hinder progress. In the southeast of the country, the Coopabuena cooperative had gone bankrupt due to Costa Rica's position as peripheral to the core, and the region's periphery within the country was making it difficult to recover. In Talamanca, banana producers separated by mountains and rivers from both San José and North American consumers are still struggling to break traditional models of corporate exploitation. The organic farmers in these regions, paradoxically so intimately connected to and dependent upon the global marketplace, were less connected to MAOCO, many having never heard of it, even though their regional associations were members. And many of the organic banana producers in Talamanca told me that, having heard positive messages on the TV about the benefits that CAFTA would bring, they were hopeful that perhaps it would help them, too. This was not true, however, in indigenous communities, who analyzed CAFTA from the perspective of the

ways it might threaten their cultural heritage and autonomy. The coffee producers in the Central Valley highlands of Turrialba are faring slightly better, able to make institutional connections with and through CATIE, and more able to reach the capital. Producers were also more informed about and positioned against CAFTA. These examples show that marginality can be reinforced and recreated through multiple channels in powerful ways. This inability to break with patterns of the past in the banana industry, where US control stretches back to the days of Minor Keith, mirrors Hardin's concept of concessionary politics, where colonial era forest concessions still have a role in determining present day conservation politics and policies (Hardin 2002).

Latvia: Repositioning meadows

Processing remains one of the biggest bottlenecks in the organic sector in Latvia, as well. It is in some ways felt even more acutely in Latvia than in Costa Rica, because of the short growing season and smaller diversity of fresh fruits and vegetables for sale. The need to meet EU regulations even for domestic sale has put an enormous strain on farmers who might otherwise have sold home-made cheeses, baked goods, smoked meats or other traditional products. EU entry made many such home-made products illegal overnight, unless the farm could certify its kitchen as a food processing facility. For most farm kitchens, this would require substantial investments in improvements such as installing running hot and cold water, separate indoor toilet facilities, tiled surfaces, and multiple entries and exits to manage product flow. In 2007, long-awaited regulations finally made it possible to register as a "home-processor," which allowed farmers to determine a list of their risk points and submit processing registers in order to be allowed to sell their products at farmers' markets. Due to this a selection of home-made cheeses has reappeared at the *Berga bazārs* market.

In 2006, there were 14 certified organic processing facilities: one dairy, one goat milk dairy, two bakeries, three slaughterhouses, two herbal tea production facilities, 2 vegetable packing plants, two fruit packing plants, and one honey processor (Latvian Ministry of Agriculture 2007). This number has been growing very slowly, despite the exponential growth in the number of certified organic farms and land area. There have also been casualties, such as when one of two certified organic bakeries in the country went bankrupt in 2007 because it was unable to repay loans and manage the tax burden of a small business. Thus, even if more farmers are producing more food, a great amount of it gets sold as conventional because of the lack of certified processing facilities. As noted, the vast majority of organic food is not labeled as such (Saktiņa 2007). The bottleneck has formed because recently formed farmers' cooperatives also still lack capital and business skills needed in order to develop their own processing plants. Those who have tried have suffered countless setbacks trying to meet regulations such as those listed above that are designed primarily for larger operations, only to then have the regulations changed again. So far, the organic sector has not captured the imagination of local investors or businesspeople who might have skills and resources with which to set up new organic processing plants. Finally, for conventional processors to open up special organic product lines within their conventional processing plants also involves new investments, because the organic production line must be separated in time or space from all conventional processing to avoid contamination.

Without more processors, even if the number of certified farms keeps increasing, it is difficult to increase the amount of certified food available for purchase. The majority of dairy farmers are forced to sell their milk to conventional dairies, beef cattle are sent to the closest (conventional) slaughterhouses, and fresh fruit and vegetables have such a short shelf-life and can be fragile and costly to transport, so that they are used more for subsistence rather than grown for sale.

There have been a few efforts by farmers' cooperatives and individual farmers to develop value-added processing industries. The most important sector, both culturally and economically, in Latvian agriculture is the dairy sector, as already described in Chapter One. In 2005, almost 65% of organic farms were producing milk, but more than half, or 851 farms, had less than five dairy cows (Saktiņa 2007). Despite this, there is only one small organic dairy processing plant, and it has had a rocky history. The dairy was formed by a small cooperative northeast of Rīga. In 2006 they were processing half a ton of milk per day, from approximately 50 cows. For Laila, the manager, an agronomist and dairy farmer, rather than a businesswoman, setting up the dairy plant was a great feat. She traveled to Germany to learn about processing facilities and took out a loan to buy equipment and start the business. The dairy produces milk, sour cream, butter, and several types of fresh cheeses. Milk is thermally treated, but not pasteurized⁵⁵, because Laila insists on the fact that pasteurization and homogenization in effect “kills the milk.”⁵⁶ She commented that organic milk producers in Germany “homogenize and pasteurize the milk, so that in the end it differs in no way from the milk in those [tetrapak] packages...just that it is in a glass bottle.” The un-pasteurized and non-homogenized organic milk from her dairy is filled into returnable and washable brown glass bottles that protect the milk from light. The products are sold at the few organic specialty stores and market stands. Due to the limited supply, short shelf life, and the brown bottle design which is not aesthetically pleasing to some customers, the milk is not sold at chain supermarkets.

⁵⁵ Latvia and France are the only countries in the EU where the pasteurization of milk is not required by law. To sell non-pasteurized milk, however, processors are subjected to more rigorous laboratory testing for staph and other bacteria.

⁵⁶ Interestingly, Michael Pollan (2001) quotes an organic dairy farmer in the US using this same phrase to describe the process of ultra-pasteurization, not regular pasteurization, reflecting a significant difference in perceptions.



Figure 4.8: Organic dairy products focus on simplicity in Latvia. Source: www.videsvestis.lv

The dairy has also had many problems with several changes in hygiene legislation that have required several waves of renovation, and problems with bank loans. For instance, the dairy needs money for basic improvements like repairing the roof, but can not get loans for this because it is not seen by the bank as a business expansion. Other investments for which the dairy did obtain resources to make renovations required by the hygiene and sanitation laws have turned out to be unnecessary, because the regulations have since been changed and relaxed.

The issue of hygiene regulations is one of the most difficult for farmers who want to engage in processing activities and for small cooperatives. I heard constant complaints about the absurdly strict requirements of the Food and Veterinary Department of the Ministry. Representatives from the department insist that their regulations are not so difficult to meet, and that inspectors are very open to consultations and questions about requirements. Farmers and business owners, however, have repeatedly told me their experiences that local regulations end up being overly detailed and stricter than the EU requirements. In addition, for many farmers the very process of inspection seems intimidating, therefore they are loathe to ask many questions in advance, or to question the final decisions by the inspectors (see Chapter Six for more on certification and inspection). In addition, there is not uniform

interpretation of these norms at all levels, as noted in the newspaper article about inter-agency disagreement over tree regulations quoted in Chapter Two. What one functionary at the central office says may contradict what the local inspector says, and the farmer feels stuck in the middle.

There was a hopeful development in the organic dairy sector in 2007, when a farmers' cooperative bought out the majority shares of a cheese plant, and began producing three different types of organic cheese. It was the first time that a conventional dairy plant agreed to buy organic milk with a price premium, and they signed a contract with the Drustu farmer cooperative. This was a long-awaited positive development for organic milk producers, and many organic farmers cancelled their previous milk sales contracts to make new agreements with the Drustu cooperative. The sales of the new organic cheeses were not as good as hoped, however, and the dairy announced in January 2008 that it would stop buying the organic milk (Galkina 2007; Majore-Linē 2008).

These fits and starts in the organic dairy industry reflect larger issues in the dairy sector as a whole. According to EU regulations, dairy farmers may no longer milk their animals by hand, and were required to make large investments in their milk collection and storage facilities in order to comply with regulations. EU funds were available to assist in this transition, but it was still painful for small producers. Furthermore, entry into the Common Agricultural market meant that each producer was assigned a milk quota to avoid over-production. Dairy farmers were already dissatisfied with this system, but then the large milk processing plants lowered prices for small producers, claiming "optimization of routes." Small farmers were especially hard-hit, because many were offered huge price cuts for their milk due to the inconvenience of picking up such small quantities. These various issues came to a head in May 2008 when dairy farmers staged a protest against low milk prices in the Dome Square of the old town of Rīga, giving milk away for free in a symbolic

representation of the fact that current prices did not cover production costs, yet supermarkets were selling the milk at double the prices that farmers receive (BNS 2008).⁵⁷ This came amidst a general economic downturn and high inflation rates, leaving many small farmers suffering, and afraid they will default on their bank loans.

The organic herbal tea sector, however, is an example where the idea of adding value has been in some ways more successful, in part because the required infrastructure is much less complicated. There are several different farms that now have certified facilities for drying and packaging of medicinal herbs for teas. Farmers pick wild herbs from their certified grasslands and meadows, as well as growing fields of specific medicinal plants and herbs. They make herbal blends of teas for specific ailments or boosting immunity, based on folk knowledge combined with medical knowledge of the properties of the plants. In addition, they make little herbal pillows and satchels, sauna treatments, and spice mixes. Through this adding of value, farmers have been able to obtain much higher prices for relatively simple products.

In one of the farthest northeast corners of Latvia only a few kilometers from Russia, several farms have begun to specialize in the collection of these herbs from their meadows. Anita collects herbs from her wild-horse grazing territories and neighboring organic farms also bring her what they collect. She has made a contract for 25 different herbs and flowers with a new local organic cosmetics company, the first one in the country to be using certified organic products to produce a line of lotions, cleansers and skin care products.

In some ways, this can be seen as a reclaiming and repositioning of the meadows and grasslands not only as source of pasture-grass for dairy animals, but also as sources of other products in their own right. The farmers who possess the knowledge of the herbs become the

⁵⁷ This action had a doubly powerful social impact. While the farmers were aiming to demonstrate their dire straits, the long line of pensioners lined up early in the morning toting multiple empty milk cans and plastic bottles to receive their free milk revealed that they might be worse off than the farmers.

translators of the meadows, and through their packaging of different types of herbal blends for various types of teas, they are adding not only their labor, but their knowledge as well. And for those farmers who are working with the natural grazing as described in Chapter Two, this entails also a reimagining of the meadow, as a home for the wild horses, as a tourist object for people who want to go see the wild horses, and as a source of raw materials for their value added products. These sorts of creative repositionings and creation of connections seem to work as a way of transforming the marginal meadows on the periphery of Europe into a niche market, more so than the dairy sector has been able to do.

Stuck?

What do these various stories about the approaches, successes and challenges of the two countries' organic sectors tell us? The Costa Rican and Latvian organic movements have taken incredibly different approaches to certification, processing, and marketing, yet have strikingly similar problems. These problems are all interrelated and connected, so that there is no one strand to pull to untangle the knot that ties them one to the other, making it seemingly unmanageable. The Costa Rican movement began by trying to form a strong social and political movement, with an alternative vision of certification and markets. Meanwhile, the Latvian Organic Association has organized itself more as a professional association and concentrated on assimilating to more mainstream consumers' needs, by developing a logo and making market locations more accessible to a greater variety of people. And while progress slowly continues on some levels in both movements, they also both seem somehow "stuck" at a threshold that is preventing them from developing further.

In both Latvia and Costa Rica, the problems related to establishment of processing facilities that would allow farmers or small businesses to capture more of the returns from their products are related to larger infrastructural concerns and access to capital. As such,

they reflect both the position of the organic sector within the agricultural economy of the country and the economic position of each country within global markets. There is a sense of stagnation, and that producers and processors are not able to get past all the obstacles that would allow them to expand to create profitable businesses.

What are the possibilities of getting out of this vicious circle? As one farmer/processor in Latvia commented:

So those of us who have [organic] farms here...well, we're existing.... I don't know...maybe we don't know how to work...but we are all in a similar situation. We all lack the resources- the resources for production, facilities, transportation...so we just exist... and dream that we will be able to provide consumers with good food. They're good dreams...it's nice that people can have good dreams, but..." Later she concludes: "Maybe we just need to sell the whole business to someone who can develop it..."

A long-time participant in the Costa Rican movement expressed her frustration that the solutions were actually so very simple and straightforward, but for years already, it wasn't happening, because donors don't fund practical work, yet there is also no one else to invest in such solutions:

So what are we all working for?... is it to have all the time more people to certify? No. Or to have more organic pineapple in the Dutch markets? No, no, no. I'm not interested in that. To have more people who can sell to Wal-mart? Not that either. We want more small producers producing organically, in a more integrated way, that can have a better quality of life- and through that we will have more production available in all parts. What do we gain by working on information on markets, more certifications, credits for large investments? There is a budget of 14 million dollars for a new government project. There is not a single dollar of this for small credits for producers. Because they are all oriented that the producer has to make a big investment...no, we need to come back down to earth- what are we talking about here?... we need to start with diversification, food sovereignty, with local markets, with small credits...

She cited the example of Antonio, who had suffered hard times as a conventional producer, but with his hard work and years of selling at the *feria* had been able to educate all his sons, build a new house, and even go on vacation occasionally. This was the model that had

proved frustratingly difficult to replicate on a larger scale due to lack of adequate types of funds. “It’s so obvious,” she exclaimed in exasperation, but still so difficult to achieve.

Conventionalization on the margins

The problems described above are strikingly different from those discussed in the majority of the literature on organic sectors and markets that primarily focuses on cases from North America, Western Europe, and Australia (see Introduction). These are countries where capitalist economies developed long ago and from where they have spread to other parts of the world. In these countries, the pressure from large companies has forced a metaphorical “conventionalization,” whereby organic production becomes little more than substitution of organic inputs for synthetic ones, and organic sectors are co-opted by large companies and “business as usual” models of processing.

The situation in small countries on the margins, such as Latvia and Costa Rica is notably different, however, and discussions with farmers, shop-owners and small processors reveal a chain of barriers to even getting organic food certified, packaged, and to the market place. Thus, I would argue that in some ways the Costa Rican and Latvian organic sectors are stuck “between conventionalizations.” Due to the persistent bottlenecks in the organic sector, producers are faced with a very different sort of conventionalization than that which threatens industrialized organic sectors. Here one of the options seems to be to return quite literally to conventional production, where infrastructure and financing are better coordinated. Or, at the sector level, to hope that a foreign investor will be able to invest enough to develop beyond the recurring problems.

This raises the question of whether in small countries that either still classify as “developing” or “second world” such as Costa Rica and Latvia, the idea of conventionalization can be separated from globalization. What does the term

conventionalization mean for small farmers who have been crafting their own innovative understandings of organic agriculture in response to other large-scale changes, as described in the previous chapters? What significance may it hold for these two small countries that are so differently integrated into large-scale global economies?

During my main fieldwork period from May 2005- December 2006, I carefully considered the conventionalization debate as regards Latvia and Costa Rica. As I watched the farmers and processors struggling to expand, pay back debts, or meet strict regulations, and as I watched the market stands and specialized stores struggle to fill their shelves, it seemed that both of these places were still quite far from the threat of conventionalization as described in the literature. If anything, there was a threat that many farmers who had begun using organic methods might succumb to this second type of “conventionalization,” as some coffee farmers in Costa Rica already had, deciding to return to conventional production methods because the promise of organic production as providing either a stable and easy export market niche or higher prices for local markets, was not turning out to be true. In fact, organic farmers seemed in some cases to have higher production costs, fewer marketing possibilities, and the same farm-gate prices as conventional producers. Under such circumstances, it might only be those who “approach organic agriculture almost as a religion,” as expressed by one elderly woman farmer in Costa Rica, that would remain in the sector.

When I returned to Costa Rica in 2008 for follow-up research, I was struck by various new developments. First, a debate was in progress about the expansion of organic pineapple production in the north of the country. The trend in expanding pineapple production had been continuing for several years, in some cases transforming existing pasture area or banana plantations to pineapple plantations, but also clearing new areas of forest for new pineapple production. The majority of this was conventional pineapple contracted from small

producers by large intermediary companies. The companies provided farmers with the *hijos* (seedlings or starts from pineapple cuttings) and necessary inputs, and farmers sold them back the pineapple. This type of “contract farming” has been heavily criticized for taking control out of the hands of small farmers, thus in effect proletarianizing small producers (Lewontin 1998). In addition, such farming practices have a deskilling effect, because farmers only apply a “packet” of chemicals without truly understanding or engaging in the agricultural processes. This type of “formula farming” can also result in over-application of chemicals.

With increasing market demand for organic pineapple, the large pineapple buyers had allegedly started simply providing a proprietary “organic packet” instead of a conventional one to some producers, without truly engaging farmers in all aspects of organic farming. The debate that emerged in 2008 within the organic movement was surrounding the fact that one of the large intermediaries had approached MAOCO to develop a form of cooperation with their organic farmers. The idea was to develop a project whereby some of MAOCO’s producers would train the company’s farmers in organic production methods. While some in the movement saw this as an opportunity to help educate other farmers, and try to improve the environmental and social practices of a large company, others saw it as an attempt by the company to steal the knowledge from the movements’ farmers, use it to reduce their own production costs, and eventually out-compete the small producers from whom they had obtained the information. Regardless of the intention of the company or the final outcome of the negotiations, this dispute indicates that the conventionalization of production processes at least in organic pineapple production has indeed already begun, and may well continue.

Wal-mart’s hold on the Costa Rican supermarket sector was also tightening. While few producers from MAOCO were selling to these supermarkets, the demand for cheap

organics that Wal-mart was promoting would likely facilitate also the expansion of larger companies using contract farming to sell to that segment of the retail sector.

Changes had also happened in Latvia in 2007 and 2008. Most farmers were still struggling to find markets for their goods, but the success of the herbal tea production had been validated by the fact that a German pharmaceutical company placed a large order for organic medicinal herbs from Latvia. In the seed sector, I was told in 2007 that the majority of seed varieties tested by experiment stations were no longer the varieties locally developed by the national Breeding stations, but ones that come in from large foreign seed companies, because this simplified the process. Conventional farmers recognized the name and often got special deals on the seeds if they bought other inputs. And due to the lack of possibilities for selling beef as organic due to a lack of slaughterhouses, organic cattle ranchers were increasingly beginning to sell live calves for export to Germany and Italy where they would fetch higher prices.

Finally, the new subsidy structure introduced in Latvia in 2008 that tied organic payments to the revenue earned from production per hectare had raised fears that only larger, intensive, organic farmers would be able to keep receiving subsidy payments, and thus to continue to survive at all. Some farmers who had taken out large bank loans in order to build or renovate primary processing facilities were now unable to complete the construction due to inflation or were in danger of defaulting due to rising costs of fuel and other inputs. One farmer said, cynically, “So, who will buy them out? A Latvian? Never! Maybe a German...” Are these new developments signs of conventionalization, globalization, or both? One of the big differences in these countries is that the take-over of small businesses or niches is not happening only by corporate actors, but by necessarily foreign corporate actors, because these are the only sources of investment capital. Thus, it seems that the lack of local

development opportunities was leading to the globalization of the sector, prioritizing export over local markets.

To some extent, the patterns in the organic sector mirror the two countries' positions in world agricultural markets. Costa Rica has long been seen as a producer of agricultural export commodities. Some of the organic development opportunities, like the banana deals with Gerber, mimic the same dynamic of purchaser-driven pricing and corporate control of the production chain. Meanwhile Latvia, having been excluded from European markets for so long, is still struggling to find a way in. The new unity of old and new member states within Europe is still fragile at best. At the Biofach trade fair in Germany, one German researcher presenting on Eastern European markets noted that it was important for old Member States to begin investing in the new ones, in order to ensure the quality of potential imports and avoid problems with possible food scares that would destabilize the entire European organic sector. Thus, to the mind of the researcher, the strange new EU members presented both a risk and an investment opportunity, but the idea that the sectors could develop on their own was out of the question.

In Costa Rica, the long history of increasing US dominance in the agricultural sector is perhaps what has spurred farmers, both organic and conventional, to view their role in rural development debates as a more political one at various points in time.⁵⁸ In this context, the organic sector seems to be striving for protection from both globalization of agriculture and conventionalization of organic markets. While the connections to the US are part of what have set Costa Rica apart from the rest of Latin America, the Costa Rican social movements are now trying to use their long-standing democratic traditions, the other source of their “exceptionalism,” as a tool to become less of an exception in Latin America, in terms of the

⁵⁸ See for example Edelman, M. (1999). Peasants Against Globalization: Rural Social Movements in Costa Rica. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

resistance to the US and its models of development, business, and culture (see Chapters Five and Seven for more on Costa Rican democracy).

Latvia, as a small player in larger geopolitical contests is now just as much, or perhaps even more, on the margins of the European Union as it was on those of the Soviet Union. Both organic farmers and many other citizens are beginning to feel that they have been tossed “from one Union to the next.” A group of farmers in the eastern part of the country, Latgale, lamented the lost role for agriculture that came with the dissolution of the Soviet Union: “We used to grow enough potatoes to feed ourselves and all of Petersburg.” The markets to the east, from which they had now been cut off, represented a lost stability.

This involves a shift from one margin, on the Western edge of the Soviet Union, to the eastern edge of the European Union. In many ways, this has been a fall from grace, from being the esteemed *Pribaltika*, a term used to refer to the preferred Baltic seaside vacation spot for Soviet apparatchiks, to the eastern border of the EU from whence women get trafficked as sex workers, and trained doctors emigrate to Ireland to pick mushrooms for the higher salary this downward mobility offers. For the agricultural sector as well, this has been a sense of degradation, from being a prime exporter of milk, potatoes, and other food to Russia, to being nearly forbidden to sell anything on already “Europeanized” domestic markets.

Perhaps then, it is not really conventionalization, but reinforcement of existing positions in relation to global markets that is happening? At the national level, trends are reinforcing Latvia’s marginality as a member of the “second world” and Costa Rica’s global insertion to the marketplace as a “third world” provider of raw materials. But in both places, the organic movements themselves may get increasingly marginalized through conventionalization processes. There are signs that conventionalization, if it is going to happen, might pass right by the movements themselves. Because if and where

conventionalization is happening, it is not small farmers or companies who are selling out, or larger and medium farmers that are changing to input substitution models. In Costa Rica, where “conventionalization” is already happening in the pineapple sector, certain companies are establishing their own parallel industrial organic worlds, imported as directly from the North as the pineapples get exported to the South. This process will likely continue whether or not the movement decides to cooperate with it. Thus the globalized organic export markets may develop alongside these movements that have been trying to create their own versions of organic agriculture, and eventually create competition for them.

Connections across marginality

There is also subtle irony here about mainstreaming and marginalization at the global level. While the Latvian Ministry and Organic Association feel increasing pressure to join the European mainstream, pushing for double-certified, commercially viable organic seeds, and organic products in supermarkets, they become marginalized because their post-socialist past makes them European misfits. But not marginalized enough, it seems, for there is another “Europe” at work in this story. In fact, even as the Latvian Association struggles to negotiate the labyrinths of the new EU regulations largely on its own, the main funding and training in Costa Rica about seed-saving and innovative organic initiatives is coming from various European organizations and international agencies.

In Costa Rica one of the most active organizations that has been supporting MAOCO is Vredeseilanden from Belgium. In projects abroad they had changed their name to VECO because no one could pronounce the original, but they were one of the main funders of the organic and alternative rural development movements in Costa Rica and other countries in Central America. They had organized exchanges for farmers from Costa Rica to visit groups in Belgium, and introduced ideas for many of the most successful projects in Costa Rica,

such as the *Semana Agroecologica*, the sale of weekly vegetable baskets, and the sustainable schools project. Many other European groups and individuals were also active in Costa Rica. Kokopelli, a French seed group, had come to teach farmers how to produce and save vegetable seeds, such as lettuce seeds.⁵⁹ HIVOS, a Dutch NGO, together with the UNDP provided funding for the seed projects. And many European individuals have moved to Costa Rica and are working in the sector with NGOs or as organic farmers themselves.

Many Europeans I met in Costa Rica asked with polite interest how Latvia is doing with EU accession, and listened to my brief accounts of the sometimes harsh adjustment process, but the interest usually stopped there. Among European and international funding agencies there was no apparent interest in starting projects in Eastern Europe that would be somehow similar to those being carried out in Costa Rica. In 2006, an NGO coalition from Western Europe attended the European Regional FAO meetings held in Riga. The groups who attended were intrigued when I mentioned that East-West issues within Europe might be parallel to North-South issues in certain ways, and admitted that they had never given much thought to the inequalities or to possible activism on this level. The Latvian participants from the organic movement who attended, for their part, seemed shocked that the NGOs were promoting food sovereignty and small-scale subsistence farming, things that seemingly clashed with all the signals they were getting from Europe. And thus the dialog among these groups did not continue.

This apparent oversight on the part of European funders and lack of cooperation among NGOs stems in part from imagined structural differences, from assumptions that the countries of Eastern Europe must be more developed and less in need than those in Latin America, and in some ways that might be correct. Based on this assumption, most European

⁵⁹ Kokopelli is one of the few groups that have been embroiled in lawsuits against intellectual property rights on seeds at the European level, which creates its own bridge to the Costa Rican experience described in Chapter Seven.

foundations that funded any type of NGO work and training seminars pulled out of the Baltics in the early 2000s. It was assumed that the transition to democracy and to a market economy were largely complete. But even then, the particular types of groups supporting organic agriculture and alternative development paradigms were never present, and have always worked more in Africa, Latin America and the “developing world.”

In this particular case, then, NGOs advocating goals that may be considered marginal within Europe, such as food sovereignty, connect to parts of the world that are considered peripheral, but there is not a larger examination of core, periphery, or marginality within the new Europe. Eastern Europe is perhaps not “other” or exotic enough, does not have the same type of post-colonial connections with Western Europe, and thus does not fit into the global imaginary of solidarity towards a better future. Or perhaps it is simply backwards, in the ways it has been for centuries in the European imagination (Wolff 1994). Thus despite, and sometimes because of all of the new legislation and new activism, certain patterns are perpetuated. The US and Western Europe are still dictating the rules of the game, the Latin Americans are still resisting, and the Eastern Europeans are still “stuck in the middle.”

SECTION III: IMAGINING A REGION

CHAPTER 5

“We will simply count the votes:” democracy, hegemony, and the common sense of regionalization

“The real loser in the 2003 referendum was democracy.”

-Political commentary on
Latvia’s referendum on joining the EU (Auers 2003)

“Today democracy won.”

– President of the Costa Rican Supreme Tribunal of Elections,
Luis Antonio Sobrado of the CAFTA referendum (Villalobos 2007)

On the morning of October 7, 2007, in a working class suburb outside of San José, Costa Rica, I sat down on a bench outside the polling station for the referendum on the ratification of the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). One of the international observers sat down next to me and said to me casually, “Have you seen the materials of the SÍ campaign? They’re incredible!” She pulled out a cartoon and handed it to me. It depicted the future of Costa Rica with or without CAFTA in two columns of cartoons. In the left hand column, happy *Ticos* (as Costa Ricans call themselves) have shiny new cars, fancy computers and medical equipment, secure jobs and beautiful nature preserves. Exports roll onto a ship and happy shoppers browse the shelves of cheap imports. On the right hand column, in a Costa Rica without CAFTA, a pothole has swallowed up a car in the street,

people are unemployed, goods linger unexported, and all the trees have been cut down due to lack of money for nature protection. There is no more medicine available, teenagers hang around aimlessly and turn to theft, seeing no future in education and hard work.

I looked up, asking where she got the pamphlet- and she pointed to the information stand of the SÍ campaign, where staffers were assisting people in finding their voting tables. “They gave that to you?” I exclaimed incredulously. There was a ban on campaigning or distributing information on the last three days before the referendum, let alone on election day right outside the polling station. We consulted with the other international observers, and a colleague from Panama went to report the violation to the election officials. The observers became almost giddy afterwards about having successfully reported a violation. Their work here had been worthwhile.

Costa Rica’s referendum on CAFTA was historic on a number of levels. It was the first country to hold a national referendum on the ratification of a free trade agreement.⁶⁰ For Costa Rica’s electorate, it was also the first national referendum in its 186 years of independence. And for many voters throughout the country, it was the first time that they got involved in openly debating the future development of the nation. The referendum was characterized by the massive popular involvement of citizens, especially those in the opposition, who had initially called for the referendum. The anti-CAFTA campaign had at first been led by the “usual suspects” of Unions, teachers, farmers, and environmentalists, but in the months leading up to it, was joined also by hundreds of “neighborhood patriotic committees” that formed spontaneously and canvassed door-to-door getting other neighbors involved. The day before the referendum, one woman explained to the group of international

⁶⁰ The EU has a separate free-trade agreement called the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). Joining the EU is different because it includes other legislative aspects for Member States.

observers assembled that she had never been involved in any political campaigns before, but that this was different, because it was not run by political parties.

In Latvia in the summer of 2003, several months before the referendum on joining the European Union (EU), the atmosphere was quite different. The government's YES campaign was going strong, filling newspaper columns and TV minutes. Here, children's school groups, NGOs and pensioners were also rallying for the YES campaign. Voices of dissent were few and far between, and mostly discounted as old communists or extreme nationalists, while the majority of the population anticipated some improvement in their lives from EU accession.

This chapter discusses the ways that integration into the regional economic and political blocks of the European Union and the Central American Free Trade Agreement were proposed and discussed by the governments of Latvia and Costa Rica, respectively, and reacted to by the media, general public, and social movements through the referenda processes. While in both countries, entry into these agreements was presented by proponents largely as "common sense," the reactions to this naturalizing discourse have been very different. In Latvia, although many voters remained undecided until the last minute, there was little public discussion and opposition groups were highly marginalized. Meanwhile in Costa Rica, the country was highly polarized, and fierce debates preceded the referendum on joining CAFTA. I show how governments and social movements in both countries created teleological narratives of historical relations and social imaginaries of the regions they were to "join", which was a way of constructing their own versions of what was "common sense." Using Anna Tsing's concept of "contingent lineage," I show how this common sense was "made" by connecting distinct imagined national histories with specific regional and global futures. I suggest that the different resonance that these discourses had for the public in each country is partially due to the way that such lineages were constructed, the way social

movements conceived of and deployed the ideas of “democracy,” regional imaginaries, and global connections. In the conclusion, I reflect on how in Costa Rica, participation by wider publics and social movements transformed the NO’s notions of common sense into a counter-hegemonic discourse, while the ones in Latvia were not successful in doing so.

While other chapters of the dissertation focus specifically on organic farmers’ interpretations of the meanings and impacts of regionalization, this chapter is meant to contextualize the farmers and movements’ views within larger political debates, and does not focus specifically on farmers but on broader social movements and publics. I first give some background on the two referenda and on the theoretical grounding of the chapter, and then turn to the analysis of the specific campaigns.

A tale of two referenda

Latvia’s accession to the European Union is a process that began as early as 1994, three years after Latvia’s independence from the Soviet Union, with the signing of an Agreement on Free Trade and Trade Related Matters with the EU. An official application for membership in the EU was submitted in 1995, and the official accession negotiations took place through 2002. In April of 2003, the EU Accession Treaty was signed, followed by the referendum in September (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia).

On September 20, 2003, the Latvian electorate voted in a national referendum to join the EU. The result was 67.4 percent in favor and 32.6 percent opposed. Electoral turnout was about 72 percent of those eligible to vote. Latvia’s result was the third lowest among new Member States, but was a welcome victory for the proponents, because Latvia had had consistently high rates of undecided voters and “Euroskeptics” in opinion poles in the four years leading up to the referendum. Latvia’s government scheduled the referendum as the last one of the ten accession countries in part as a strategic decision to influence voters to

vote YES, as their neighbors had (Pridham 2004). Latvia officially joined the EU on May 1, 2004, along with nine other accession countries, expanding the block from 15 to 25 Member States. Bulgaria and Romania have also since joined, bringing the total to 27.

Negotiations for CAFTA began in January 2003. The agreement was originally signed by the US and the Central American countries in May 2004, the Dominican Republic was added in August, 2004, and was ratified by the US in July 2005. All other members ratified the agreement through their Parliamentary votes, and the agreement has already entered into force. Due to years of controversy over the agreement in Costa Rica, Parliamentary ratification was continually postponed, and the opposition pressed for a public referendum.

On October 7, 2007, Costa Rica became the first nation in the world to hold a referendum on the ratification of a free trade agreement. The national referendum on the ratification of the CAFTA was initiated by its opponents, planned as the culmination of a four-year long anti-CAFTA struggle. Despite the efforts of these groups, voters approved the ratification of CAFTA, with a narrow margin of 51.6 percent in favor and 48.4 percent opposed, with electoral turnout at around 60 percent. The defeat came as a shock to opponents because opinion polls had been showing a steady increase in opposition to CAFTA, with the final poll three days before elections showing a 12 percent lead in anti-CAFTA sentiment (Villalobos 2007). Following the vote, there were many allegations of media bias, intervention by politicians and voting irregularities but the result was not overturned. Costa Rica's President signed CAFTA into law on November 21, 2007. It will enter into force in 2008 if remaining necessary legislative changes are made by Parliament by that time⁶¹ (see Chapter Seven).

⁶¹ The established deadline for all legislative changes to be made was 29 February 2008. Due to continued resistance from the opposition parties in the Legislative Assembly even after the referendum, the

The agreement eliminates 80 percent of tariffs on US exports to the Central American countries immediately, and phases out tariffs on the remaining 20 % over a ten year period. Central American countries already have preferential trade status under the Caribbean Basin Initiative and Most Favored Nation programs, which allows for duty-free imports of 80 percent of goods to the US from these countries, but these programs must be renewed by Congress periodically. In addition to the general multi-lateral agreement, each country negotiated specific bilateral provisions as “side letters” under the agreement with the US (2004). In the case of Costa Rica, 13 national laws, the so-called “implementation agenda” have to be changed still by the Legislative Assembly after ratification in order for the agreement to enter into force.

It is not the point of this chapter to compare the content of the agreements, but rather the public discussions and debates surrounding them. It is important to note however, that although the EU is a political union, and thus considered very different than just a free trade agreement, that CAFTA is also not *just* a trade agreement. As opponents to CAFTA in Costa Rica emphasized in their campaigns, the agreement “*va mucho mas allá que el comercio*” (goes much beyond trade). Both the EU Accession agreement and CAFTA include numerous non-trade related issues, such as environment, agriculture, investments, telecommunications, finance, and intellectual property rights. It is exactly these non-trade related aspects of the agreement that have been the most controversial. As a matter of process, in both countries the negotiations on these agreements have been on-going for a number of years, often with limited public involvement. The referenda, then, are only one small step in processes with their own institutional momentum. In the case of the EU, all of Latvia’s legislation had already been changed before the referendum to match the EU requirements, while in the case

government had to request an extension until October 1, 2008. Gillers, G. (2008). Costa Rica Gets More Time for CAFTA. Tico Times. San Jose, 29 February 2008.

of Costa Rica, the legislative changes are still in process after ratification. This is important because it changes the stakes considerably.

Making common sense

What is at stake is the nation that we want: whether we are a country that can look the world in the eyes, confronting the new challenges that emerge, or whether we are a country that turns its back on the present and the future and thinks only of the past...CAFTA is our great opportunity. Ensuring that this opportunity becomes a reality will be our great responsibility.

- Costa Rica referendum campaign materials for SÍ (Marti 2007)

Let us remember how historical injustice hurt- the fact that Latvia was forcefully withdrawn from the rest of Europe. If 1940 had not happened, Latvia would be equivalent to Denmark, Holland, Finland or Sweden. Because that is what Latvia was like before the occupation. That is what it must become again. Citizens of Latvia! On the 20th of September we have the opportunity to correct history, to make safe our nation's future development.

-Statement two weeks before the referendum written by Latvian composer Māra Zālīte and signed by 250 artists and intellectuals (Zālīte 2003).

In both of the above quotes, the idea of voting “yes” in the respective national referendum is presented as logical, wise and necessary. The future and the security of the nation depend on this vote. Voting yes, then, is presented as common sense. Geertz (2000:75) has examined the cultural attributes of what we call “common sense:”

There are a number of reasons why treating “common sense” as a relatively organized body of considered thought, rather than just what anyone clothed and in his right mind knows, should lead to some useful conclusions; but perhaps the most important is that it is an inherent characteristic of common-sense thought precisely to deny this and to affirm that its tenets are immediate deliverances of experience, not deliberated reflections upon it. ...[Common sense ideas] ...are conflated into comprising one large realm of the given and undeniable, a catalog of in-the-grain-of-nature realities so preemptory as to force themselves upon any mind sufficiently unclouded to receive them. Yet this is clearly not so.

Biehl, in his account of “zones of social abandonment” in Brazil, invokes Geertz's notion of common sense, to explain how an institutionalized patient, Catarina, and countless others, were made *socially* dead long before their *physical* death. Biehl shows how every decision made by Catarina's family, doctors and responsible institutions was perfectly

understandable as common sense, yet that when combined, they resulted in an abominable violation of human rights, showing the lack of sense in common sense.

Gramsci has shown that common sense is historically and culturally situated:

Common sense is a collective noun...there is not just one common sense, for that too is a product of history and a part of the historical process...Every social stratum has its own 'common sense' and its own 'good sense,' which are basically the most widespread conception of life and of man. Every philosophical current leaves behind a sedimentation of 'common sense': this is the document of its historical effectiveness. Common sense is not something rigid and immobile, but is continually transforming itself... (Hoare and Smith 1971:325-6).

Thus common sense, often assumed to be unanimously held by the members of any one society throughout time, is actually the articulation of understandings of the past and present, and is thus specific to both the culture, the social group, and the particular moment in time.

If we look more closely at the quotations from the two YES campaigns above, we see that they present voting YES in the referendum as their own versions of common sense that imply, and even require, contingency. They connect a particular imagined national past with an anticipated regional or global future.⁶² In such a teleological formula, the outcome of the referendum becomes the “plus” sign that connects these historical and future elements. This contingency “makes” common sense by rendering other options unimaginable. It is no secret that campaign messages are carefully crafted in order to speak to the desires, fears, or imagined “instincts” of voters. Seeking to understand, however, how exactly these pasts, futures, and the democratic processes that connect them are constructed in these campaigns can shed light on the various meanings of the referenda and their outcomes.

In order to capture how the campaigners of the “yes” and “no” groups constructed their particular ideas of common sense to offer to the voters, I use Anna Tsing’s concept of

⁶² In discussing the imagined past I am drawing on Benedict Anderson’s concept of “imagined communities” and the scholarly traditions of showing how national narratives are romanticized and mythologized. Anderson, B. (1983). Imagined Communities. London: Verso.

“contingent lineage.” Tsing (2005:127) invokes the term “contingent lineages” as a way to contextualize and historicize how social movements combine local, national and global meanings:

we might call these shifting... histories ‘lineages,’ that is, shards of genealogies through which present forms have emerged.... Contingent lineages show us the world-embracing spread of cosmopolitanisms even as they bring us into the articulations through which these cosmopolitanisms become locally identifiable. ...the confluences of contingent lineages refigure imported ideas, migrants, and materials from all over the world as local. In these conjectures, cultures are made and remade.

What is important in applying the idea of contingent lineages to these referenda campaigns is that they go beyond the past and present and into the future. I argue here that both the proponents and opponents of the EU and CAFTA are combining and transposing national and global meanings in different ways in order to situate specific lineages of national histories firmly in a particular type of regional and global future imaginary. I suggest that this act of tracing a *selective* national history through to its logical, global, conclusion is the way in which both the governments representing the “YES” and the social movements representing the “NO” campaigns constructed their own versions of common sense- which was either to join or not join the EU and CAFTA. The ability of each campaign to successfully connect this imagined national history to a particular future constrained the range of alternative futures.

The process of the actual referendum, and how it is imagined, is incredibly important, because it reflects a certain understanding of democracy. Paley has reviewed the emerging anthropological literature on democracy and shows us how differently the concept is used, sometimes meaning the electoral system, other times referring to the number of NGOs involved, and only sometimes meaning a real voice and role in decision-making (Paley 2002). Democracy is considered very important in both of these settings, in Costa Rica as a reflection of its long-standing democratic history, and in Latvia as proof of its newly re-

gained democracy. The referendum is an important symbolic moment in affirming these commitments to democracy, therefore it is important to examine how various actors employed this idea of democracy. Thus, for each of the four campaigns I will briefly reflect on the way that the actual moment of the referendum was envisioned as fitting into a broader concept of democracy.

Global connections, as Anna Tsing (2005) has shown us, are messy. Thus, for both Latvia and Costa Rica, there are a multitude of global connections that have influenced the way that these ideas of nation, region, and democracy are imagined. In each of the four campaigns I attempt to link the discourses used to this history of global connections that have helped inform and shape them.

The remainder of this chapter is organized into four sections, each one devoted to one of the campaigns. Based on campaign materials, supporters' statements, and observed events and activities, I analyze for each campaign the imagined past and selected historical reference points, the type of democratic process that is envisioned to connect this past with the future, and the anticipated regional and global future and global connections that have helped to shape the particular global imaginary. In the conclusion I will briefly analyze how the resulting collages of contingent pasts and futures resonated differently with supporters and voters in each campaign, and what this tells us about the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic power of each of these competing versions of common sense.

The common sense of yes

Latvia: all in the family

In Latvia, the yes campaign was successful because it was seen by many as a process of the post-Soviet “normalization” of history. Eglitis (2002) has argued that since Latvia regained its independence, there have been various efforts to restore “normality” through

correcting history- imagined either temporally, by returning to the norms of the interwar independence period, or spatially, by returning Latvia to Europe (Eglitis 2002). In statements by Zālīte and others, we see these two merged into one. Latvia is already part of Europe, and would have been part of Europe had it not been for the occupation by the Soviet Union. Thus, the return to Europe was almost a foregone conclusion.

This particular lineage of the past is important, because it takes its starting point in the independence period of the 1920s, rather than in, for instance, the 600 years of serfdom under German rule beginning in the 1200s, or the period of Nazi rule during World War II, which are also examples of previous connections to Europe. This selective choice of a historical reference point is significant because it enables Europe as a region and as a cultural imaginary to be equated with “progress.” Joining the EU was presented by political elites, and largely accepted by the public, to be an essential part of reconstructing historical and political ties to Western Europe and a proof of having reestablished democracy and created a market economy. Joining the EU and NATO had been almost the sole political goals in the country since independence was regained in 1991, and was largely seen as “the only option.” In this sense, the decision to try to join the EU had been made long ago, and the referendum came at a time after nearly ten years of changing laws, policies, and even the constitution to make EU accession a reality.



Figure 5.1: Campaign slogan in favor of joining the EU. The missing piece of the puzzle says “for.” The place where it fits says “Latvia in Europe.” Source: <http://politika.lv/index.php?id=6917>

Major political and cultural figures made impassioned – and historically-framed – pleas to the public to vote for accession. Prime Minister Einārs Repše called it one of the three most important decisions in the country's history- after its two independence votes in 1918 and 1990. The president, Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, emphasized the pact's symbolic value: "For Latvia, it is putting the final full-stop to the sequels of the Second World War and wiping out forever the divisions on the map of Europe that the odious Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939 had placed there" (BBC News 2003).

This sense of undoubted European heritage was even invoked by noted economists to justify their study on the positive effects EU accession would bring to Latvia's economy:

The foundation of the study is not only modern European and generally accepted Western values, but also the assumption that we, Latvians, are Europeans- a part of Western civilization. That our place is in Europe, we assumed as a natural and historical axiom. From this perspective, joining or not joining the EU is simply an institutional question. It is not a marriage of convenience between Latvia and the EU. We are already a family, we are all Europeans (Osis, Kalnmača et al. 2003).

The metaphor of a European family was echoed by EU representatives as they welcomed the positive results of the referendum. The president of the European commission, Romano Prodi, welcomed the Latvians into the European family, and the president of the European Parliament, Pat Cox, congratulated the Latvians on their decision to "return back to their proper place, their real home, Europe" (LETA 2003; TVnet ziņas 2003).

In Latvia this return to Europe was also framed as leaving an old "region" and joining a new one. Getting out of the sphere of influence of Russia was seen as a strategic goal by many that was more important than anything else. And indeed, the idea of Russia and the other "eastern" neighbors being both threatening and backwards runs through various commentaries. Aivars Stranga, a Latvian historian, when asked about his opinion before the referendum stated: "I don't especially analyze why I should vote for Latvia joining the EU. It just seems to me- it would be shameful if we stayed outside of the EU with Ukraine,

Belarus, Russia and Moldova. ...I can't think of any reason why Latvia would stay outside of the EU" (Nagle 2003). This is a sentiment that still prevails now, even after disillusionment with the EU has begun to appear. Thus, this idea of shifting from one, backwards, region to a new (but simultaneously even older) one, was beyond analysis even for a historian – it was, simply, “common sense.”

The fact that it was seen to truly be part of Latvian “common sense” of the moment was reflected by the fact that there seemed to be no viable alternatives. The only alternatives discussed were isolation, or joining Russia, Belarus and others in the NIS. One commentator portrays the absurdity of the idea of a tiny independent country in Europe sandwiched between the expanded EU and looming Russia. At a conference held in Latvia one week before the referendum, one of the main speakers addressed the audience thus: “The question to be answered remains: at what price is Latvia willing to isolate itself at the international level?” (Bēziņa 2003). This lack of good alternatives leads to a sense of resignation. Raita Karnīte, Head of the Academy of Sciences Economics Institute admitted that if she “listens to her heart” then there are more arguments against than for joining, however “one must vote ‘for’ to choose shelter from one’s own weaknesses, from the problems of a small country” (Nagle 2003). The lack of imaginable choice is also reinforced by the seeming “end of history” if Latvia refused entry. In the last few weeks before the referendum, an EU Enlargement Commissioner was asked about the possibility of postponing entry for a couple of years. He answered that such postponement would not be possible, that if the population voted no, that it would be the end of the process, that EU investments and funds would be withdrawn immediately (Raudseps and Ozoliņš 2003).

These strategies of totalizing and naturalizing discourse made it easy to discount the opposition. Juris Bočs, an economist, wrote in one of the daily papers that voting against the EU would be a crime against the younger generations that can not yet vote. He said he had

come to the conclusion that all of the people who are against the EU were lazy, fools, or criminals (Bočs 2003). The economists cited above easily discounted a “counterstudy” done showing the potential negative effects of joining the EU as a radical left-wing Marxist-influenced work, because the work speaks of globalization as a modern form of colonization, and about the spread of wild (*plēsonīgs*) capitalism (Osis, Kalnmača et al. 2003). Since Latvia’s future is one of leaving communism behind, Marxist interpretations were necessarily lacking in common sense. Any continuity between the Soviet, communist past, and the European future was portrayed as ridiculous. As one commentator put it, even if the EU bureaucracy has been criticized for a lack of transparency, “for a country that still suffers from the remains of a sluggish Soviet bureaucracy and a syndrome of secrecy, it is hard to imagine that the EU could be imagined as anything other than a vitamin injection to de-Sovietize the country and create a more open, tolerant, and friendly attitude towards inhabitants” (Baerug 2003).

This transition from the Soviet to the European worlds had already been equated with a simultaneous transition to democracy and to a market economy for nearly ten years. As in many countries of the former Soviet block, after the highly mobilized pro-independence protests had settled and economic problems began, social movement activity in Latvia declined rapidly. This demobilization has been attributed to a variety of factors, such as activist fatigue, new economic hardships, etc. Paley (2001) shows how in post-dictatorship Chile the idea of “civil society,” particularly of the type promoted so actively by USAID and other donor agencies, served to demobilize social movements by encouraging only certain kinds of participation. This participation makes NGOs complicit in state and international projects, and even allows them to take over some of the functions previously carried out by the State. In Chile, demobilization happened also because many local activists had different types of participation in mind. This is exactly the type of promotion of “civil society” that

happened in Latvia for the first ten years after regaining independence, when new aid programs descended to help institutionalize democracy in Eastern Europe. USAID, National Endowment for Democracy, Baltic-American Partnership Program all have funded numerous initiatives that define democratic process in terms of “civil society” (USAID 2002). In this model of civil society, officially registered NGOs could apply for project- based funding, and learn how to lobby government officials. Like in Chile, this may have contributed to demobilization in the post-independence period, and disciplined participants into a democracy that happens in offices and through official correspondence rather than through street protests.

In the pre-referendum period, registered civil society organizations were eligible to apply for projects from the one million Euro EU information campaign of the government. Specifically pro-European NGOs sprang up, and the summer of 2003 was filled with discussions, cultural activities and civil society campaigns promoting EU accession that were sometimes difficult to distinguish from the official government campaign. Thus, for the society that had been made civil, accession to the EU was in many ways accession to a ready-made model of democracy, and open debate of the real stakes was limited.

Thus we see that these naturalizing discourses of the YES campaign left no practical alternatives. In their construction of a lineage with a national history of robbed independence, they made possible only one, common sense, future: the inevitable entry into the EU to finalize that independence and rejoin “the family of Europe.” Both European and US connections had confirmed this inevitable future through year-long funding of the transition to civil society, and threatening the removal of EU funds if accession were not to take place.

Costa Rica: From poverty to progress

On the eve of the CAFTA referendum in October 2007, Eugenio Trejos, the main spokesperson for the NO campaign in Costa Rica, came to speak to the group of international observers to tell them about the process leading up to the Referendum. As he began to speak, the room went silent. Trejos told the observers that in a private meeting with President Oscar Arias shortly after his controversial election in 2006, he had suggested to the President that he hold a referendum to decide the fate of CAFTA. The president had rejected the proposal, indicating that the matter should be resolved by the Legislative Assembly. Once the opposition had in effect forced the process through the Supreme Election Tribunal (TSE), however, Arias announced the referendum as a grand opportunity for the country:

I have full confidence that the Costa Rican people will know how to choose the correct path; that they will prefer to say yes to democracy, yes to the creation of high-quality jobs, yes to the future of our youth, yes to the world; they will prefer to have a country that advances with optimism and a clear course, a country with a government capable of making decisions, solving problems, and thinking big. Let's go, then, to the ballot boxes to decide, at last, the fate of CAFTA. But above all, let us go to the ballot boxes to show the world that which the world has always known about us: that in Costa Rica the democrats are in the majority (Arias Sanchez 2007).

This quote shows how the government and the SÍ campaign tried to position the referendum as part of Costa Rica's mythologized democratic past – and CAFTA as its inevitable democratic outcome. “Few countries have as beguiling an imagined past as Costa Rica. Traditional historians, politicians and average citizens alike portray it as a redoubt of democracy and peace in a Central America forever plagued by tyrannies and internecine conflicts...” (Edelman 1999:45). Indeed, Costa Rica is the only country in Central America that has not had long periods of military dictatorships or civil wars since it gained independence in 1821. This history is proudly celebrated every September 15, and is part of the foundation for Costa Rica's “exceptionalism.” Thus, the government and the SÍ campaign actively tried to connect that democratic tradition with the future under CAFTA.

The referendum, as a voting process, was key to Oscar Arias' conception of democracy. In receiving the news that the TSE had approved the referendum process he also stated:

I receive this resolution with pride, because it will enrich our democracy, because it is a triumph for institutionalization and a failure for those who have threatened with violence. We will decide the destiny of CAFTA in the form closest to our idiosyncrasy: voting in peace and tranquility; not in the streets, but in the ballot boxes. We will not count the heads or placards in a march, or in barricades. *We will simply count the votes* [emphasis added] (Arias Sanchez 2007).

This quote is very revealing. For Arias, it was a relief that the issue would be removed from the streets, where it had resided for the previous four years, and taken back to the safe space of the ballot box. He, as a seasoned politician, and previous president of Costa Rica (1986-1990), emphasized that he had “never feared an election.” For Arias and the government, the division and debates in the country surrounding CAFTA seemed dangerous, rather than a sign of a healthy democracy, and thus elections became a peaceful alternative.

On the day of the referendum, the TSE celebrated the fact that no violence had taken place, that *Ticos* had known how to be “delegates for day.” Newspapers and TV reporters interviewed these temporary decision-makers. And indeed, the atmosphere on election day was one of festive excitement and anticipation. Those who participated in the vote did so with a sense of great responsibility. After victory of the “YES” was announced, Arias took the referendum result as a final indication that all previous debate should be erased. On the night of the vote, after the results had been announced he said: “[Now] the boundaries that divide us disappear: we are no longer those of SÍ and No” (Villalobos 2007).

Like in Latvia, a more specific historic moment was also emphasized. This moment in Costa Rica was the period that began 20 years ago as Costa Rica's “historic opening.” In campaign materials it is emphasized as the beginning of Costa Rica's progression from poverty to progress. “In the second half of 1982, at the end of Rodrigo Carazo's term, official

statistics located the poverty level at 49%. Almost half of all Costa Ricans were poor! Now, the poverty index is around 20%. Thanks to the strategy of opening to international trade, we have diminished poverty significantly...” (Marti 2007).

Another part of the mythologized past includes the strong welfare system, which was developed with funds gained from abolishing Costa Rica’s armed forces after a brief civil war in 1948. But for the campaign materials for the SÍ, it was important to stress that the welfare system was no longer viable: “Every day we notice that public services are not what they once were: long lines, poor quality. The State can not finance us anymore and this affects all of us” (Alianza del SÍ 2007). Thus, the transition from a welfare state to a system of open foreign investment was the logical solution.

The future that was presented comes directly out of the recent opening of markets to the US and the continuity of those ties. Campaign materials emphasized that almost half of Costa Rica’s imports already go to the US and 60% of foreign investment comes from there, largely as a result of the Caribbean Basin Initiative. That initiative, however, was set to expire in 2008, unless renegotiated with the US. Proponents emphasized that CAFTA was a more secure replacement of that treaty because it would not be renegotiated. Campaign materials stated that, “we insist: because the US is the country to which we sell the most, and also the country from which we buy the most, it is of enormous importance for the development of Costa Rica that it be precisely the US with which we have a signed agreement, to grant legal security to our relationship” (Marti 2007). The SÍ campaign tried to emphasize specifically the economic perspectives of the treaty, and thus the common sense of it was that of course Costa Rica needs development, better roads, and security, and this is the natural path that the country would take under CAFTA. This was the inevitable continuation of the history begun 20 years ago.

The campaign highlighted the significant losses that would result from the rejection of the treaty and the discontinuation of those ties. It was frequently mentioned that the Caribbean Basin Initiative would be repealed, that factories and businesses would leave, new investors would never come, massive unemployment would ensue, the currency would have to be devalued, inflation would rise (Alianza del SÍ 2007). It would certainly be common sense to avoid such a bleak future, because it did not fit with the past.

In Costa Rica, as in Latvia, the pro-CAFTA campaign also emphasized the lack of viable alternatives. The alternatives to CAFTA presented were either total abandonment, as shown above, or an alliance with Fidel Castro, Hugo Chavez, and the discredited leftist leaders of Latin America. One pro-CAFTA brochure cynically exclaimed about what would happen if Costa Rica rejected the treaty: “We would be in the news! The international press would comment on the strange small country that decided to leave up in the air its connections to its main commercial partner, and reject the free access of its products to the largest market in the world.” Campaign materials consistently portrayed the process as a tug of war between the US on the one side, and Cuba and Venezuela on the other. These leaders were portrayed as threats to Costa Rica’s democracy, and thus an unnatural and unimaginable future association for the country, as depicted in the poster, *Las Caras del No* (The Faces of No). The poster, depicted below, is a cynical imitation of a campaign strategy of the same name used by the no campaign, that imitated a Facebook page.



Figure 5.2: Campaign ad for the “SÍ”: “The Faces of NO: These three want to destabilize our democracy and are behind those of the No in order to achieve it. Our democracy is at risk. Let’s say Yes to CAFTA and ratify our will to continue living free, without extremism or totalitarianism. Source: www.concostarica.com

In Costa Rica the deliberate crafting of the SÍ campaign, and the manufacturing of common sense it entailed, was made obvious due to a scandalous memo that was leaked to the press. A memo written in July 2007 by one of the Vice Presidents, Kevin Casas, and a Member of Parliament, Fernando Sanchez, to the president Oscar Arias hit the press about one month before the referendum. It was a memo suggesting some general tactics for devising a campaign, such as founding a strategic committee and a wider social coalition. The most revealing part of the memo, however, was one that gave very specific recommendations about how to run a wide media campaign, and suggested that the most effective way was to “stimulate fear.” It encouraged using four types of fear that correspond to the issues already discussed here. The memo elaborated on how to stimulate these fears:

the fear of losing jobs (“here it is very recommendable to use intensely testimonials of very simple people in precarious situations...”); fear of an attack on democratic institutions (“the argument in defense of democracy is the only resource we have left to mobilize the *emotions* of the people in favor of the SÍ...one thing must be understood: no one is ready to “die” for free trade, but maybe for democracy”); fear of foreign interference on the side of the NO (“The connections of the NO to Fidel, Chavez and Ortega must be ‘pushed’ everywhere...it is almost certain that this could have an impact on the most simple people, and that’s where we have the most serious problems”); and fear of the destabilizing effects the NO vote would have on the government (“we should seed three questions in the minds of the people to make their finger tremble if they are considering voting NO: are they ready to put the stability of the economy at risk...?...are they ready to go back to the time of Abel [Pacheco]... when the government had no clear path and nothing was happening in the country?...have they thought about who will be in charge if the NO wins?...”) (Casas and Sanchez 2007). In addition it threatened to not give economic support to mayors whose districts did not get a yes vote, to debunk the idea that the agreement would increase the gap between rich and poor, and other tactics.

The memo was a large blow to the SÍ campaign and provoked a decisive shift in opinion polls. The Administration claimed that it had only been a brainstorming session, and had never been implemented. The VP was forced to resign, but the MP is still serving in the Legislative Assembly. It is striking that even though the memo basically discredited the fear tactics of implying practically an imminent onset of communism if CAFTA were not approved, it is clear that the tactics continued to be used. This was confirmed to me the day before the referendum, when a friend of mine and I went over to one of the SÍ offices. We went in asking for information. It was clear that we were *gringos*, not eligible voters, so their interest at first was limited. The woman behind the desk handed us some materials. Her

colleague came out from a back room, and asked what we were looking for. When we explained that we would like some information about CAFTA, and about why so many people are opposing CAFTA, she looked puzzled for a second, then said, “How can I explain to you?....” Her face got red as she exclaimed, “It’s that they’re communists! They’re communists! They don’t want development for the country...” She went on to explain the irrationality – the lack of common sense – of the NO campaign.

It remains unclear to me whether she thought this was the only comment that good Cold War-inspired *gringos* would understand, or if this was her common refrain to anyone who asked about the No campaign. But the other SÍ office we visited that day still had posted on the wall the campaign poster with “the faces of NO” featuring Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez. When we asked about the connection between the poster and the memo, suggesting that perhaps that was simply a scare tactic that had been discredited by the memo, she acknowledged that the memo had been bad, but stood by the connections between the NO campaign and communists. Thus the SÍ campaign tried to portray the alternate future as a communist one. Such a future was unimaginable because it was the antithesis of the democratic past for which Costa Rica stood.

The entire campaign in Costa Rica was marked also by the participation and intervention of US political voices. The last few days before the referendum, according to Costa Rican law, no political campaigning was allowed, but these turned into very intensely political days. In the month prior to the vote, US democratic senators opposed to CAFTA had sent representatives to reassure the *Ticos* that they would not suffer grave economic consequences if they rejected the treaty. In response to the Democrats’ visits, the US Trade Representative, Susan Schwab, made a press statement two days before the vote threatening that the US would indeed end the Caribbean Basin Initiative. This started a three day flurry of attacks within the US Congress and White House, with the Democrats saying that Schwab

had no authority to make such a statement, the White House saying that it was true, and the Democrats even introducing a Costa Rican Friendship Bill that would make Costa Rica's trade benefits permanent.

The press reported on this flurry of political activity, mostly emphasizing the threats expressed by the US government rather than the controversy between both sides in the US Congress. The most striking reporting technique came on the night before the referendum, when *CNN Español* announced a “breaking news story,” strategically placed at the exact time when the most popular TV show in Costa Rica, *Bailando por un sueño* (Dancing for a dream) was about to start. The report announced that the government had received a memo from Washington warning them of the grave consequences of rejecting the treaty. The opposition issued a complaint to the TSE that all of the “free” press coverage for the SÍ side was a violation of the ban on campaigning three days before the election, but regardless of the outcome of the complaint, the impact would not be undone.⁶³

We see then, that the SÍ campaign painted a picture of a historic line of democracy intermixed with a more recent connection to the US. This led to the logical conclusion of the need for a continued connection to the US as a way of continuing the progression toward economic prosperity. The referendum was presented as a choice between two futures, only one of which was truly imaginable, because it was the only one that fit with Costa Rica's mythologized past of a democratic electoral tradition and that would continue its recent progression from poverty toward development.

⁶³ The TSE later ruled that it was news not campaigning.

Voices of dissent

Anti-CAFTA slogans in Costa Rica:	Anti-EU slogans in Latvia:
<p><i>Sepamos ser libres, no siervos menguados</i> (We know how to be free, not timid servants!)</p> <p><i>No a la entrega de nuestra soberanía!</i> (No to handing over our sovereignty!)</p> <p><i>Será nuestro ultimo desfile de independencia?</i> (Will this be our last march of independence?)</p> <p><i>Juntos por la patria</i> (Together for the fatherland!)</p> <p><i>Costa Rica no se vende!</i> (Costa Rica is not for sale!)</p> <p><i>No al miedo!</i> (No to fear!)</p>	<p><i>Neticiet melu kampaņām! ES vajadzīgi vergi, donori, zeme!</i> (Don't believe the campaigns of lies! The EU needs slaves, donors, and land!)</p> <p><i>No Padomju Savienības mēs izglābamies, nebāzīsim galvu Eirolēžu cilpā!</i> (We saved ourselves from the Soviet Union! Now let's not put our heads in the noose of Euro-cheats!)</p> <p><i>Eiropas Savienība NAV tas pats kā Eiropa!</i> (The EU is not the same as Europe)</p> <p><i>Nē ES! Latviju nepārdosim!</i> (No to the EU! Latvia is not for sale!)</p>

On August 23, 2003,⁶⁴ the coalition of NO campaign groups in Latvia organized a protest against joining the EU. It was attended by approximately 250 people. On September 30, 2007, the anti-CAFTA campaign in Costa Rica organized a National day of protest, which was the largest demonstration in the history of Costa Rica, with estimates of the number of participants ranging from 150,000-250,000. It is perhaps striking that the slogans and tactics of the opposition were similar in key ways, although their reception was markedly different. I show here the different ways in which the movements constructed their own “contingent lineages” of why rejecting the treaty was actually “common sense.” In the conclusion that follows I reflect on what elements of the NO discourses and strategies made them more or less successful.

⁶⁴ This is the day of the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop agreement in 1939 between Hitler and Stalin, that in effect „traded away” the Baltic State to the Soviet Union. During the independence struggles in the late 1980s it was one of the main commemorative days on which protests were organized.



Figure 5.3: Anti-EU rally in Latvia less than one month before the referendum (left), and anti-CAFTA demonstration in Costa Rica, one week before (right). Sources: www.geocities.com/latvia_eu/against/demonstration and www.concostarica.com

Latvia: “From one union to the next”

In Latvia, the opposition relied on sentiments of patriotism, nationalism, and sovereignty to make its case. Rather than selecting the moment of the “robbing” of their independence as a reference point, however, the more important moment was the regaining of independence in 1991. This was also the recent “acquisition” of democracy, with the opportunity to engage in decision-making. One artist commented: “I see the referendum as the first possibility in my life to vote for a free and independent Latvia. If I vote against Latvia in the EU, my conscience will be clean- I will have taken a stand for a sovereign Latvia” (Nagle 2003).

The democratic process imaginable and enactable by the opposition was severely limited by the circumstances in which they found themselves. In discussing the referendum process, one commentator wrote: “The majority of Latvia’s elite united to push Latvia into Europe. But at what price? In the future, will there also be contentless ads in place of real discussions? Then Latvia’s referenda will differ little from those organized by Latvia’s... eastern neighbors, who we had so resolved to leave in the past” (Auers 2003). The press was seen as largely coopted by the state YES campaign. One commentator stated that the Latvian news on the EU had become just as predictable as happy endings in Hollywood movies, and

that this led to inevitable comparisons to the days of State-controlled, heavily propagandized media in the days of the Soviet Union (Baerug 2003). The government also used political influence and government funds to campaign on the side of “YES.” Auers pointed out that the one million Euro government budget used for organizing the referendum was unabashedly used to campaign for accession (Auers 2003). In contrast, other analysts noted that in the Norwegian referendum on the EU, which was won by the NOs, equal amounts of government funding were granted to both sides (Baerug 2003). The opposition was portrayed in the media not as part of the civil society imagined by the “YES” campaign, but rather as uncivil, as groups working with “underground” methods such as graffiti (Vanadziòð 2003). Given the lack of resources for the NO campaign, it is unclear if this was a conscious and strategic choice or a necessity.

As a way of emphasizing the potential loss of sovereignty and independence, the opposition to the EU in Latvia made a clear distinction between Europe, as a cultural image, and the European Union as a political entity. Opponents also emphasized that EU laws have higher standing than national ones. This was also understood as a threat to national identity. Activists pointed out that national history will be replaced with world history in schools (Rozenberga 2003). This was also then seen as a second loss of independence.

The anti-EU group also attempted to equate the European Union with simply a wealthier version of the Soviet Union, with the formula “EU=USSR + \$,” as shown below. A study emphasizing the potential negative economic effects of EU accession emphasized that economic sovereignty would be lost. While it is not the same as Soviet central planning, the EU does subject Member States to production quotas, eventually giving up the national currency and Central bank control over it (Sproģis 2003). This would also bring slowed economic growth, inflation outstripping wage hikes, and cheap imports. The “NO EU” group pointed out that economic development rates actually slowed in Greece, Portugal, Spain, and

Ireland after entry into the EU (Rozenberga 2003). Thus, the NO campaign in Latvia countered the common sense portrayed by the YES campaign, by showing the EU would bring economic hardships and loss of recently gained sovereignty.



Figure 5.4: Campaign poster of the NO in Latvia: “Independent, Latvian, Latvia-Yes; European Union- No! EU= USSR +\$” Source: www.geocities.com/latvia_eu/against/demonstration

Similarly to the YES campaign, the NO campaign also voiced a need to “get away” from Russia. For the NO side, however, staying out of the EU was the way to stay away from Russia. They feared that it was only a matter of time before Russia also joined the EU, due to the EU’s reliance on Russian natural resources and the EU’s overproduction of agricultural products. “It is completely unacceptable to the members of the No EU group to live together with Russia in one country again” said the leader of the organization (Rozenberga 2003).

Opponents of the EU were frustrated by the way the lack of alternatives were portrayed. At a conference entitled “What will No to the EU mean?” one participant

exclaimed: “We are being offered two ditches in which to go, but neither the government, nor anyone else one has talked about Latvia’s independent path. That is our biggest problem. If we won’t be in the EU then it is immediately the NIS? Why? Why can’t we stay on our own path? Like Iceland, Norway and Switzerland?” (Bēziņa 2003).

Thus, the logical future of independence continued from the recent regaining of independence. The EU was seen as a threat to this independence rather than a means of solidifying it. The future was portrayed as one of ever-increasing global integration, with Russia joining the EU. For this reason, joining the EU was unimaginable, because it entailed recreating the Soviet past and increased economic problems. These constructed lineages portray the lack of common sense in voting YES, leaving only the option of voting NO.

Costa Rica: more of the same

In August 2006, I accompanied an activist from the “NO” side in Costa Rica to watch one session of hearings on CAFTA at the Legislative Assembly. When we arrived, a guard checked IDs as people entered the gates. Upstairs, the public viewing area was flushed in glaring fluorescent lights, and consisted of two rows of white plastic, Mc-Donald’s-style chairs bolted to the floor, the back row slightly higher than the front. These rows lined the long glass window on one side of the Legislative Assembly meeting room. The window was mostly sound-proof, and several speakers on the ceilings broadcast the legislative proceedings. When I entered, I was already surprised by the set-up, but could never have imagined how things would unfold. Both rows filled up before the hearing began, as did standing room between and behind seats, with representatives from the different NGOs and social movements that were scheduled to testify that day.

I suppose I was expecting quiet, respectful listening to the proceedings, perhaps with occasional applause or booing, that would in turn, be either unheard, ignored or at best

respectfully acknowledged by the delegates. What proceeded, however, was something between a sporting event and an interactive theater performance. Observers had arrived armed with rolls of blank poster-sized paper and an assortment of magic markers. As delegates and invited participants debated the relevant issues, activists intently scrawled relevant slogans in response, and taped them onto the glass wall. Loud cheers and jeers were a constant accompaniment to the remarks of the speakers.

The delegates were not impervious to the action behind the glass wall. Those who supported the observers' comments and slogans would nod in agreement, and even respond to them in their speeches. Others who found the comments disrespectful or incorrect would reprimand the observers. At the end of the session, in perfect coordination, as the social movement speaker testifying to the Assembly put up his last slide, a picture of one of last year's large street protests, the observers put up signs and chanted, "*A las calles, a las calles!*" (To the streets! To the streets!). All the gathered observers began chanting this slogan in unison as a veiled threat that if CAFTA passed in the Legislative Assembly, then the real struggle would begin outside of the Assembly, on the street.

This practice reveals that the NO activists had a fundamentally different conception of democracy than the one held by Oscar Arias and the SÍ campaign. Before the referendum, the opposition was circulating a board game designed by an activist that positions the current struggle against CAFTA within a long history of social actions (see Figure 5.5). The title of the game is "In order to not forget: a route through the intense history of the participatory democracy of Costa Rica." Each space on the game has a trivia question about various strikes and protests from 1919-2007, against various dictators, monopolistic companies, unjust laws, electoral fraud, privatization, price hikes in basic services, and for female suffrage and social welfare benefits for all workers. For the social movements involved in these past struggles and in the current struggle against CAFTA, social justice has been

achieved largely through this democracy on the streets, through the active and continuous vigilance and participation by citizens of the, in their opinion, not-always-so-democratic decisions of the Legislative Assembly. On numerous occasions, it has been exactly these strikes and protests that have resulted in the cancellation of laws already passed in the Legislative Assembly, or put up for vote.



Figure 5.5: Board game designed by a member of the opposition, placing the anti-CAFTA demonstrations within a long line of successful social actions.

These events show that the conflict over the referendum is not the real issue that divides the government and the opposition, but rather something far more fundamental: the meaning of democracy itself. For Arias, and the other CAFTA supporters, democracy was embodied in a static moment, the moment of the vote, rather than an ongoing process. Arias was relieved that democracy would take shape through merely counting votes, yet the opposition saw democracy as taking place – and as historically having taken place – through

very different ways of making their voice heard, such as marches, rallies, and highly participatory observation in the Legislative Assembly. For the activists, the entire process of organizing the referendum, holding the marches, and forming neighborhood committees was part of democracy, and for them democracy was a process, that began before and continued after the referendum. Furthermore, their criticism showed that simply organizing the referendum was not enough. The way in which the whole process took place up to the vote, including media access and relations, was also a necessary part of that democratic process.

As the election results came in on the night of the referendum, so did accusations of election fraud. Numerous cases of illegal spreading of campaign materials, irregularities in procedure, and voter intimidation came in from around the country. Though the majority of these were considered minor infractions by the TSE, the opposition movement took them very seriously, and even more so once the results turned out to be so close. Eugenio Trejos, the main spokesperson of the NO campaign, categorized the media's behavior, the interference of Costa Rican and US governments as an "affront on Costa Rican democracy"(Chacon 2007). The alternative media went so far as to call it a "frauderendum" (notlc.com 2007). The current administration's efforts to work only within the Legislative Assembly were seen by many activists as a reversal of this previous tradition, and very much in line with the neoliberal traditions inherent in CAFTA itself. Disappointment with the state of Costa Rican democracy deepened, when in mid-October the Legislative Assembly ordered the windows of the observation room polarized to prevent delegates from seeing the messages of observers. The alternative press headline remarked: "Delegates do not want to see the eyes of the people" (notlc.com 2007).

After the initial depression after the referendum, some NO supporters slowly regrouped, and have kept organizing against the implementation agenda of 13 laws that still needed to be changed before CAFTA could enter into force. From the point of view of

participatory democracy, the fact that the opposition continued in its efforts to stop CAFTA by trying to prevent the 13 laws from passing is not surprising, but rather completely in line with previous efforts to make their voices heard in the nation. Most notable was the initiation of a new referendum, described in detail in Chapter Seven. In deep disappointment about the continuing efforts, the day Arias signed the ratification of CAFTA he said of the continued resistance: “It is not ethical to oppose the will of the majority” (BBC Mundo 2007).

This story of the democratic process also illuminates how the NO campaign took a different view of history. The NO campaign takes its historical reference point in connection with the United States as the defeat of US filibuster William Walker, under the direction of Juan Rafael Mora in 1856 (Picado 2007). Often taken by *Ticos* as their first real battle for independence, it is a defining moment in the national myth of independence and democracy.

As portrayed by the campaigners of the NO, since that defining moment in 1856, the connection between the US and Costa Rica has been one of recurring struggles against domination. This is evidenced by the historic influence of US companies such as United Fruit Company that resulted in massive strikes by workers and ended in bloodshed. The US influence is clearly visible in the streets of San José, in the McDonald’s Pizza Hut and KFC signs, and the Century 21 Real Estate ads that dot the landscape in coastal areas. The future as represented by CAFTA then, was “more of the same,” in the sense that its ratification was seen as the final straw in a process of neoliberal reforms that had been gradually sweeping the nation since the 1980s, and began under the previous presidency of Oscar Arias. Thus, the NO campaign redefined the same historic moment taken by the Sí campaign as the “beginning of history” to be the “end of history.” This was the moment when the highly valued social welfare state began to be dismantled, and has greatly affected the social security system and agricultural price controls, leading to wide protests (Edelman 1999).

The future offered by the NO campaign was one of continued participatory democracy, rather than the farce of electoral democracy. It was characterized by the defense and preservation of key values, which were threatened by all of the non-trade issues included in CAFTA. Much of the struggle by the NO side was to explain and portray how those non-trade related issues would fundamentally challenge Costa Rican values. Key issues were intellectual property rights on plants and living organisms that would be imposed by joining the UPOV (Union of the Protection of Plant Varieties) treaty (Carazo, Lizano et al. 2007). Another is opening the country for investments such as the production of arms, which goes against Costa Rica's pacifist history. Similarly, the privatization of the telecommunications monopoly ICE was halted by a general strike in 2000, but now secretly included again as part of the CAFTA negotiations.

An alternative future for the Costa Ricans was not such a stretch of the imagination as it might be in Latvia. It may indeed be common sense for Costa Ricans to imagine their future as different than their neighbors, because they come from a different history. The NO campaign took advantage of the fact that Costa Rican national pride is built on the myth of Costa Rican "exceptionalism." Not only have they maintained a democracy longer than any other country in Central America, they are also the only country to have abolished its army and invested the money in a social welfare system instead. Why could they not be the first country to reject a free trade agreement, and create an alternative, more just system? The NO campaign made this continuity of difference and exceptionalism the basis for their vision of a different- and thus common sense- future.

From common sense to hegemony

I have attempted to show how even though the discourse and strategies used by the Latvian and Costa Rican proponents and opponents of joining regional economic and

political blocs shared many similarities, they worked very differently. Each of the campaigns attempted to portray the joining or not joining of the given treaty as common sense, making the decisions seem both natural and practical. As Geertz (2000: 91) has stated, common sense ideas rest on “the assumption, in fact the insistence, that any person with faculties reasonably intact can grasp common-sense conclusions, and indeed, once they are unequivocally enough stated, will not only grasp but embrace them.”

Once the votes have been counted, the results of the referenda become the sedimentation of common sense in history that Gramsci alluded to. But despite the fact that the YES campaigns won in both countries, the NO campaign was much more successful in Costa Rica than in Latvia. I would like to suggest that it is due in part to the ability of the Cost Rican NO campaign to present a counter-hegemonic discourse in a way that the Latvian campaign was not able to.

Gramsci traces how an idea transforms from being part of common sense, to being part of a hegemonic movement. The key is in the consciousness of attempting to create another worldview:

Consciousness of being part of a particular hegemonic force (that is to say, political consciousness) is the first stage towards a further progressive self-consciousness in which theory and practice will finally be one. Thus the unity of theory and practice is not just a matter of mechanical fact, but a part of the historical process whose elementary and primitive phase is to be found in the sense of being “different” and “apart,” in an instinctive feeling of independence, and which progresses to the level of real possession of a single and coherent conception of the world. This is why it must be stressed that the political development of the concept of hegemony represents a great philosophical advance as well as a politico-practical one. For it necessarily supposes an intellectual unity and an ethic in conformity with a conception of reality that has gone beyond common sense and has become, if only within narrow limits, a critical conception (Hoare and Smith 1971:333-4).

The critical difference between the Latvian and Costa Rican NO campaigns, in their possibility of imagining this alternative worldview, was in their ability to both articulate and

enact an alternative view of democracy. The highly participatory notion of democracy exhibited by the NO movement, as a process that was broadly inclusive of a diverse range of actors, was successful in engaging supporters in Costa Rica, because as a process, it began before and continued beyond the moment of the referendum, even if severely weakened. As such, the NO movement itself was not completely contingent upon the outcome of the referendum. Rather, the referendum was one in a series of attempts to achieve a different world. The consciousness of the actors that this was possible was reinforced by previous successes. Despite the defeat, the movement, or at least part of it, could still envision potential alternatives in preventing the implementation agenda from moving forward (see Chapter Seven).

Regardless of the outcome of the referenda, and of future struggles, the stories of these two referenda give us pause to consider what the “making of common sense” *does* in the way it is done in many political and activist campaigns. It obscures the kinds of “double binds” (Fortun 2001) that are actually behind these types of decisions. Kim Fortun (2001: 13) describes double binds as “situations in which individuals are confronted with dual or multiple obligations that are related and equally valued but incongruent....Double bind situations create a persistent mismatch between explanation and everyday life, forcing ethical agents to “dream up” new ways of understanding and engaging the world.” By creating naturalized common sense solutions to these double binds, the difficulty of the decision becomes covered up, much in the way that Anna Tsing (2005: 89) shows that universals cover up the connections out of which they emerge. This raises fundamental questions about the compatibility of common sense, and its making, with truly participatory democracy.

CHAPTER 6
Maps from space:
Latvian organic farmers negotiate their place in the European Union

“Oh, dear God...I am seeking and asking only this,
that you make the honorable Master Surveyor of such mind
that he grant me the meadow of the deep valley, the pea fields on the hill,
and the small area of [forest] regrowth
along the Slamste and Šmakānu borders...”
-Farmer Kencis’ prayer from
the novel *Mērnīeku laiki (Age of the Surveyors)*
(Kaudzīte and Kaudzīte 2006 [1879]:225)

On a cold morning in January 2006, I went to the Latvian Ministry of Agriculture for an information session for organic farmers about the European Union’s (EU) Agri-environment support program, expecting a straightforward, and perhaps rather dry explanation of available programs, application requirements, and funding limits for the coming year. I arrived, however, to find the room packed with farmers from all over the country. Once the question and answer session started, any preconceptions I might have had of a dull meeting were soon dispelled.

First one farmer stood up and asked, why, if she had changed nothing in her fields since the previous year, was she being asked to pay a fine for decreasing the area of organic agricultural land on her farm? Farmers who receive organic support payments through the EU Agri-environment support scheme sign an agreement in the first year not to decrease the amount of land they have in organic production for at least five years, or repay the funds received in previous years. The Organic Agriculture Support program is part of the Agri-

environment schemes that were introduced through the EU's Rural Development Program and the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform process. The stated goal of the reforms has been to shift EU funding away from agricultural commodity subsidies to supporting more environmentally sustainable farming and rural development.

At first I thought that this woman's question reflected simply an individual case of a bureaucratic slip-up. As farmers stood up one by one, however, asking similar questions, realizing that they were not alone in their problems, the frustration and anger in the room spread. By the end of the meeting, tensions were so high that another woman stood up and exclaimed, "Do you imagine that just because we work the land, we are fools?" In anger, a man suggested that the Ministry agency that administers payments change its name from the Rural Support Service (*Lauku atbalsta dienests*, or LAD) to the Rural Destruction Agency. With no easy resolution to the conflict in sight, it became clear to me that this was not just a simple administrative glitch, but a widespread problem that reflected a far larger clash of perspectives, values, and imaginaries.

The implementation in 2004-2005 of a new system of GIS (Geographic Information System) maps based on aerial orthographic photos, necessary to administer EU Agri-environmental support payments in Latvia, erupted into disputes over farm boundaries, appropriate surveying technologies, good agricultural practices, and cultural landscapes. The conversion of old aerial photos into new "European" maps resulted in what was becoming an all too familiar post-socialist bureaucratic problem. Farmers whose land area had "changed" along with the change in technology and regulations were deemed in breach of their support payment agreements, and had to repay the difference, leaving many disillusioned with the EU and considering withdrawal from the organic agriculture support program.

I argue here that this case demonstrates the complexities of EU accession for the residents of New Member States, revealing unintended consequences of the implementation

of European policies in post-socialist contexts, and reflecting tensions between local practices, national ideals, and regional power dynamics. The disputes over the area of organic land eligible for payments is not a simple clerical or financial matter, but rather reflects deeper cultural issues tied to the history of foreign domination over the land. Furthermore, it is a conflict of ideas of space versus place. Abstract “maps from space” challenge farmers’ place-based knowledge and national imaginaries of agricultural landscapes. This also led to disagreements over definitions of good agricultural practices for organic versus conventional farmers. On a broader level, this conflict reflects the tensions between the “return to Europe” as a social imaginary and a changed Europe as a political and bureaucratic space. At the policy level, this conflict may have serious consequences for Latvian organic farmers’ support of the EU project. At the same time, it reveals shortcomings in the EU Common Agricultural Policy reform process, and its implementation in new Member States like Latvia.

First I describe the actual conflict and some of its immediate socio-economic consequences for the farmers. Next I root farmer reactions in Latvia’s history, cultural symbols, and ecology, and show how the conflict reveals contested ideas of space, place, history, and landscapes. Then I explore the competing ideas of “Europe” that get used in many of the conflicts, and the implications thereof.

New maps, new problems

The implementation of a system for administering EU rural support payments began in 2004 after Latvia joined the EU. A "block-map" system, using aerial photos to create a digital Geographic Information System (GIS) database was chosen to determine the area of land for which support payments are to be paid. This system was preferred over using existing cadastral maps, as land had not been surveyed during the land restitution process in

the early 1990s due to the political necessity to process land claims quickly. Therefore, the land cadastre is out of date, and the block system was deemed more appropriate.

A “block” is a contiguous piece of agricultural land, as delineated by natural boundaries, such as bodies of water or forested land. Each numbered “block” is further subdivided into fields that belong to individual farmers. These photos are then converted to GIS maps that are used to ensure that two farmers do not receiving payments for the same piece of land. In 2004, farmers who had registered for the program were sent the block maps, along with a lengthy instruction book, to fill out their applications for support payments. The instructions asked them to use the information on the block map, or correct it if they saw mistakes. The first year’s payments were made based on these applications and were processed quickly. When I began my fieldwork in the summer of 2005, many farmers had recently received these first payments and were very optimistic about the future development of organic farming in Latvia.



Figure 6.1: Sample block map like the ones received by farmers, showing agricultural land (in lighter color) delineated by natural boundaries. Each “block” may contain several farmers’ fields. Source: Author’s photo.

In 2005, the Latvian Rural Support Service (*Lauku atbalsta dienests*, henceforth LAD) started updating the aerial photos, and it turned out that some of these photos were at

least 10 years old, during which time shrubs and pioneer species had been slowly encroaching on the agricultural land, changing the ratio of open-field to forest cover as seen in aerial photos. Thus, even when farmers hadn't changed the contours of their fields from 2004 to 2005, many received new block maps in the second year which showed that their fields were significantly smaller than the previous year. In fact, these farmers' fields were smaller than they had been at the date of the last photo, sometimes as long as ten years ago. Some farmers who had been confused by the new maps had also filled out their applications incorrectly, using the area on their land deeds from the 1990s as opposed to the area listed on the maps, because the land deed was the most "official" document they had. The area shown on the block maps, however, was smaller than the area on their land deed, because only land being "actively farmed" is eligible for support payments, not the entire area of the property. The definition of "actively farmed" is outlined in guidelines for "Good Agricultural Practices" developed by LAD, based on EU and local regulations. Because most farmers had never had their land surveyed since they regained it in the 1990s, due both to a lack of resources and no pressing need to do so, they had no way of checking or contesting the agency's data.

Farmers whose block maps showed a decrease in area were deemed to be in breach of the aid agreements in which they had promised not to decrease the area of organic production for five years. Farmers receiving letters that they had broken their agreement had to pay back the subsidies received the previous year for the disputed area, which in turn stalled the calculation of the current year's payments. At the meeting of farmers, Ministry, and LAD representatives in January 2006, only a handful of nearly one hundred farmers present said they had not experienced problems with their calculations. According to a LAD official, approximately 1000 of 6000 applicants experienced problems in 2005. Some farmers who had been expecting their payments in December had still not received them, or even

notification of their status, by March of the next year, causing serious problems with bank payments, purchase of seeds and materials, and leaving many on the edge of financial ruin.

The amount of support payments for organically farmed land in 2005 was 139 EUR/ hectare for farms in the transition period,⁶⁵ and 82 EUR/ hectare for certified organic farms. To put this in perspective in financial terms, gross average monthly salaries outside of the Rīga region in 2005 averaged around 285 EUR/ month (Central Statistical Bureau). Thus, a discrepancy of two hectares for a transition period farm implies a loss equivalent to about one month's salary. While many farmers had discrepancies in the one-two hectare range, some farmers had to pay back support received for up to ten or even 15 hectares, which can cause a significant financial burden.

From the perspective of LAD, most of the problems were due to farmer, not agency errors. A senior LAD official acknowledged that some of the first photos and maps were up to 10 years old, but also explained to me, using the plural “we” form commonly used when speaking about children when referring to the farmers, that farmers were just not reading the instructions, and not fulfilling all of their responsibilities as farmers. “It's all described in detail in this book; I estimate that this book is read maybe only by every hundredth or every thousandth... well, maybe not every thousandth- every hundredth [farmer]...” he says. He adds that if the organic farmers had had their land surveyed, as a paid service just like other paid services they use on their farm, then they would have been able to enter the correct numbers on the application to begin with, regardless of what the map photos showed.

There was a basic assumption underlying the LAD official's tone and words that the majority of the farmers were out to cheat the system. “If all the neighbors [in one block

⁶⁵ According to the EU organic regulations, there is a three year transition period before a farm can be certified as organic. Transition-period support payments were set at a higher level in order to encourage the transition and compensate for the fact that yields might be lower and products cannot yet be sold as certified organic.

combined] declare more area than what is on our map, then we send letters to all of them,” he explained. “And also if he decreases it himself [in the second year], he gets an over-declaration penalty....*because he has originally wanted more money than what he actually deserves...*”. When I asked about different problem scenarios that farmers had relayed to me, he refuted their possibility. Then I asked what happens if the on-the-spot control by LAD finds that a farmer actually has more land than he or she declared. He answered that the farmers would still receive payments only for what he or she had originally declared, but then added that “*then it's clear that someone [else] is cheating, that someone has less...*”

Besides the economic problems caused to organic farmers, many felt a strong sense of humiliation from being accused of trying to cheat the system. Many farmers felt that they were the ones who had suffered with every economic and policy shift in the last 15 years and that “the farmer is always to blame.” They now lost all trust in the new EU system as well. They felt so degraded by the experience of repeatedly being asked for explanations and being accused of violating their contracts that they said they were planning to withdraw from the organic support program after their five-year contract period ended in 2009, preferring to produce only for their families and friends. One farmer exclaimed: “Everyone is wondering why Latvians are going to work abroad. Here is the explanation! How can we teach our children to love this country if they see how we are suffering? We could have left long ago, but we don't want to. We want to work and develop here, but not rely on social welfare from area payments.” People were also worried about what would happen in the future: “This year we will still survive- but what will happen next year? There will be new measurements and more mistakes? And how will we look our customers in the eye when we have to tell them we couldn't produce any food?”

The situation was not completely resolved in 2006 or subsequent years.⁶⁶ Farmers did in fact have to pay back all of the “extra” payments they had received the first year, and no apologies were issued for the inaccuracy of the aerial photos and the resulting problems. At the meeting in January 2006, LAD officials pointed out that nothing could be done except proposing changes to the new Rural Development Plan for the 2007-2013 planning period. The organic farmers’ association, LBLA, has regularly collected farmer complaints and questions on these problems and publishes the LAD and Ministry responses in its monthly bulletin. In most cases where farmers’ questions point to ways in which the regulations clash with their real life experiences, however, the officials’ responses simply restate and quote relevant articles of either EU or Latvian Cabinet of Ministry regulations. Officials have made little attempt to understand the root causes of the problems or resolve them.⁶⁷ Maps continue to be updated, many farmers have had additional problems in the last two years, and the general mistrust of the institutions involved has not lessened.

Representatives of other state institutions also did not have a very favorable impression of LAD’s handling of the situation. One extension agent said to me: “LAD will continue doing this until they get a major lawsuit from the farmers.” Other organizations that have also had EU projects administered by LAD have complained about problems with the oversight of projects. Despite the widespread disappointment in the situation, the case

⁶⁶ In the August 2008 LBLA newsletter LAD noted that in 2007-2008 a third of all applicants had problems of “overdeclaration” of their land area, the third highest rate among EU Member states, and that the number of problems were increasing rather than decreasing.

⁶⁷ The Cabinet of Ministers regulations were amended in 2006 to allow that small discrepancies, resulting in less than 65 LVL (92 EUR) differences, need not be recovered by LAD. This was welcomed by farmers, but interestingly, has not resulted in a significant change of procedure. Farmers who have small differences in map areas still receive the letters from LAD declaring that they are in breach of their aid agreements, and LAD withholds the difference from the next year’s payment. In an exchange in the April 2006 LBLA bulletin, LAD explained that farmers should not expect this new regulation to be an automatic “gift” of 65 LVL, but rather that it permitted LAD to write off the debt if they were unable to recover it, reminding farmers to be more careful in their applications.

mostly made it only into rural papers, and there was no larger examination of how the administrative system was working.

These problems have caused a serious questioning by the organic farmers affected of both their place in the country and of Latvia's place in the EU: "We are feeling very confused- are we, as organic farmers, even needed by the country?"; "I voted most definitely against [the EU]. If I had a chance to vote now, I would picket on the streets and vote even more strongly against [it]...You can't take a country that is still a huge mess and put it into an even bigger mess." Some even went so far as to suggest that the new EU system was just as foreign and controlling as the Soviet system had been. This conflict, along with other problems that I witnessed from 2005-2006, has had serious implications for the long-term attitude of organic farmers towards the EU. One farmer described her own shift in attitude as one from "naive optimism to deep pessimism." This general attitude of EU-skepticism among organic farmers had not lessened when I returned in the summers of 2007 and 2008.⁶⁸ If anything, there was a sense of resignation among farmers, who reported in 2008 that they had begun routinely reporting less land than they had in order to avoid problems.

Some of the farmer reactions to the conflict may seem exaggerated for what by many outside observers would be considered simply a poorly-handled bureaucratic glitch that is bound to be resolved in the coming years as the system gets smoothed out. Such strong emotional reactions, however, suggest the cultural significance of the scandal, as it relates to historical relations with the land, definitions of good farming practices, and local and national landscape ideals. Furthermore, the conflict reveals a series of interrelated deeper conflicts between ideas of space versus place, private versus public control of space, and productivist versus post-productivist interpretations of Europe.

⁶⁸ The causes of the EU-skepticism are of course not restricted to this one conflict, but include increased level of regulation in general, higher levels of farm debt, and unfamiliar rules. I use this conflict as a case study to illustrate only some of the problems encountered by organic farmers in the new EU system.

Surveyors from space

Surveying of land has long been a means for State or private authorities to control the rural population. As James Scott (1998:27) observes in an account of the history of surveying in Europe, “every act of measurement was an act marked by the play of power relations.” He emphasizes that cadastral maps have been a tool for the State to increase the “legibility” of its subjects by gathering information about who farms what, and collecting taxes on it. Scott likens the cadastral map to a still photograph that captures land use only at one given moment. Thus, the value of the cadastral map “depends, in a curious way, on its abstract sketchiness, its lack of detail – its thinness” (44), despite the fact that other properties of the land are often more important than the exact location of its boundaries.

This political significance of surveying is especially true for Latvia. The controversy surrounding the new block maps was a particularly sore issue for Latvian farmers, because under various rulers, land surveying has played an important role in maintaining systems of control over the land, and by association, rural dwellers. Latvian peasants were paying taxes to Scandinavian absentee landlords as far back as the 12th Century, and the cadastral system and units of measurement have been revamped countless times over the centuries, changing the units of measurement, the types of dues, and the relative worth of different types of land with each successive ruler (Boruks 2003).

Due to this history, the act of surveying has become a cultural metaphor in Latvia for control over rural populations. This is in part due to the fact that the novel quoted in the chapter epitaph, *Mērnīeku laiki* (*Age of the Surveyors*), was the very first modern novel published in the Latvian language. The novel uses the real events of land surveying in the 1860-1870s in Vidzeme, the Northeastern region of the country, along with some literary characters, to show how a community was divided, and how people suffered as a result of greed brought about by the surveying and sale of lands and houses.

In the novel, German surveyors, assisted by Latvian middlemen, survey the German manor lands worked by the Latvian peasants. The officials involved, both local and foreign, are portrayed as anything but honest, and three different rounds of bribery by the peasants are necessary to guarantee, in turn, the drawing of the most favorable boundaries for each landholder, the establishment of the lowest possible property value (for tax purposes), and the negotiation of the best house price. As a result, the community is divided into those who achieve all of these goals, and those who do not. Significantly, the only family brought to court and driven off the land is in fact the most honest one that has offered the smallest bribe, after having been set up by the middleman. Meanwhile larger landowners, who better knew how to negotiate the system, profited.

Tellingly, then, at the January 2006 meeting between farmers and Ministry representatives where this map problem was being discussed, one farmer stood up and said, "And now we have the new '*Mērnīeku laiki*'..." This suggests that for many farmers, the current problem with their land measurement is more than just a bureaucratic issue. Rather, it raises historically rooted fears of corruption on the part of the local officials, of ultimate domination by foreign rulers, and of smaller farmers as perpetual losers within broader geopolitical expansions or integrations such as the current EU process.

The use of the metaphor is not restricted to farmers alone. The Latvian National Theater in Riga opened its 2007 season with the *Mērnīeku laiki*, reset in the modern Latvian countryside. The main daily newspaper *Diena*, claimed in its review: "And, we, as today's audience, can only marvel at how incredibly closely this seemingly non-pretentious account of land surveying in Vidzeme fits Latvia's reality in 2007" (Adamaite 2007). The director commented that the story is very contemporary, because "everything we have experienced in the last few years is one big '*Mērnīeku laiki*' (Leta 2007). This sentiment also perhaps helps explain the seemingly incongruent set of Eurobarometer public opinion survey results from

April 2008, summed up in the *Diena* headline “Latvians biggest ‘euroskeptics’ but still trust EU institutions more than national ones” (Šupstika 2008).

The technological shift involved in the method of surveying “from space” in this case is very significant, both because its novelty makes farmers mistrust it, and because the resulting measurements differ from previous surveying technologies. Farmers on various occasions referred to the block maps as “pictures from Outer Space,” suggesting that to them, these maps were quite literally an ‘alien’ representation of their farms. Part of what made them alien, and suspicious, was that they arrived out of the blue, not as the result of a traditional surveying exercise. Ingold (2000:191-2) contrasts the perception of the landscape that results from “dwelling” in it, and that which results from trying to represent an image of that landscape on a map or as a picture:

No doubt the surveyor, as he goes about his practical tasks, experiences the landscape much as does everyone else whose business of life lies there. Like other people, he is mobile, yet unable to be in more than one place at a time. In the landscape, the distance between two places, A and B, is experienced as a journey made, a bodily movement from one place to the other, and the gradually changing vistas along the route. The surveyor’s job, however, is to take the instrumental measurements from a considerable number of locations, and to combine these data to produce a single picture which is *independent* of any point of observation. This picture is of the world as it could be directly apprehended only by a consciousness capable of being everywhere at once and nowhere in particular (the nearest we can get to this in practice is by taking an aerial or bird’s-eye view)....”

In the Latvian case, the technology itself was doubted by the farmers, because there was not even a surveyor, like in Ingold’s text, walking from point to point, but *only* the bird’s eye view. Some farmers went and used a *cirkulis* (compass) to re-measure their land because they doubted the measurements on the map. Many accused the Ministry agency of using the new maps to contradict or somehow question the validity of their knowledge and experience.

Furthermore, there are real differences between the results of the various technologies. One farmer, who had received the GIS maps had hired an extension agent to come and survey the land using a Global Positioning System (GPS) device, and later an

official from LAD came to do an “on the spot check,” also with a GPS device. All three measurements turned out to be different, but only the LAD measurements were considered valid. Moreover, the aerial photos, while they may be considered more accurate and “objective” than a drawing made by a surveyor, must still be interpreted by a human. A technician must look at the photo, where fields show up a lighter color than forests, and determine which shade of gray to count as “actively farmed land” and which as forest cover. Exactly where this line gets drawn seems to vary from year to year. Consider for example, Anita, whose land area had already been re-measured twice, and decreased successively in size, resulting in fluctuating payments every year. In July 2007 she showed me three different maps that she had received in the last year, and asked incredulously, “How can it be that between November and April [when nothing is growing], my fields have decreased by almost 20%?” According to GIS specialists I consulted, such a difference must be either a human or technical error, but the farmers have little recourse.

Thus, the block maps that result from these aerial photos are similar to Scott’s cadastral maps, in their thinness or lack of detail, and the control they embody. Indeed, many Latvian organic farmers were upset not just about the measurements, but also with the maps’ lack of attention to other meaningful qualities of their farms, qualities that make it part of a broader cultural landscape and a place, rather than just an abstract piece of land, or space.

Mapping political spaces and places

Recent literature in geography, anthropology and philosophy has focused on the difference between space, as a universal, and place, as a particular (Hirsch 1995; Casey 1996; Feld and Basso 1996). Casey (1996:43) argues against some anthropological literature that treats “place as something carved out of space or superimposed on space.” In contrast for Casey, place is “the most fundamental form of embodied experience – the site of a powerful

fusion of self, space, and time” (Feld and Basso 1996:9). I will discuss here the tension that results between the maps’ construction of space and the farmers’ interpretation of their farms as places. The difference between the abstract maps and the farmers’ lived experiences on their land parallels the distinction between space and place, and debates about the definition of landscape.

Like the act of surveying, the maps that result from the process are also political. As Colchester (2005:271) states: “Maps are an assertion of power—a means of projecting perceptions and policies, laws, and institutional relations onto natural environments and human landscapes.” This was particularly true in the Soviet Union. Moran (2006:676) discusses how Soviet mapping was also an active exercise in propaganda, representing “exactly and only what the state intended.” The specific form it took in Soviet years was economic mapping to not only show economic activities on the land but also popularize the Five-Year plans: “Throughout the Soviet period cartography was under centralized state control, with maps recognized as instruments for economic advancement, propaganda, and military needs.” The maps were also full of “deliberate errors,” and “those for public consumption showed a very particular view of reality.” Clearly, this history of Soviet cartography only enhanced farmers’ mistrust of the maps.

As was demonstrated in Chapter One, Latvian farmers’ practices are deeply rooted in their histories and memories of, and visions for, the landscape. As the controversy over the maps illustrates, there is a big difference between land as represented as a map or image, and land experienced as a landscape. The resulting maps contrasted in important ways with the lived reality, practices, and imaginaries of the organic farmers. As Rocheleau puts it in a discussion of community mapping exercises as ways to empower communities:

Some of the most powerful maps are the seemingly private mental maps that derive from cultural and political terrains and often reflect highly uneven power relations... Sometimes the legends behind these mental maps are more powerful than the more

openly acknowledged calculus of economic or biological inventories (Rocheleau 2005:330-331).

Peter Gow (1995:44) observes that people's relationships to particular places are mediated not by visual representations of the place, but by the social relations that govern the use of that image. Thus, maps, pictures, or images do not necessarily reflect the meanings that the land has to its inhabitants. He gives an example of a community in Amazonia that possesses a map of land titles that is almost never used. It is on the whole meaningless to the local people because it does not include any natural boundaries or the shifting ways in which the land is actually utilized. Its meaning was radically transformed, however, when it was used by a large landowner to sue the community because one man had killed one of the landowner's pigs that had invaded the community's land. Thus, the map that until then had been meaningless as a representation of the community's land suddenly became powerful. In the same way, even though the block maps in Latvia were originally insignificant, and perhaps even 'alien' to the farmers, their implementation had very real consequences, which imbued the maps with power and meaning.

Ingold (2000:190) differentiates between land, which is quantitative and homogenous, and landscape, which is qualitative and heterogeneous. He notes that "you can ask of land, as of weight, how much there is, but not what it is like," while the opposite is true of landscapes. When I followed up with specific farmers about their individual cases, their disappointment was not only about the land area, but about the type of landscape and activities that were being recognized or denied through the support payment scheme. As farmers showed me around their farms, they pointed out their intimate knowledge of the land that was not reflected on the maps, which in turn has resulted in conflicts over where the exact boundary should be. For example, their knowledge of where the cows drink and find shade, and where there might be diverse grasses as food sources, give the land meaning and

should thus be included as part of their agricultural landscape. One farmer, Dainis, gave an example of the particular problems he had with the block map and the Agency's on-the-spot check:

Here, on the map we have an island in the river, listed as 1.54 ha. I bought the island as 1.8 ha, but it has a few bushes and trees around the edges. But here is the paradox, I use it for pasture. They came here to measure at a time after a storm, when the edges of the island were flooded, so that influences their measurements. So they can't walk down to the edge, they can't see where the edge of the water is. Then if there is a tree by the shore, they go along the inside of the tree, not on the shore side. Then the tree branches interfere with their satellite image, but these are individual trees, which are very beneficial in organic grazing. So then they protest that I have handed in incorrect documents, that it is actually only 1.54 ha...

Thus, the lack of detail in the maps comes down to questions about real "ownership" of the land, expressed as knowledge of the land and its functions. Reducing the land to an aerial image homogenizes it and obliterates all of its ecological functions, or the characteristics that make it a "place."

Practices of place

Organic farmers also construct their farms as places through their farming practices. Besides the land boundaries, disputes center around what is found on it and the practices associated with it. Regulation 269 by the Latvian Cabinet of Ministers (2007) outlines the requirements for any farmer, organic or conventional, to receive EU or national agricultural subsidy payments. The interpretation of the details of these regulations is where the problems begin. According to the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations, agricultural land must meet certain criteria of being in "good agricultural and environmental condition" to be eligible for payments, including that the land:

- was in good agricultural condition on 30 June 2003;
- does not have shrubs or the invasive plant hogweed [*Heracleum*] growing on it;
- has not started progression towards either a swamp or forest;

- has a total area of at least 1 ha, including contiguous fields of one culture no smaller than 0.3 hectare (par. 11, 12).⁶⁹

Thus, when examining what part of a farmer's land is eligible for support payments, any land that has bushes or trees, that does not have adequate drainage, or is less than 0.3 ha becomes automatically ineligible. These seemingly innocuous conditions, combined with the technological shift in surveying methods, have been the source of numerous conflicts. Some of the conflicts surrounding trees and bushes were already described in Chapter Two. Other measures have also been controversial. For example, Dainis has an orchard close to his house, through which he put a small work-path, but this is now on the LAD block map considered a "road" that divides the field. As a result, the two halves of the orchard don't qualify for payments because each half is smaller than 0.3 hectare.

Another reason for many of the map and land conflicts in Latvia was disagreement about what constitutes "good farming." In addition to the criteria named above, in order to be eligible for support payments, organic or conventional, land must comply with the LAD definition of "Good Agricultural Practices." The guidelines themselves are quite general, and consist of 21 points listed on a table, arranged according to four general topics: environmental protection, nature protection, landscape preservation, and animal registration. The various points, such as "must prevent soil degradation and ensure the *active farming of agricultural land*," (LAD 2005) correspond, however, to 12 different national laws or regulations, which have been developed in accordance with EU regulations and directives. Thus, farmers must be knowledgeable about, and meet, a string of specific requirements in order for their land to be eligible for the support payments.

⁶⁹This is the version of the Regulation currently in effect. The version in effect in 2005 (MK 221) included all of these same provisions, but spread across various articles.

The majority of the items listed in “Good Agricultural Practices” fall into the category “environmental protection.” Some of these, such as crop rotation, or erosion control have been relatively uncontroversial for organic farmers, while others, such as mowing fields by a certain date, maintaining man-made drainage systems on the land,⁷⁰ and exclusion of trees and bushes have been the source of controversy, often because organic farmers find them contradictory to their own environmental practices. Some farmers noted that the corners where the tractor turns around or the area under the compost pile have been taken out of the LAD calculations of their “actively farmed land,” although these activities are certainly an active, and necessary, part of farming. Land that receives support payments may also not be used for the temporary storage of construction materials that are being used to improve part of the farm infrastructure.

All of the activities that are excluded are related to the idea of the temporality of the landscape. Paths and roads, for example, serve as the “taskscape made visible” (Ingold 2000:204), yet are excluded by the LAD guidelines, as in Dainis’ example above. Thus, by excluding certain landscape features, LAD is devaluing certain types of work, as well. These omissions from the LAD maps are painful for farmers because they do not validate their labor, which itself is forming the landscape. Moreover, this approach disallows a holistic approach to farming as an integrated set of practices, and reduces instead the concept of agriculture only to ploughed fields of a certain size.

This definition of practices is particularly important for organic farmers, who set themselves apart from conventional farmers, and to a large extent define themselves, through these very practices. Many organic farmers feel that the LAD Good Agricultural Practices are written only from the perspective of conventional agriculture, and do not take into

⁷⁰ Much of Latvian agricultural land is in fact wetlands that have been “improved” through drainage. Some organic farmers have had disputes with LAD about the maintenance of these drainage systems, which the farmers find contrary to the goal of working with natural systems rather than against them.

account the specific needs of organic farmers. The example above of Dainis' island is also closely related to his concept of organic management practices. When Dainis showed me the island in the summer of 2006, there were cows grazing all along the bank, right down to the water, and drinking from the river. Further off, other cows were resting in the shade of the trees. Dainis pointed out on the map where the border of his "actively farmed land" goes in an artificially straight line which runs along the upper bank of the river, excluding the sloped banks where we saw the animals grazing, and cutting out the trees under which they were resting. Thus, according to Dainis, and his cows, the artificial boundaries that have been drawn on the map do not actually reflect where the land is actively farmed. He observed that while in conventional agriculture it may be important to leave the edges of the water out to avoid contamination or runoff from pesticides from cultivated fields, this is not something that applies for organic grazing. He stated explicitly: "I have had problems [with LAD] because they try to measure the land in a way that would be required for conventional agriculture."

In fact, this is perhaps one of the main reasons why many of the organic farmers to whom I spoke kept repeating that they would not sign agreements for the organic payments for a second five-year period. It was largely a matter of honor and respect, not mere cash. Contrary to the assumption of the LAD official, these farmers were not simply trying to cheat the system and get more than they deserve, and it was not just a matter of getting paid for their land. Rather, the portrayal of their land in an aerial photo and digital map transformed their place into space, made it abstract and obviated their own, individual authority over it. Certain important organic farming practices had been rendered meaningless through this abstraction from place, as lived experience, to "maps from space." The farmers, then, were experiencing this bureaucratic problem as divorcing their land from the landscape and from

their farms as places. As Dainis summarized: “All of the elements important for the landscape here on my farm- they don’t count.”

Publicly private landscapes

Much of the scholarship in geography and anthropology about the political significance of space has focused on urban and explicitly public spaces (Crowley and Reid 2002, Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003). This conflict over the block maps raises some interesting questions, however, about the way rural, seemingly private (and indeed freshly privatized) places are converted into objects of public administration and thus spaces of political control. The numerous restrictions on the farmers’ activities on their land in order to be eligible for support suggest that their land, as measured from space and administered through state agricultural agencies, is perhaps less ‘private’ than the ideologues of private property would suggest. This dispute between the meanings of the land as place and its public control as space takes on particular meanings in a post-socialist context.

This intermingling of private and public uses of space has strong precedents in the Soviet era. Communal apartments are an oft cited example of the “public privacy” and “private publicness” that was institutionalized in the Soviet system (Gerasimova 2002). Scholars have also commented that people devised multiple coping mechanisms to provide for a sense of continuity between these two seemingly oppositional spheres of public and private (Aardam 2002).

In the agricultural sector, collectivization changed the political meanings of land by transforming private land into public space, owned by the state and managed by a collective of workers rather than bourgeois landowners. Land on collective farms was considered movable and abstract: “Land pertaining to any given collective or state farm had no firm boundaries that distinguished each such entity from others like it: all were fungible within the unitary property fund of socialism” (Verdery 2003:65). Verdery (1996) describes how

during the land restitution process in Romania, land was “flexible,” with land measurements varying with political wills in order to accommodate both those who had lost land in collectivization, and those who had worked it in the meantime. Land was further devalued during the 1990s as smallholders struggled in the face of rising costs and changing agricultural policies. Although farmers regained legal title over the land, true “ownership” was lost, due to a lack of policies that would ensure that farmers had the resources and economic conditions in which to farm effectively. Thus the real value of the land diminished (Verdery 2003:356): “The global context has transformed the possibilities and conditions for realizing value in such a way that smallholders can no longer do it.” Thus land restitution was in effect the demise of the peasantry in Romania, as opposed to its intended rebirth. Verdery (2003:358) summarizes:

Socialist farming worked land as an abstraction having fungible properties. By means of collectivization, it uprooted people from land so they would willingly enter the industrial labor force. Decollectivization, by contrast, was to have produced a contrary movement, to reroot people, to fix them to space again by returning to them land that had very localized meanings. The result, over time, however...was to erase land’s particularities, and make it an abstraction once more. We might say then, that for these small owners, land lost value twice: once when it was seized from them by socialism and again when it was seized by the free market.

Some organic farmers in Latvia in the 1990s were able to circumvent this trap of the free market, in part by reducing their reliance on purchased inputs, and also by managing land in innovative ways, such as through the grazing of wild horses discussed in Chapter Two that restored its particularities. These farmers had begun, through their practices, to regain and recreate the land once more as a place. Thus, the scandal over the ‘maps from space’ in Latvia is in many ways a fight over the re-particularization of land as place in the face of new state and supranational, EU mechanisms of control. The administration of the EU support payments was turning out to be a third wave of abstracting the land, thus adding a new dimension to the lack of “effective ownership” that Verdery discusses.

What is significant is that although to the organic farmers their farmsteads are now private property and particular places, the new administrative systems transform them into quasi-public spaces, thus also echoing back to Soviet practices of administrating the land. Verdery (2003:48-49) discusses how land was hoarded and hidden in order to make the collective systems look more productive. She states that “property in socialism was more an administrative than a legal issue” yet “an administrative decree acquired the force of law and was applied as such.” Thus, the current systems of administration are not negating farmers’ property rights per se, but the Cabinet of Ministers regulations in effect administer farmer lands as “publicly private.”

Public administration

On two farm visits in Latvia in 2008 I was accompanied by a friend who spoke no Latvian. At first concerned that she would be bored by the long discussions she could not understand, I found her fascinated by the number of internationally intelligible cognates she heard repeatedly in the conversation: “*inspekcija*,” “*sertifikācija*,” “*kontrole*.” She noted in fact, that almost every conversation revolved around these issues.

Organic farmers are subject to inspection visits by organic certifiers, LAD inspectors who may come to check the farm’s eligibility to receive EU support payments, the Food and veterinary department who come to inspect sanitation and hygiene conditions, and tax inspectors who come to check the farm’s financial paperwork. Any farmers involved in specialized activities, such as seed production or breeding of pedigree animals may have other certification and inspection visits. The responsibility that individual farmers now have for knowing and following all of the different regulations and ensuring that their paperwork is in order for each amounts to what feels to many farmers like a full-time job, leaving little

time for actual farming. In fact in one conversation about the situation in Costa Rica, a Latvian farmer listened longingly and responded, “So, they still have time to farm...”

This seemingly endless supply of inspectors keep the farmers in paperwork and files. Producers are required to keep detailed logs of all of their activities, self-monitoring “critical points,” where there is possible risk of contamination by conventional products or sanitation risks. Given the countless political shifts in the post-socialist period, these files are often redundant. When I asked one producer to show me the documentation she is required to keep, she obliged and went to the other room to get them. I wished I had a camera when she returned, carrying twelve different binders that were literally spilling out of her hands, saying “Here is the first part...” She explained:

There are two institutions who come as our boogeymen- to look into our beds if we aren't hiding something....if there isn't synthetic fertilizer somewhere. We show them all the paperwork. I counted that I have to register each birth [of a calf] in eight different places. Each animal has its own passport, then there are separate logbooks for births, deaths, insemination, moving to different stables, sales. I had to go to five day courses to be able to be the supervisor of our herd.

Farmers are often extremely nervous when the inspectors come. One farmer, Linda, was taken by surprise when an organic inspector arrived to collect statistical data. Although this was not an official inspection, Linda was visibly flustered as she searched for the document she needed. Farmers and small business owners do not have the confidence to contradict the officials, and are intimidated by the constant fear that something in their scores of registers and documents will be found at fault.

This nervousness regarding files and certification may seem odd, especially if one is certain that one has “done nothing wrong.” When I mentioned to a Swiss colleague that many Latvian farmers felt they were drowning in documentation and paperwork, he commented that requiring more self-documentation actually reduced the amount of control required by

the state. This connection may seem entirely different and work in contrary ways in a post-socialist context.

Associations in post-socialist contexts between an endless paper trail and the power dynamics that produce them are very significant. Verdery (1996) has written on the ways in which surveillance systems in socialist regimes were invested in “producing files,” with the ultimate goal of producing political subjects and subject dispositions. Zilber (cited in Verdery 1996) notes that “in the socialist bloc, people and things exist only through their files. All our existence is in the hands of him [sic] who possesses the files and is constituted by him who constructs them.” Furthermore, the production of files depended upon an intricate system of informants who were integrated into every echelon of society,⁷¹ breeding suspicion and distrust.

These subject positions that were for so long cultivated in socialist systems have not disappeared in the space of seventeen years. Therefore one must consider in what ways the organic record-keeping and third-party certification processes affect post-socialist subjects. The constant self-monitoring required of organic farmers constitutes more than just a self-disciplining activity in the Foucauldian sense,⁷² but also a self-surveillance, and the paradoxical *creation of one's own file*. Linda's nervousness over the arrival of the statistician/inspector perhaps also mirrors interactions with colleagues/ informants of earlier eras, resulting in an understandable lack of trust.

⁷¹ For a more thorough discussion of the effect that these systems had even on trust within families, see Figs, O. (2007). *The whisperers : private life in Stalin's Russia*. New York: Metropolitan Books.

⁷² Foucault has described various techniques of control by the state that are then adopted by citizens as governmentality. Foucault, M., G. Burchill, C. Gordon and P. M. Miller (1991). *The Foucault effect : studies in governmentality : with two lectures by and an interview with Michel Foucault*. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf. Appadurai describes, however, how groups of slum dwellers in Mumbai have appropriated such techniques of self-surveing as a way of taking back control from the state. Appadurai, A. (2002). "Deep Democracy: Urban Governmentality and the Horizon of Politics." *Public Culture* 14(1): 21-47. This sort of technique may be problematic in a post-socialist context, however.

Furthermore, as farmers themselves have aptly observed on numerous occasions, the inspectors and Latvian bureaucrats may feel themselves in a parallel position vis-à-vis the European bureaucrats in Brussels that check their files. The farmers' conclusion is that the inspectors feel they must enforce regulations as strictly as possible to avoid "getting in trouble" themselves. The Latvian institutions are thus often perceived as the middleman, trying so hard to please the "master", that they make rules more difficult than necessary. Farmers told countless stories of how rules and regulations in Latvia were more strict than in older EU member states. On a trip with Latvian organic farmers to Austria, farmers doubted whether the Latvian inspectors would certify the on-farm processing facility we visited. When they asked the Austrian farmer about the inspection process, she shrugged nonchalantly, replying, "Well, don't take the bureaucrats so seriously." She explained that in Austria many farmers would keep doing things in their own way until they got fined, because if enough people didn't follow some regulation then it would eventually be changed. Public officials in Latvia, on the other hand, often commented that they felt stuck in the middle, and that they were powerless to change the regulations, and farmers feared challenging them.

Imagining "European" spaces

This conflict also signals a contest at the national level about what "European" Latvia will look like- as a landscape, as a set of practices, and as a functional space. This debate is in effect being played out on organic farmers' land. The map scandal is revealing in the various interpretations and evocations of Europe that it elicits. The way the idea of Europe is used by farmers, the Organic Association, and Agency officials reveal their own competing positions and aspirations in relation to the EU.

As discussed in other parts of the dissertation, the idea of a "return to Europe" was a much romanticized and idealized one, which made "Europe" into more of a utopia than a

geographical or political entity (Eglitis 2002). This united many different groups even at the moment of the vote in the EU referendum. The various disputes and disillusionments that have followed, however, reveal that the imagined and aspired-to Europe was very different for many of these groups.

First, for many of the smallholder farmers, it was the ideal of the smallholder past, of small farmsteads producing at a subsistence level as described in Chapter One. This corresponds to Eglitis' ideal type of a temporal return to pre-War Europe. For others, mainly larger farmers and also many representatives of the Association, it was a prosperous future, with high productivity, and new export opportunities to Europe. This corresponds with Eglitis' ideal type of a "spatial" return to Europe. Finally, other organic farmers, such as the ones discussed in Chapter Two, were combining what Schwartz (2006) has called national agrarian ideals with European biodiversity-centered ones.

In the end all of these groups, as well as the general population, have been disappointed by the "actually existing Europe," as is revealed by the fact that only 29% of inhabitants surveyed in 2008 responded that participation in the EU is a good thing (Šupstika 2008). While on the broader level, there are many explanations for the disillusionment, tied up with a global economic downturn, on the agricultural level this can partially be explained by the fact that Europe itself and its policies have changed and is still changing, and does not fit exactly with any of these imagined Europes.

Reformed Europe

Europe's Common Agricultural Policy was based on subsidies for commodity production from the 1950s until the 1990s. In response to pressure from the World Trade Organization (WTO) as well as the strains of EU enlargement, the CAP has been undergoing a reform process since the early 1990s, with the aim of disassociating subsidies from

production and yields, administering instead a single payment based on the area farmed (EU Commission 2004). This so-called “decoupling” of subsidies has been praised because it provides more money for environmental and rural development programs, thus expressing the cultural value that healthy rural areas hold in the European context (Potter and Ervin 1999).

The reformed CAP payments are intended to support rural development and environmentally friendly low-input and organic (as opposed to high-yield, intensive) farming. The disputes over maps and practices in Latvia presented here, however, seem to indicate that, unless the system is improved, they may not do either. As shown in Chapter Two and here, many farmers feel that the norms still do not go far enough towards a holistic approach to organic farming. For small farmers and biodiversity-oriented farmers, the program remains based on a conventional, production-oriented agriculture framework. For instance, the necessity of having contiguous cultivated fields of one crop of 0.3 hectares is a norm that undoubtedly simplifies administrative procedures, but is clearly a relic of the productivist paradigm of earlier eras of the CAP. Research has shown that agro-ecological systems that integrate a larger variety of crops in smaller areas have higher biodiversity and overall productivity per land unit than mono-cropped fields (Rosset 1999), thus the 0.3 ha requirement is anachronistic and contrary to the goals of organic practices.

Second, the system is not able to deal with flexibility and change in the agricultural and socio-economic farming systems, an issue that is particularly important in New Member States. As the examples of using trees and bushes in natural grazing areas illustrate, “Good Agricultural Practice” guidelines should be adapted for organic farmers, in ways that envision and reward systems that encourage greater biodiversity, rather than punishing them. Defining “actively farmed land” only as mowed or cultivated fields and pastures also denies many important aspects of organic farming. For instance, the exclusion of land that is

necessary for a compost pile or land where animals drink or rest is in fact excluding vital elements of the organic agricultural system. Finally, exclusion of the actual farmstead area from eligibility for support limits the definition of rural development to one based on a conventional agriculture model.

All of these issues are related to concepts of change and dynamism. Landscapes, by their very nature, change, as Ingold (2000:201) reminds us: “what appear to us as fixed forms of the landscape, passive and unchanging unless acted upon from outside, are themselves in motion, albeit on a scale immeasurably slower and more majestic than that on which our own activities are conducted.” In contrast to conventional agricultural systems that are oriented towards products as uniform commodities, organic systems are often more dependent upon, and thus must be more similar to, natural processes and cycles. Thus, farmers concerned with landscape preservation feel that changes in landscapes should not be elements to be punished by disallowing changes in land use during the five-year contract period for support payments.

These issues of change are particularly crucial to understand in new Member States, like Latvia, where farms are still very much in the process of modernization, and agricultural systems in flux. Farmers must be able to react to consumer demands, market opportunities and niches. The support contracts, however, don't allow changes for five years, so if a field has been declared as grassland, and a farmer needs to plant more roses for rosehips, she would again be in breach of contract and not be able to do so. Similarly, if a farmer wants to devote some land to agri-tourism, which is also an important rural development opportunity, he or she would have to pay back all the funds received in the previous years for the land on which a new cottage is to be built. Farmers in new Member States are still facing countless changes in their socio-economic systems, and must be able and allowed to react to these changes in order to survive.

“Production” in a post-productivist Europe

There is another position, however, held by many Ministry officials, evident in the LAD guidelines, and often expressed by members of the Association. Here, one of the main concerns is that the reformed CAP encourages low levels of “production” (*ražošana*) of organic food in the country. Usually by this was meant not the yield per hectare or per farm, but more generally the amount of food that was publicly visible as organic.

Often people talked about the fact that so much money was being put into organic support payments, and that there was little to show for it. It is from this concern also, that many members of the Association began to worry about reports in the media about “couch farmers”- people, often imagined as absentee landlords in Rīga, or abroad, who received organic support payments simply for mowing large fields of grasslands once a year and in effect “doing nothing” (Jonāne 2006).

This concern, both by the Association and by the wider public, must also be viewed in its historical context. In the Soviet Union, productivity was the main goal of the economy, even if rarely achieved, and applied equally to the industrial sector and to collective farms. Soviet statistics showed ever increasing amounts of productivity and worker competitions were held to encourage high productivity. Some organic farmers who worked on collective farms in the Soviet era even remembered these competitions as motivating.

With independence came an economic crash and a dismantling of these collective farms, and along with this of course, a crash in levels of production. Many people have criticized the way privatization happened, due to the corruption that meant those at the top grabbed all the equipment, but also because of the crippling effect this had on the economy.

Because of this, one of the main goals of agricultural policies has been to increase agricultural productivity, and the explicit goal of the Organic Association is to increase production of organic food. This has resulted in great concern that the per-hectare area

payments that are decoupled from production, in place from 2004-2006, were encouraging organic conversion, but were detrimental for production levels. During this period, organic farmers, regardless of what they produced, received a uniform payment per hectare. Conventional and organic farmers, alike, who are involved in more "productive" agriculture were upset with the fact that organic farmers who just mow a field of grass once a year receive the same, or higher, subsidy payments than those who are investing in increasing production. After much discussion, new norms were introduced in 2007 that require a minimum number of animals to be grazed on "ordinary" meadows in order to prevent people from getting money for "doing nothing." In addition, beginning with the new Rural Development program for 2007-13, the payment structure for all organic farmers has been revised.⁷³ Due to worries that the previous structure was discriminating against "productive" framers, the support payments have now been tied to a minimum level of income generated per hectare, differentiated by type of production.

The belief that sooner or later "Europe will start to ask where the production is" prompted the Association and the Ministry to devise ways of reformulating the support payments to promote increased production. The result, which representatives of the Association criticized as having "gone too far," was to increase support payments substantially beginning with 2008, but to make them contingent upon the amount of revenue earned per hectare of a certain crop. So, for instance, in order to receive support payments for vegetable production, a producer must show that he or she has earned at least 1000 LVL (more than 2,000 USD) per hectare of production. Many small farmers and farmers working with biodiversity protection were concerned that this favors large producers and will make smaller ones, or those working more towards biodiversity conservation ineligible for

⁷³ Due to heated debates about the proper type of payments, no new payment structures were opened in 2007, and the new program was only begun in 2008.

payments at all. These new changes reveal that the legislative unease with “non-productive farmers” has been so great that the payment structure was actually revised in a way that is fundamentally contrary to the goal of the EU CAP reform process that aims to decouple subsidies from production.

But this concern is also related to a more widely held concern. It is not just organic farmers that are still struggling to find their entry and place in the markets of the west, on extremely unequal footing. Agricultural subsidy payments in the old Member States are often triple those in new Member States. While in EU accession negotiations, the new Member States were not successful in achieving better conditions, they are now beginning to fight back. In July 2008 EU parliament members from Latvia and other new Member States raised the issue of revising the calculations for direct payments to make them more equitable (Kolyako 2008). The Latvian Minister of Agriculture made a statement on the issue at a press conference in July 2008: “They warned us of ‘support shock’ that we wouldn’t be able to handle such a large inflow of money into the economy, but now we have experienced a very different kind of shock- a ‘price shock,’ because prices increased to European levels, while salaries and supports have not.”

The nation in Europe

The Latvian organic farmers, along with the rest of the nation, have finally completed their long-awaited “return to Europe,” and must now rediscover, reinvent, and renegotiate what the European Latvia is and will be. Despite the contest revealed at the national level between farmers who believe that the CAP reforms do not go far enough in promoting an environmental rural development alternative to agricultural production, and those who feel that the CAP reform is stifling productivity and endangering the sector, both of these

responses are in some way based on the idea of reterritorialization, or reemphasizing the role of national traditions or national sovereignty in policy-making.

The farmers engaging in the biodiversity practices are interpreting their evaluation of Europe through the lens of the national imagined landscapes of open meadows and small farms, while the production-oriented farmers are focusing on regaining national economic status and promoting domestic food production as well as export. In each position there is an interplay and articulation of values and imaginaries from various historical moments, but they combine in ways that are in subtle opposition to the trends of regionalization and globalization that EU integration has come to represent.

Remote Europe

There are various reasons for the problems experienced by the farmers with the new block maps and Agri-environmental programs, including both farmer and agency errors. It is likely that in the next few years many of the problems in the new system will be worked out. The larger cultural significance of the conflict, and the issue of farmers' lack of trust in the system, however, may be of more enduring significance if EU policies become equated with the distrust inherent in Soviet state-society relations. This is a consequence that policy-makers and implementers must work hard to remedy.

The remote sensing technology which is involved in this scandal may also be seen as a metaphor for the way farmers in remote corners of rural Latvia perceive the arrival of new EU regulations, norms, and expectations. Ķencis, the character in the novel *Mērnīeku laiki* that is quoted in the chapter epigraph, is on his way to presenting a bribe to the surveyor when he turns in desperation to prayer, something which, as he says himself, he does not often do. His first wish is that the surveyor treat him well and grant him the pieces of land that he wants, and the second is that his neighbor will not actually want the same pieces of land as he

does. Ironically, he and his neighbor arrive at the surveyor's house at the same time and get put temporarily into a jail cell together to discuss their differences. But this sudden turn to prayer represents an admission of how powerless the farmer feels in front of this not entirely understandable system.

Farmers in Latvia in 2008 may be feeling similarly confused and powerless, as unknown technology is used to measure their land, English- language acronyms replace Russian ones, and new Regulations appear and change before their eyes in rapid succession. They must learn now, not how to farm, but new survival skills of how to negotiate the administrative systems, terms, and rules. It is crucial that the administrative issues surrounding the implementation of the Agri-environmental policies be resolved, and the policies themselves made more flexible in certain cases. The conflict described here, and its lingering consequences, shows that it is imperative that the institutions devising and implementing the regulations, both at the EU and national levels, understand the complex network of historical and cultural practices, symbols, and narratives that relate to the conflict if they are to interact effectively with Latvia's organic farmers in ways that prevent future misunderstandings and truly promote sustainable rural development in the European Latvia.

CHAPTER 7
Voting on seeds:
organic futures vs. legal rights in a post-CAFTA world

“The law is coming up in plenary today!” exclaimed Maria, hanging up her cell phone. Everyone gathered in the MAOCO office was excited, but also taken by surprise. The MAOCO Board was in the middle of a last-minute meeting to prepare for bringing groups of farmers to the *barras* of the Costa Rican Legislative Assembly for the vote on the new Law on Organic Agriculture⁷⁴ the following week. It was September 2006, and after four years of designing the law and lobbying parliamentarians from various parties, the law had finally come up for a vote. Given the surprise change of agenda, people quickly divided up who they would notify. It was important to have as many people in the *barras* as possible to put pressure on the decision-makers. This short notice, however, would mean that few farmers would be able to make it in. A string of phone calls, emails, and text messages were sent out to NGOs, funders and supporters in San José and farmer organizations in towns closer to the capital. Many farmers had already arranged to come to the city the following Thursday in order to be there to listen to the proceedings and hopefully celebrate the approval of the new organic law. Every bill in the Legislative Assembly comes up for debate and vote twice, but activists assured me that if a law is approved in the first debate then it is almost certain to be approved in the second one as well. This new development meant that most would not be able to come for the first debate, but they might be there for the second debate and final vote.

⁷⁴ The full title is “Development, Promotion, and Support of Organic Agricultural Activities” Law no. 8591, published in the Gazette 14 August 2007.

The meeting participants gathered up their materials and piled into taxis to head straight over to the Legislative Assembly. There was still some last-minute lobbying to be done before the vote. The plan was to catch lawmakers as they came out of the Agricultural Committee meetings, to get a sense of how they were likely to vote, and give them some final words of encouragement. People divided into smaller groups to make the rounds in several of the party offices before the vote. Maria seemed to know everyone. She walked through the halls, greeting staffers and parliamentarians alike. The MAOCO representatives got reassuring comments from several parliamentarians as they left the committee meeting and headed to the plenary. Maria was an active student leader before beginning her work with the organic movement, and became nationally known for her leadership of student activists in the protests against the privatization of the telecommunications company ICE in 2000. Through this, she had gained the respect of both activists and lawmakers.

Once this lobbying work was done, the activists gathered in the *barras*. There was an air of tense excitement. Although things seemed like they would go well, people were still anxious. Last year, just as the law was poised to come up for discussion and a vote, one of its main supporters pulled out at the last minute, and the effort crumbled like a house of cards. They had had to begin almost from scratch after the elections in 2006.

In this chapter I discuss the contradictions that have emerged between the local vision of organic agriculture that was being promoted and developed by MAOCO and approved in the new organic law, and the new requirements and imagined threats that CAFTA would bring if implemented, particularly in the realm of intellectual property rights on seeds. I focus specifically on the UPOV (Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants) Convention that Costa Rica is obliged to join due to CAFTA, and its implications for the seed exchange practices and social networks discussed in Chapter Three. After the CAFTA referendum

passed, this law turned out to be one of the most openly contested elements of the so-called implementation agenda of 13 laws that needed to be passed for CAFTA to enter into force.

Throughout the chapter I examine how seeds and the intellectual property rights governing their exchange, breeding, and sale fit with the social imaginaries of the Costa Rican organic agriculture movement, the proponents of UPOV, and the environmental movement that mobilized for a second referendum to stop UPOV. I argue that within the social imaginary of the organic movement, seeds are a public good, currently under community control, which are under the threat of privatization or private control. For the proponents of UPOV, the control of seeds fits into a larger imaginary where national laws and international treaties govern rights and relationships among people and states. The control of property rights of seeds is only one element of that system that is meant to ensure progress and development for the country. Finally, for the environmental activists and others from the anti-CAFTA movements, the seeds and farmer control over them are part of a larger imaginary of national sovereignty and food sovereignty in a fight against transnational capital, corporations, and the neoliberal state. The strategies of the anti-CAFTA and anti-UPOV activists surrounding exchange of information and creation of alternative media parallel the farmers' strategy of perpetuating seed exchange and farmer control over the process.

Organic futures: “*¡Se aprobó!*” (It was approved!)

Despite the organic activists' last-minute fears, the evening of September 5, 2006 in the Legislative Assembly turned out to be spectacular. It was one of the rare moments when various political interests came together in serendipitous agreement. The Agriculture Committee was under pressure to pass the law, because they had yet to pass any new legislation under the current government, which helped advocates push it through. For many

lawmakers it was a way of showing support for small agricultural producers. This was important at a time when the Ministry of Agriculture was being reorganized into the Ministry of Production, raising fears about the fate of smallholders in general. This confluence of political interests resulted in an afternoon of glowing speeches in support of organic agriculture from all parties. José Merino, the only parliamentarian from the alternative left wing party *Frente Amplio* said:

we could say that in these times in which we live it [organic agriculture] is a revolutionary agriculture, because it revolutionizes the dictates...that today in the world of savage globalization, ...that agriculture can only be... in the hands of transnationals...that our small and medium producers are condemned to disappear... It is not true! Costa Rica today is sending a signal that it is not like this”(Asamblea Legislativa 2006:45-46).

Among the benefits that parliamentarians cited the law would bring were assistance to small farmers and recognition of their contribution to the economy of the country, more respect for the environment, and healthier products for consumers. Rafael Elias Madrigal Brenes from the opposition party PAC described his satisfaction when buying an organic product:

in the first place I am protecting my health and that ...of my family; in the second place I am favoring a producer with a better price, and in the third place I am favoring the protection of the environment, I am protecting water resources, and in the last instance I am contributing to the sustainability of agriculture...and our planet. – (Asamblea Legislativa 2006:53).

Several lawmakers made strong statements not only about the pollution resulting from conventional agriculture, but also about the need to protect organic farmers from contamination by genetically modified organisms (GMO). Maureen Patricia Ballestero Vargas, of the ruling party Liberación Nacional noted:

It is a reconciliation of a human activity developed over millennia...in harmony with the environment. And it is not until the last century that this equilibrium was broken and we started to in fact destroy our ecosystems and our nature... This signals that a massive agricultural activity...that is not harmonious with the environment cannot exist. One of the traits that I would like to highlight is the protection it tries to give

precisely to organic agriculture...in the face of the new tendency to modify agriculture products transgenically(Asamblea Legislativa 2006:54).

Fifteen minutes before the session was to close, there was a motion to bring it to a vote. Supporters gathered in the *barras* behind the glass wall seemed to hold their breath in anticipation as they watched the lawmakers slowly stand up, one by one, to signal their support until there was a unanimous vote to approve the new organic law. Farmers and activists in the *barras* embraced with tears in their eyes and cheered the lawmakers. All of their hard work had paid off. Then people grabbed their cell phones and begin calling farmer groups and other supporters, announcing excitedly *¡Se aprobó!* (It was approved!). The following week the law passed unanimously in the second reading as well, this time with groups of farmers gathered in the *barras*, and the law became the institutionalized embodiment of the organic future of Costa Rica.

Public protection

The approval of the law was a momentous victory for the organic movement because it was the culmination of a four year process of designing and lobbying for the law. They had consulted with farmers and lawmakers and hired lawyers to help them incorporate language that would support their vision. While throughout the negotiations some minor points had changed, all of the most important elements were included. One of the most important aspects of the law was that it declared organic agriculture as part of the public interest, thus mandating that the state include it as part of its national development plan. This carries symbolic weight, as a form of recognition of the national importance of the activity, but also makes room for public support, such as tax credits, easier access to bank loans, and payments for environmental services for organic farmers. These elements will bring practical benefits that will encourage new farmers to convert to organic, or allow existing organic farmers to further develop their production.

Many farmers and activists commented, however, that the most important elements of the law were the support it grants to farmers who want to continue saving, exchanging, and replanting *semillas criollas*, as described in Chapter Three. On a related theme, the law defines the state's role in protecting organic farmers' fields from contamination from GMOs. GMOs have become an increasingly contentious issue in recent years, and several municipalities in Costa Rica have adopted resolutions to declare their territories GMO-free, in effect banning the use of GMOs. According to the new Organic Law, farmers would be able to receive compensation if their fields were contaminated.

The state is thus charged with the two sets of responsibilities for protecting both farmers' rights and genetic resources. On the one hand, as already noted in Chapter Three, its role is to "promote, stimulate, and protect the rights of farmers and their organizations to access, use, exchange, multiply and save *semillas criollas*"(Asamblea Legislativa de la Republica de Costa Rica 2007:Art. 20). In addition, the state must define:

the requirements and procedures for preventing the genetic contamination of local genetic resources by genetically modified organisms....in addition it will apply measures of protection for organic crops...Public functionaries who do not exercise the necessary controls to prevent that a farm dedicated to organic crops is contaminated by genetically modified organisms will be responsible, together with the state, for the harm and damages occasioned (Asamblea Legislativa de la Republica de Costa Rica 2007:Art. 21).

These two clauses, combined with the declaration of organic agriculture as part of the public interest, place seeds and genetic resources squarely in the public domain while still the object of state protection. In the era of the diminishing role of the state regulation, control and support (Camacho 2005), this was indeed a great victory for the organic movement.

The idea of the public domain or the commons is a controversial one, however. Throughout the colonial history of the South, the model was the "North" taking seeds and genetic material of the "South" for exploitation. The germplasm was considered free for the taking, because it was considered "common heritage" or in the public domain, yet then it was

used in the creation of particular varieties that would be subject to variety protection (Kloppenburg 1988; Hayden 1998). In order to counter the enthusiasm for enclosure and privatization, there was a wave of romanticization of the public domain (Chander and Sunder 2004). Chander and Sunder (2004:1343) warn that this can have dangerous consequences, especially for the field of genetic resources: “The binary rhetoric of intellectual property versus the public domain masks the ways in which the commons often functions more in the interests of traditional property owners than in the interests of the commoners.” In a similar vein, Hayden (2004) urges us to be concerned about the risks that accompany “public-ization.” Placing many genetic resources “safely in the public domain” allows companies or bioprospectors to disregard any need for identifying what groups or communities should be beneficiaries.

Participatory organics

The law also introduces new possibilities for the social organization of farmers. It introduces the concept of the “farmer-experimenter” who is a farmer who “conducts small-scale experiments in his/ her farm or plot, with the goal of finding practical solutions for his/her productive problems, using clean technologies that are compatible with the principles of organic production.” (La Asamblea Legislativa de la Republica de Costa Rica 2007:Article 5h). This opens up possibilities for support for on-farm community research activities, but it also echoes an important element of how organic farmers in Costa Rica defined organic farming. Farmers told me repeatedly that organic agriculture was about experimentation and trial and error, and that there were no recipes.⁷⁵

Furthermore, the law establishes recognition for participatory certification for products intended for sale on domestic markets. In most “third-party” organic certification

⁷⁵ This sort of approach was facilitated very much by the *Campeño a Campeño*, or farmer-to-farmer educational approach promoted by active alternative development networks such as *Coproalde*.

systems, one accredited inspector visits the farm, inspects fields and growing conditions, reviews all the farm's paperwork and notes any irregularities as noted in Chapter Six. Ultimately it is this one individual, in conjunction with the accredited institution, which decides whether or not the farm passes as certified organic. In a participatory certification system, however, it is a groups of consumers, other farmers, and well-known representatives of the local community, such as teachers, lawyers or doctors, who visit the farm, ask questions, check documents, and make a decision about whether or not to certify the farm. In the case of official certification, farms must meet the norms and guidelines set out in the national legislation, but in participatory certification, the group leading the process can include any relevant factors that are important to them.

While more community-oriented, the participatory certification process can actually end up being more rigorous than third-party certification, because it includes elements that the community itself has deemed important for certification. Consider the example below of a pilot-phase participatory certification project I attended.

We all loaded into the back of two pick-up trucks with benches fastened along both edges and metal bars above to hold on to. It was a tight fit, and a few people were perched somewhat precariously on the very back. These trucks took our group of twenty people up, up, up through the steep bumpy, rutted dirt roads into the community of Valle Verde, where we would be participants in the certification process of several organic farms.

When we piled out from the trucks, the views were breathtaking. Hills stretched blue in the distance, while closer up small houses lined the roads, with lush vegetable and fruit gardens in courtyards behind them. After welcoming speeches, one smaller delegation of all the participants was selected to do the official paperwork for the certification process, representing each of the sectors of farmers, consumers, educators, local politicians, and visitors who had come from Nicaragua.

Then the work turned very serious. The family members representing the farm lined up in front of the delegation, and begin answering, one by one, questions about the gender relations, division of labor, equity, youth involvement, decision-making practices, and ecological practices such as the manufacture and use of organic fertilizers, pest control, and others. They were following guidelines developed jointly by the members of the local organization, a community development association that has been working for almost 20 years in Southwestern Costa Rica, and is very active in promoting organic agriculture as a development alternative.

The delegation wrote down all of the information, to be analyzed and evaluated later by the entire group of participants. Then all the participants divided up into groups to visit the three farms. We were shown the fertilizer production, the vegetable garden, and conservation areas. Later, during the discussion to decide the outcome of the certification process, several participants raised detailed questions about the practices they had seen, and whether these should qualify for organic certification. One of the most contentious issues was the gender equity and division of labor on the farm. Many participants felt this did not live up to their expectations and the group's guidelines. As a result, the farm did not pass the first time, but was given time to improve these aspects before a follow-up visit.

Social and gender equity are not usually included in third-party organic certification, thus a farm that might have received organic certification from an agency did not receive immediate approval from the community. The inclusion of these social and gender issues can be seen as a corrective to both the market's and government policies' deletion of these elements. In some ways, it is an attempt to certify the "moral economy" (Scott 1985) of organic agriculture, by broadening the scope of what defines organic. Through such efforts, organic agriculture becomes much more than the use of open pollinated seeds or organic

fertilizers, but a consciously constructed and sophisticated arrangement of land, labor, capital, and social values.

After the law was approved in 2007, the experiences from this and two other pilot projects were taken into account for the development of the national regulations on participatory certification. Many farmers' groups who sell primarily on the local market have been interested in the option of participatory certification not only for the community-building opportunities it facilitates, but also as a lower-cost option for certification.⁷⁶ Currently costs of certification are high because producers' groups must pay for each type of certification they use. For instance, if a group is exporting products to both US and European markets, it must get certified according to both the US and EU standards.⁷⁷ Because of this there are also still large numbers of producers and producer groups, especially those selling primarily at local markets that are not certified. Participatory certification would allow many of these farmers to gain recognition for the efforts they have made to farm differently.

The goals underlying participatory certification are multiple: it strengthens the community of farmers, by incorporating their mutual advice-giving and receiving into the organic certification process; it fortifies the link between consumers and producers and gives those interested in knowing where their food comes from a unique opportunity to visit farms and also give their recommendations. It also provides a way to spread information about the

⁷⁶ Most third-party organic certification in Costa Rica has been done in producer groups, rather than on the individual farm level. In this system, the certifier certifies not individual farms, but a group or association of farmers. The association keeps all the paperwork and documentation regarding the member farms, and has one or several internal inspectors who visits farms in order to see that all procedures are being observed. When the certifier inspects the organization, it checks all of this paperwork, and then visits only a certain percentage of all the farms. This process was developed in the late 1980s specifically for developing countries, where there is a very big percentage of extremely small farms already organized into associations.

⁷⁷ Costa Rica was one of the first countries in Latin America to obtain the highly prestigious "Third country" status, meaning that their national standards were deemed equivalent to EU standards. Nevertheless, most producer groups kept certifying according to the EU regulation "to be safe." In 2008, EU delegation members told Ecologica that they should certify according to CR national standards.

importance of organic agriculture to other local community leaders (Lizano Jimenez, Carrillo Guevara et al. 2007).

But beyond these community-building elements of participatory certification and the formation of consumer groups, these activities also belie an outright political agenda. The first participatory certification program was born in Brazil, and they are now rapidly spreading throughout Latin America. In a seminar on local markets in Costa Rica, as well as at regional Latin American meetings I have attended, the focus on local markets and alternative certification procedures is spreading as an overt challenge to capitalistic alienation of markets. By bringing truckloads of visitors to their farm, growers are trying to fight the distance and separation that comes from having a product appear abstract and naked alone in a supermarket, divorced from the people and place that have created it.

Thus, in Costa Rica and in many other Latin American countries that are experimenting with participatory certification, it represents an effort to transform the social relations that surround certification, organic production, and markets. Thus, in the organic movement's social imaginary, the future they had constructed and that had now been successfully codified into law, valued local and creole genetic resources, active farmer-experimenters embedded within active communities of farmers, consumers and supporters, and a vigilant state that not only recognized but protected these rights.

The initial excitement that the law had finally passed gradually began to give way to concerns about the practical actions necessary for its implementation, and a hint of pessimism began to sink in. Why had the law suddenly passed so effortlessly after so many years of struggle? At this moment in 2006, debates about CAFTA were still in full swing, and there had not yet been any mention of a referendum. The ruling coalition had the necessary 38 seats in Parliament to pass CAFTA. Had the organic law passed only because lawmakers knew that if they passed CAFTA in the next few months that it would have higher standing

than the national organic law? The happy excitement of the achievement was mingled with the uncertain future presented by the possible approval of CAFTA.

Threatened seeds

Imagine that you are a farmer, and the courts condemn you for planting the seeds that you yourself saved from your past harvest.

This is how it looks: you purchase, or obtain, certain seeds that give you a very good harvest of whatever it may be...tomatoes, mangoes, cucumbers. You choose at the end of your harvest, in addition to the fruits to recuperate a certain amount of seeds. The fruits of your harvest, you can eat them or sell them. The seeds, you would think, you could eat (if they were edible), plant, or even sell. Why not, if they come inside the fruit and you sell the fruit? But let's say that you simply replant the seeds and wait peacefully for the next harvest...

Peacefully, that is, until the police, public prosecutors and judges arrive to condemn you as a thief and threaten to throw you in jail. In addition, they fine you for damages inflicted upon the company with proprietary rights to the gene that gives life to the seeds that give life to your plants. Plants that give fruit, and of course within those fruits are seeds. But no, and this is key- these seeds are not yours.

Does this seem crazy? It is crazy! But this is exactly the crazy world that we are getting further and further into with every day....

- Leonardo Garnier (2004) editorial in La Nación

The above excerpt is from an editorial written by a writer and academic, published in the main daily newspaper. It refers to the well-known case of the Canadian canola farmer Percy Schmeiser, who was sued by Monsanto for having illegally planted genetically modified canola seeds on his farm.⁷⁸ The above article, however, was circulated among activists in the run-up to the CAFTA referendum, to make a larger point not just about GMOS, but about farmers' rights more generally, and the respective roles of international conventions, free trade agreements, and states to determine and alter these rights. Activists used this article to make a point about the implications of the UPOV convention that issues "soft patents" on plant varieties. Furthermore, those circulating the article conveyed distress

⁷⁸ Schmeiser contended that he had never planted the seeds, but rather that they had cross-pollinated and contaminated his plants that he had been selecting for forty years. The Canadian Supreme Court upheld the Monsanto's patent on the genetically modified gene in the original case in 2004. Schmeiser subsequently sued Monsanto for contamination, and Monsanto settled out of court in March 2008, agreeing to pay "clean-up costs" to rid his field of the genetically modified plants. See www.percyschmeiser.com for more details.

that the author, who had since entered politics and become a Minister in the Arias government, had recently made statements in support of CAFTA, and was thus now seen as a turncoat.

This was an important issue because after the CAFTA referendum passed, the government began working to pass the 13 laws of the implementation agenda. Six of these concerned intellectual property rights (Rodriguez 2008). One requirement was joining UPOV, which is comprised of all the signatories of the Convention on Plant Variety Protection. First signed in 1961 by only six Western European countries, the Convention standardizes procedures for registering new plant varieties. It is designed to protect breeders' intellectual property rights and allows them to collect royalty payments for up to 20 years on use of seeds of registered varieties. UPOV also requires farmers to obtain permission from and/or provide payment to the breeder in order to reproduce the seeds, in effect banning free seed exchange.

Participating countries may make exceptions for farmers to reuse their own seed under certain circumstances under a clause called the Farmers' Exception.⁷⁹ The Convention has been amended various times in 1978 and 1991, however, each time making it progressively stricter about farmer seed-saving options. For example, the 1978 version of the Farmers' Exception allowed farmers to save seeds from protected varieties for their own use, including reproduction. The 1991 version includes only use for one's own consumption of the products, not reproduction of the seeds (Red de Coordinación en Biodiversidad 2007). Currently over 60 countries are members, but all countries joining now must adopt the 1991 amendments, thus endangering farmer seed-saving practices.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ There is great variety in how broadly this exception is used in different countries. For example, Holland has an exception for certain crops, such as wheat, whereas other countries may have none.

⁸⁰ Countries that joined previously had a choice whether or not to adopt the 1991 changes. Some countries, for instance Norway, chose to remain with the 1978 version (CITE GRAIN).

The mission of UPOV is to “encourage the development of new varieties of plants for the benefit of society.” From the proponents’ and breeders’ point of view, intellectual property rights for plant varieties are necessary to help stimulate scientific innovation and breeding and develop higher quality seeds. There is also a Breeders’ Exception, which allows breeders to use protected varieties for the development of new protected varieties. Originally the system was developed in a way that set it apart from patents, so that discoveries of natural genetic mutation or cross-pollination could also be registered (whereas for a patent it must be an invention rather than just a discovery). The original wording referring to discoveries of natural mutations allowed for a broader interpretation of who is a breeder. Under such a definition farmers selecting their own varieties could also be considered breeders. Subsequently wording was changed to include “discovery and development” rather than just discovery (UPOV 2002), narrowing the interpretation of breeding to fit laboratory settings more readily than farmers.⁸¹

In order to register and protect a new variety, it must meet four criteria: novelty, distinctness, uniformity, and stability. Regardless of which definition of breeder is used, these criteria are almost impossible for farmer-breeders to meet due to a difference in methods. From an ecological perspective, this is because farmer selection occurs at the population-level, rather than at the variety level. This means that in a farmer’s field who is working with his or her own seeds, various crosses may occur through cross-pollination. Farmers select the healthiest plants that are best adapted to the local conditions, but will continue planting various types, not just selecting one, as a means of insurance against changing conditions. The variability among the population and across generations of farmer-selected varieties make them better able to adapt to changing growing conditions and more

⁸¹ The UPOV document notes that the French term originally used is *obtentuer* which can be translated more literally to plant improver than breeder (UPOV 2002). In Spanish, the term used is *mejoramiento*, which is literally improvement, and in Latvian, *selekcija*, or selection.

disease resistant. In short, the diversity-based planting and selection practices of small farmers make the criteria of uniformity and stability undesirable and nearly impossible to meet.

As one University breeder from the Netherlands noted at a conference, farmer selection is much more interesting, because there can be unexpected surprises. In contrast, breeder work in laboratories is pre-meditated for the desired result, thus does not allow for adaptability. Breeder work is also much quicker, because it can use genetic markers to identify desirable traits and track which crosses carry this trait without having to let the plants grow and develop. This allows breeders to stabilize the variety, ensuring uniformity also across future generations. This incompatibility of the two breeding types is summarized by a group of organic plant breeding specialists thus:

Modern plant breeding has aimed at pure lines and increasingly [sic] use of hybrids, resulting in a decrease of genetic diversity in conventional varieties. Also genetic diversity at the regional level is decreasing with few varieties grown over large areas. In search for implementing more genetic diversity on different levels as a tool for improved yield stability under organic conditions, the possibilities of landraces and variety mixtures are explored. But such variety concepts do not fit easily into current official testing and certification systems (Welsh and Wolfe, 2002) (cited in Lammerts van Bueren, Wilbois et al. 2007).

The criteria of novelty is also controversial, because a variety is considered novel if it has not been previously commercialized and is different from all other registered varieties. This raises fears among farmers who have been working with their own seeds that breeders from large companies will be interested in “stealing” farmer-developed varieties that have not been registered or commercialized, and stabilizing them in laboratories so they can meet the variety registration and protection criteria. Subsequently farmers would have to pay royalties to the breeder to use the variety.

Probably the most famous case of this is the patenting⁸² of the “Enola” bean, purchased by Larry Proctor, the owner of a US seed company at a market in Mexico in 1994. He selected some beans and let them cross—pollinate to stabilize the population, and patented it as the Enola bean with a “novel yellow color” in 1999. His company then subsequently sued Mexican bean exporters for a patent infringement, demanding royalties of six cents per pound (RAFI 2000). The patent was challenged by the International Center for Tropical Agriculture with support by the FAO, based on the fact that they have samples of the bean in their gene bank (RAFI 2000, Rattray 2002, Wilson 2008). The patent was eventually overturned (Wilson 2008), but still serves as a potent example as one case of agricultural biopiracy that was stopped among countless others that do not get contested.

According to the text of UPOV, varieties that are registered for protection must be distinct from other varieties that are registered or that are considered “common knowledge.” In theory, farmers could contest registered varieties as having been originally their own selection:

In applying the notion of common knowledge in cases of dispute...UPOV members are recommended to be prepared to take into account not only knowledge that exists in documented form, but also the knowledge of relevant communities around the world provided that this knowledge can be credibly substantiated so as to satisfy the standard of proof of the civil law courts....This means, for example, that landraces which are capable of satisfying the definition of “variety,” and which can in consequence be defined and propagated unchanged should be regarded as varieties of common knowledge for distinctness purposes (UPOV 2002:7).

In the Enola bean case, the patent could be overturned because of the cooperation with the International Center for Tropical Agriculture and the FAO. In practice, however, for communities or farmers on their own to follow what varieties are being registered anywhere in the world and contest them “so as to satisfy the standard of proof of the civil law courts” is difficult, if not impossible.

⁸² In the US, plant variety protection is also done with patents on varieties.

Due to concerns such as these, UPOV has been criticized by many activist groups, such as Genetic Resources Action International (GRAIN), for giving plant breeders monopoly rights over genetic materials and contributing to genetic erosion by limiting diversity (GRAIN 1999). In addition, in many developing countries the majority of applications for protection are for foreign-bred varieties thus it does not even contribute to local scientific developments (Red de Coordinación en Biodiversidad 2007).

Specifically in the case of Costa Rica, opponents to the treaty argue that it is a “soft patent” on plants and seeds, thus in violation of an ethical principle of not patenting life forms. They point out that it contradicts the national Law on Biodiversity from 1998 which establishes “community intellectual rights” over genetic resources (GRAIN 1999; Red de Coordinación en Biodiversidad 2007). The requirements of UPOV are also seen by many to contradict directly the spirit of the new Organic Law, because the criteria of “distinctness, uniformity, and stability” are the exact opposite of the mixed and changeable “creole” varieties protected by the Costa Rican Organic Law (see Chapter Three).

These concerns are not new, as UPOV already has a long history in Costa Rica. In fact, the Costa Rican Legislative Assembly already rejected joining UPOV twice in the past. The first time was in 1999, and the second in 2002 (Rodriguez 2008). At that time, UPOV was brought forward because one requirement of Costa Rica’s joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) TRIPS⁸³ agreement was establishing a mechanism for protecting intellectual property rights on plant varieties. The Biodiversity Network, a group that had formed spontaneously in 1998 as a result of efforts to adopt a new Law on Biodiversity, lobbied successfully that UPOV was not the only way to meet the requirement, and proposed an alternate bill on plant variety protection. The network designed a new bill that would meet the requirements of the WTO, but not be as restrictive as UPOV. Other countries in

⁸³ Trade-related Aspects of Intellectual Property

Latin America also developed their own interpretations of the minimum intellectual property rights necessary and passed alternative laws that are more liberal than UPOV towards farmers' rights (GRAIN 1999). The bill was introduced in 2003 but did not make it to debate. The alternative bill now does not have a chance because Chapter 15 on intellectual property rights in CAFTA explicitly requires joining UPOV.⁸⁴ Now that UPOV has been formally associated with the implementation agenda of CAFTA, there is strong political pressure to adopt it.⁸⁵

Although the ratification of CAFTA has not overturned the Organic law and implementing regulations were being finalized in 2008,⁸⁶ these fears reflect a far stronger tension between the role of local initiatives, national laws, and international treaties and conventions in determining the future. The broader issues of "privatizing seeds" and "patenting life" represented by the UPOV convention became one of the more contentious and visible issues in the fight against the CAFTA implementation agenda.

Legal futures

The future vision held by the supporters of UPOV is quite different than that held by the organic farmers. The main proponent of UPOV in Costa Rica has been the National Seeds Office. It was created only in 1981, as an outcome of the 1978 Seed law. This

⁸⁴ The article on joining UPOV contains the following footnote, which could potentially be used as a way to create more space for farmers' rights: "The Parties recognize that the UPOV Convention 1991 contains exceptions to the breeder's right, including *for acts done privately and for non-commercial purposes, such as private and non-commercial acts of farmers*. Further, the Parties recognize that the UPOV Convention 1991 provides for restrictions to the exercise of a breeder's right *for reasons of public interest*, provided that the Parties take all measures necessary to ensure that the breeder receives equitable remuneration. The Parties also understand that each Party may avail itself of these exceptions and restrictions. Finally, the Parties understand that there is no conflict between the UPOV Convention 1991 and a Party's *ability to protect and conserve its genetic resources*" [emphasis added].

⁸⁵ In congressional debates, however, representatives of the opposition from the Citizens' Action Party, PAC, argue that passing only a national law would also satisfy the requirements of CAFTA, and that ratifying the international treaty is not necessary. Such a solution would allow the law to be changed with changing needs in the face of food security issues, etc, whereas the UPOV convention cannot be changed.

⁸⁶ There was an initial struggle to allow involvement of representatives of MAOCO in the stakeholder committee that was devising the implementation regulation, but two representatives were involved in the final stages.

coincides with many of the neoliberal reforms that farmers protested so vehemently in the 1980s, because they saw them as a breach of the traditions of the social welfare state (Edelman 1999). CAFTA is seen by many as the next and final stage in that “take-over” of the agricultural sector by US interests, because it would force UPOV, seed certification and variety testing on them.

Similarly as in Latvia, where UPOV is already in place (see Chapter Three), the use of improved, certified seed of protected varieties, as required by UPOV, has been presented as a way to increase seed quality and in general advance agriculture. A document written by the National Seeds office begins by establishing this fact:

In the current circumstances of globalization and the opening of markets, efficient and competitive forms of agricultural production become ever more necessary....It is an undisputable fact that seeds of good quality produced by research and development of varieties represents the strategic input par excellence that allows agricultural activities to be sustained, making significant contributions to improving the quality and profitability of production (Quirós O. and Carrillo A. n.d.).

For the National Seeds Office, the approval of UPOV is part of a longer-term regionalization effort to standardize seed quality and eliminate trade barriers in Central America, as well as facilitate trade internationally. It is a process that has been ongoing for at least fifteen years, but with continuous setbacks.

In contrast to the common assumption that free trade implies deregulation,⁸⁷ the representative of the National seeds office with whom I speak, Don Jorge, offers UPOV as part of a tidy and legalistic world, in which all wrongs can be righted by another national level law or a new international convention, rather than promoting free trade in the *laissez-faire* sense of the term. Although Jorge realizes that the UPOV convention and law have been controversial in Costa Rica, he feels his office has given serious consideration to how to address the main issues. For instance, if there is a risk that breeders will try to raise prices

⁸⁷ Many critics of free trade have actually made the point that free trade is not free, it is just regulated in a certain way, and for the benefit of certain parties.

too high on their seeds, then the consumer protection law should be put into force to protect against excessive prices:

It wouldn't be acceptable or ethical to have an excessive price even if it is a very good variety that produced good dividends. It would still be an abuse. So here is this law of competition and ...protection of consumers where you could turn if there were price abuses, there would be the possibility to denounce it.

He also notes that stricter laws should be made to protect against biopiracy. Biodiversity exists, however, to be used, and the laws of biodiversity have to regulate that access rather than forbid it. Transnational companies also have an important role to play in this use of biodiversity:

If we are realistic, there are many products that will not be developed by Ministries of Agriculture or Health or small companies, that will probably be developed by transnationals that have technological and economic possibilities to develop them. And this isn't bad, as long as the raw materials have acceptable benefits - so the society benefits. Some people might say- but look, the transnationals will get the benefits- but it would not worry me - if they can find a cure for Alzheimer's or for cancer - the country will benefit economically and in other ways like technology transfer.

This echoes a point that has been made about Locke's interest in defending property rights: "He [Locke] was also justifying European conquest of the New World on the argument that Europeans could exploit the Americas more effectively than the native peoples because the Europeans would create private property in land and improve it, something the natives did not do" (Humphrey and Verdery 2004:4).

This view that use of genetic resources is not exploitation as long as "benefits to society" are ensured is also very much in line with the CBD idea of benefit-sharing. Meant as a counter-device to leaving all genetic resources in the public domain and "free" for the taking, benefit-sharing is a way to give back to those who have protected the resource. This has already been an incredibly contentious issue in Costa Rica.

Saving to sell versus exchanging to save....

The issue of control over agricultural genetic resources echoes previous struggles over the use of biodiversity from Costa Rica's protected areas through the setting up of bioprospecting agreements. In 1991 the Merck pharmaceutical company signed a historic agreement with a private non-profit institute in Costa Rica called the National Biodiversity Institute or InBio. InBio was established in 1989 and lauded for its efforts to catalogue the biodiversity of Costa Rica, but was also very explicit about the goal of the cataloguing to be to make biodiversity "useful to humanity" (Tangley 1990). Merck paid InBio one million dollars over two years and provided equipment and training for paratxonomists who would collect and categorize species. InBio would catalogue information on plants, insects and microorganisms from protected areas and provide them to Merck for use in pharmaceutical products. If any products were derived from those materials, InBio would collect royalty payments on behalf of Costa Rica (Hayden 1998; Rodriguez 2008). To date, no such products have been derived and no royalties paid (Hayden 2007).

The Agreement has on one hand been hailed as a success internationally because it was one of the first attempts to contract benefit sharing for the use of plant genetic materials and was thus a proving ground for the CBD mechanism (Evans 1999). InBio emphasizes that the ability "to put biodiveristy to work for society" is crucial to its protection, and the protection of forests from deforestation (Tangley 1990). On the other hand, the Agreement has been highly controversial. Many environmentalists both inside and outside of Costa Rica have questioned the rights of InBio as a third party to claim benefits on behalf of the state or the nation, and criticized that the contract brings few benefits to local and indigenous

communities who often have been directly involved in preserving and using the resources (Evans 1999; Rodriguez 2008).⁸⁸

Both activists and scholars have questioned the instrumentalist approach to biodiversity conservation, or the idea of “saving” something just to sell it (Hayden 1998; Rodriguez 2008). In the bioprospecting agreements, InBio was saving the genetic materials to sell them, rather than, in the case of the farmer seed-saving networks, exchanging the genetic material to preserve it.

This case has also raised larger international debates about the moral principles and implications involved in designating intellectual property rights for living organisms (Brush 1999; Kirsch 2004; Cleveland and Soleri 2007). Opposition party members in Parliament, like Patricia Quiros Quiros, made this point very clearly when speaking against UPOV: “the rejection of the patentability of life and the generalized rejection by our people of intellectual property on living beings has been one of the main causes of the rejection of the principles of UPOV until now” (Asamblea Legislativa 2008).

The value of resources and labor

The idea of benefit-sharing is often seen by activists as more akin to biopiracy, or just another way for richer countries to exploit poorer ones, and also raises important questions about the practical feasibility of implementing benefit sharing contracts (Hayden 2003; Rodriguez 2008). But it is also a fundamental reconfiguration of the social relations

⁸⁸ This claim should not be confused with romanticizing indigenous communities or local knowledge, as many scholars have pointed out the pitfalls of doing so. See for example Adams, J. S. and T. O. McShane (1992). *The myth of wild Africa : conservation without illusion*. New York: W.W. Norton, Agrawal, A. and C. Gibson (1999). "Enchantment and Disenchantment: The Role of Community in Natural Resource Conservation." *World Development* 27(4): 629-649. There have been many anthropological accounts, however, of how farmers and user groups in developing countries have been involved in conservation of biodiversity and agricultural genetic resources Orlove, B. and S. Brush (1996). "Anthropology and the conservation of biodiversity." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 25: 329-52.

between the state and its citizens. Hayden (2007:733) notes that “when benefit-sharing is on the table inclusion is figured explicitly as participation in processes of value-production.”

In the field of agriculture, these relationships are different than for wild flora and fauna, where people’s involvement in protecting resources may have been more indirect. As discussed in Chapter Three, farmers working with *semillas criollas* have been very actively involved in preserving genetic diversity, and are concerned about losing control over it. This sets this case apart from the typical “tragedy of the commons” (Hardin 1968) scenario where overuse is a problem (Chander and Sunder 2004). It is also quite the opposite in terms of investment in the resource. Boyle (2003) explains the typical argument of why the commons was an inefficient form of property management: “Before the enclosure movement, the feudal lord would not invest in drainage systems, sheep purchases, or crop rotation that might increase yields from the common—he knew all too well that the fruits of his labor could be appropriated by others.” With agricultural genetic resources in the public domain, this is quite different, because it has been individual farmers making improvements to the resource, which has in turn benefited others in the community, who have then improved it yet again. Thus, rather than suffering from a lack of investment in the resource which private management would improve, there have been improvements happening upon which the private sector has not been able to capitalize (Lewontin 1998). Therefore the effect of imposing intellectual property rights on seeds is to limit the investment by others, and clearly define the beneficiary of having made that investment. This requires defining clearly how the resource is valued and who is making legitimate improvements, and how to acknowledge the efforts of communities through time rather than individuals at the present. And here the views of the officials promoting UPOV differ again from the organic farmers.

Jorge, from the National Seeds Office feels that the risks of agricultural biopiracy are low, because Costa Rica is not the center of origin for most of its staple agricultural crops:

Costa Rica has enormous potential in biodiversity and many things to discover, but in the agricultural sector, what is it that we use and where does it come from? The important products for food security - rice, beans, flour, potatoes, vegetables...[or the] economically important products- banana, coffee, sugarcane...where did these national varieties come from? The germplasm comes from – Columbia, the Philippines, Asia... Never in the agricultural history of Costa Rica have we found something, and [it is] difficult [to imagine] to find anything that will support material for investigation for new varieties.

This perspective adds an interesting limitation on what types of resources are valued or not based on a type of authenticity.⁸⁹ Jorge concludes that *semillas criollas* from Costa Rica would thus not be interesting to the seed industry because they would have access to most of the original genetic material in gene banks already. And if there were any specific traits, like disease resistance that would be interesting for the company, they would only be interested in reproducing that one gene, and not the entire variety. This then, devalues *semillas criollas* and puts them outside of the realm of possible benefit sharing, because they are not commercially valuable. Thus, all of the concern of companies coming and stealing genetic materials from the farmers is not realistic, according to Jorge.

Indeed, there is a similarly ambiguous distinction between activities that count as breeding, and are thus seen as a threat to the UPOV system. With this Jorge explains that small farmers working with *semillas criollas* needn't worry, that they are not the target of the UPOV legislation, and that they will be able to continue:

There are farmers who save their own seeds and use their own [seeds]- this is no problem and is not illegal. On the other hand, there is a clandestine seed market...it's not very large, but it exists. The office can intervene if it detects an irregular commercial situation. Usually, those who do this are doing it without bad faith, or intentions, but [there are] others who know what they are doing and have goals of profit and are simply trying to compete with those who comply with the quality standards, who are under the process of supervision.

⁸⁹ While it is true that there will be more genetic variation and more crossing with wild relatives closer to the centers of origin, these are not the only valuable genetic materials. Brush, S., Ed. (2000). Genes in the Field: On-Farm Conservation of Crop Diversity. Rome, Ottawa, Boca Raton: International Plant Genetic Resources Institute, International Development Research Centre, and Lewis Publishers. One of the main reasons for *in situ* conservation (on-farm) vs. *ex situ* conservation (gene banks) is that placing a seed in a seed bank stops the genetic evolution of the plant. This is the reason that *semillas criollas* are important, because they represent the continuous evolution of the genetic material.

This distinction, based on profit-making intentions, relegates farmer seed selection and seed exchange to non-revenue making farmers. This raises important questions, for example, about organic farmers who do want to sell their crops and their seeds for their livelihoods. Would this count as seed-saving, or as the formation of a clandestine seed market? This seems to indicate that seed saving and exchange is acceptable only for the marginal or poor, but anyone trying to actually make a living using these methods becomes a threat to the system.

Furthermore, Jorge also sees farmer breeding as an entirely different activity than technical, precise, and efficient breeders' work:

The farmer is usually not going to be involved in a program of genetic improvement per se, the farmer does a more intuitive improvement, from observing plants, identifying the best ones- it is a more informal program, to improve and to get good seeds. They can obtain very interesting things, and more rustic ones more adapted to the conditions of use...but not for the seed market.... There are some activities where farmers may have more varieties, because they are not interesting for the industry. But this is the only reason, not because they are more efficient, and this is the truth.

With this, Jorge insists that UPOV is intended more for commercial and industrial agriculture, not for smallholder farming models, but at the same time discounts those models as antiquated, inefficient, and uninteresting. He suggests that there might be space for defining smallholders for whom certain aspects of the law do not apply, but this raises even more uncertainty about where the line would be drawn.

Parliamentarians speaking in favor of UPOV echo similar reassurances that the Farmers' Exception will let smallholders continue with seed exchange. They emphasize that joining UPOV, however, will help breeders be recognized for their efforts. This will help Costa Rica as a nation to sell value-added products on the global market, and to increase yields, quality, and the level of technology used in the agricultural sector to better confront the global food crisis. Ofelia Taitelbaum Yoselewich, from the ruling party *Liberación Nacional* states:

In order for the insertion into the global economy to be a source of prosperity, it requires that we export products and services with a high value added....In addition, in current times, modern agriculture is based in a highly dynamic seed agroindustry, and this, in turn, in programs of genetic improvement. Because of this, I affirm that the farmers will benefit from the approval of this UPOV convention (Asamblea Legislativa 2008).

From the perspective of supporters then, UPOV is only one piece in a larger mosaic of laws and treaties that will govern people's and companies' behavior and give Costa Rica better footing in the unavoidable advance of technological progress. Because of this, breeding programs must be clearly separated from activities of farmer-breeders, and their work valued differently.

Ambiguous benefits for uncertain communities

The line of farmer-breeding vs. scientific breeding is fuzzy at best, however. In conversation with Jorge, he first continues to draw the distinction between these two types of activities. He contends that farmers may select the best seeds from previous generations, but do not actually try to cross varieties, trying to come up with a new variety with distinct new characteristics. When I offer cases where organic farmers in Costa Rica have done just that, but that would not be able to meet the uniformity criteria, he offers an alternative.

The protection and intellectual property rights, like UPOV, are in reality designed more for formal genetic improvements, period. It was done for this. Now, it's an injustice that farmers who develop their varieties can't apply for protection under this regime- what we can say is that it was not made for this, it was made for a more industrial development of varieties. If farmers are not protected- don't have the possibilities to protect [their varieties] - this is what the system of protection of community intellectual property *sui generis* is for in the Biodiversity law of Costa Rica. Because in reality, we can't say that a farmer developed such and such a creole variety, because that was more of a community work, and through generations. It is not normally something that someone discovered, rather something that the father, grandfather managed, so it can't be attributed to any one person in particular.

Jorge concludes that it has been neglect on the part of governments not to do more to implement the FAO Convention on Plant Genetic Resources, designed to protect more fully farmers' rights. He agrees that it will be complicated to work with community rights and that

he knows of no country where this has been successful, but that this would be the proper venue to discuss these other concerns. But his own office, it turns out, is also the focal point for the FAO treaty, and should be coordinating the implementation of this treaty as well, alongside UPOV.

Comaroff and Comaroff (2000:328) have described one of the key elements of the millennial moment of capitalism as being fetishism of the law, as the instrument that can level out incommensurable differences: “Like all fetishes, the chimerical quality of this one lies in an enchanted displacement, in the notion that legal instruments have the capacity to orchestrate social harmony.” We see this belief in Jorge, that all problems or lacunae in the law can simply be addressed by another law or treaty, and in the end, everyone’s rights will be protected. Indeed, there are a variety of international treaties, conventions and agreements that are each attempting to govern the various pieces of this whole.

Treaty wars

The most important international treaty that does in some ways try to regulate the concerns raised about UPOV over private control over genetic resources is the FAO International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources, signed in 2001, after seven years of negotiation. The FAO treaty picks up in some ways where the CBD left off, also concentrating on benefit sharing, but specifically for agricultural resources. The objectives of the FAO treaty are “the conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits derived from their use, in harmony with the Convention on Biological Diversity, for sustainable agriculture and food security” (FAO). Rather than emphasizing the protection of specific varieties for breeders, as UPOV does, it concentrates on developing a multi-lateral system for sharing the resources and benefits in an equitable way. This treaty establishes the legal concept of Farmers’ Rights

to save, use, exchange and sell farm-saved seed, but leaves it up to governments to guarantee these rights through national laws. The Treaty came into force in 2004, after 40 governments had ratified it, but many details of the mechanisms are still under discussion among the signing parties.

One key idea introduced in the treaty is benefit-sharing of any proceeds coming from farmer-developed varieties. The treaty establishes the Multilateral System on Access and Benefit Sharing which is intended to facilitate access to plant genetic resources, information, technology transfer, capacity-building, and the shared monetary or other benefits arising from commercialization. The Fridtjof Nansen Institute in Norway has compiled a report of cases where countries are making headway to protect farmers' rights, and cites a wide array of activities that can be broadly construed as contributing to benefit-sharing, such as participatory breeding programs, agricultural conservation programs, and incentive structures (Andersen and Winge 2008). The practical difficulties in instituting benefit-sharing agreements are well-documented for non-agricultural biodiversity. For instance, Cori Hayden discusses how the definition of "community" was so problematic in a Mexican bioprospecting case that often collectors relied on roadside or market collection of herbs and medicinal plants (Hayden 2003). It is unlikely that such concerns will be resolved for agricultural resources any time soon.

The difficulties in defining the parameters and financing of the benefit-sharing system came to a head in November 2007 at the second meeting of the governments participating in the FAO treaty. Because governments were not willing to contribute funds even to keep the secretariat of the treaty alive, the farmers' and civil society organizations present called for a suspension of seed transactions among governments and research institutes until the issues could be resolved and a clear benefit-sharing mechanism put into place (Kastler, Rahmanian et al. 2007). The press release of the organizations concludes,

however, with a threatening statement, that if governments are not able to resolve the system now on their own, the situation will be even worse, because it will be handed over to the CBD. In this case, “governments and the FAO could lose control of the Treaty to a different UN body. This would be a serious mistake: the control over seeds -- the first link in the food chain -- would be left with a bunch of environmentalists who know nothing about agriculture” (Kastler, Rahmanian et al. 2007). This comment reflects that there is still an uneasy peace between environmentalists and farmers in wider debates on these issues.

Despite these apparent conflicts and philosophical differences, a recent study undertaken by the Institute for International and European Environmental Policy found that legally, there are no conflicts between the FAO treaty, UPOV, the CBD and the WTO TRIPS agreement. This is because the FAO treaty covers primarily plant genetic resources that are in the public domain and not those held privately (or already under UPOV protection). Also, because UPOV predates the FAO treaty, in many countries farmers’ rights have already been defined and limited according to UPOV (Gerstetter, Grolach et al. 2007:269). The CBD and UPOV have also been negotiating “mutual supportiveness” (Idris 2008), which appears to be aimed more at bringing the CBD in line with UPOV rather than vice versa. This raises the question of whether the FAO treaty is still a promising avenue for developing countries to devise alternative systems of rights if they have not already joined UPOV. In Costa Rica, because UPOV would be approved after the CBD and the FAO treaty, it will be up to the national government and implementing agencies to define how to determine and protect farmers’ rights through national laws.

But the division of genetic resources into those held in the public domain to be regulated by one treaty and those protected by intellectual property rights by another opens larger questions about what each of these agreements, treaties and laws can, in theory, and do, in practice, accomplish. As Silvia Rodriguez has noted about the Costa Rican situation,

activists are well aware that the FAO and CBD are still working within the intellectual property rights structure, which they would rather oppose all together, but that the new UPOV law in Costa Rica does not even guarantee minimum protections for those resources, therefore any alternative is better (Rodriguez 2008).

Voting on seeds

After defeat in the October 7 referendum on CAFTA (see Chapter Five), there was a general fall in social movement activity due to the shock and depression over the loss. Some in the environmental movement, however, did not want to give up, and wanted to begin immediately working to slow or stop the implementation agenda. The idea was born to try to start a new referendum on UPOV as a way of revitalizing social movements and encouraging people to continue discussing political issues. Several people from Fecon (The Costa Rican Federation for Environmental Conservation) and the Biodiversity Network made an official application in November 2007 to the Supreme Tribunal of Elections (TSE) to request the initiation of a petition on the UPOV Convention and the additional required national Law on Plant Variety Protection. In December, 2007, they received approval from the TSE to initiate the process. They were required to collect a total of 5% of the electoral roll or 133,000 signatures within a period of nine months.

The victory of the pronouncement was dampened by the numerous caveats of the decision. First, the legislative process of debating and voting on the bills would not be halted during the signature collection period. This meant that if the bills passed to a vote and became law before the signature collection period ended, the signatures would be invalidated, because the collection process had been approved for holding a referendum on bill, not a law. A different procedure would need to be started to attempt to overturn the law. Furthermore, the TSE ruled to allow only one referendum per year, meaning that the referendum could not

be held earlier than October 7, 2008, and that would therefore not be officially announced earlier than three months before, or July 7, 2008.

These conditions made the new referendum process lose much of its meaning, and caused internal discussions within the movement about the sense of proceeding with a process that was likely going to be cut short. Many felt so disillusioned and disenfranchised with the un-democratic process of the CAFTA referendum that they felt they could not support a new referendum process. After long discussions, however, the decision was taken to continue. Even if it would never actually come to a vote, as was likely, it would help to revitalize the movement, inform people about UPOV and show the government that there were still many people who did not agree with CAFTA and the implementation agenda. In addition it would expose the fact that the TSE interpretation of the referenda regulations were stifling, rather than promoting democratic processes.

Signature collection began in late January 2008, and there was an initial resurgence in movement activity, although collection proceeded more slowly than many activists had imagined. By March 2008 when the project was about to go to a vote, the activists had collected nearly 80,000 signatures, and held a press conference requesting the Legislative Assembly to halt the legislative process, given that there was so much opposition to the Convention. Photographed behind stacks upon stacks of signature sheets, activists emphasized that never before in the legislative history of Costa Rica had over 70,000 people signed a petition to stop a bill.



Figure 7.1: Activists and opposition leaders organized a press conference in the Legislative Assembly asking to halt the vote on the UPOV convention, given mass opposition. Source: www.nacion.com.

Nevertheless, the UPOV convention was approved on April 15, 2008, by which point 103,751 people had signed in support of initiating a new referendum, collected in a mere three months by patriotic committees and environmental activists throughout the country. The required 133,000 signatures (plus several thousand extra in case any were disqualified) were submitted in May 2008, but were not accepted since the UPOV laws had already passed (Fecon 2008; Villalta Floréz-Estrada 2008).

For the organizers of the referendum, the UPOV process was dangerous for all of the threats to biodiversity, the patenting of life, and farmers' rights mentioned above. These issues, however, were representative of larger problems in the country, surrounding the rights of farmers to decide what and how to grow, or food sovereignty, and the rights of Costa Rica as a sovereign nation to make its own laws.

As one activist put it "UPOV stands for plant variety protection- it sounds beautiful...of course people want to protect the variety of plants!" Because of the deceptively nice title, he told me, it took a lot of explaining. A representative of Fecon, Mario, however,

pointed out that signature collection had not been difficult, because many of the arguments against UPOV were completely logical to Costa Ricans:

There are three to four basic topics that seem logical - or illogical. How can it be possible that a farmer has to pay for a seed that the community had been improving for one hundred years, because some company changed something in it, patented it or got breeders' rights, as the law says, and now [the farmers] have to pay? In addition, they can't save the seeds like they've done their whole lives. For a *pueblo* (people) that is *medio-campesino* (half-peasant) like in Costa Rica, this is not logical.

Thus, Mario emphasized that in Costa Rica it was unimaginable that farmers would not be allowed to save their own seeds. This tapped into a sense of community and solidarity with the farmers as an element of national identity.

In addition to the content of UPOV, the activists also wanted to make a larger point about the democratic process. Mario described that the way the signature collection happened challenged the model of corporate controlled media as the bearer of information that had been so involved in promoting CAFTA. In the UPOV campaign, just as in the No to CAFTA campaign, people had continued communicating informally on the street to spread information. This decentralized approach, with no hierarchical leaders, led to a more democratic process.⁹⁰ Mario expressed a broader critique of the much idealized tradition of democracy in Costa Rica:

Democracy is a tradition- very much just on paper. There is not democracy in the media, there is not access to information. Without media democracy there is no political democracy, because it has no meaning... Yes, there is freedom of expression, but more than that, there is an entrepreneurial freedom to become an information business. Because there is no guarantee to have your voices represented in the media. For me this is the central issue- the issue of information. Because of this I think the campaign was successful, because it informed [people] in an unconventional way. By asking for your signature- you can give me your signature or not, but you listened to what I had to say.

There was also a sense of offense and indignation on the part of the environmental activists over the way the political process governing UPOV and implementation agenda had

⁹⁰ Other activists have questioned, however, if part of the reason for the defeat in the CAFTA referendum was not that they were "too horizontal" a movement.

been conducted. The negotiators of CAFTA had originally promised the Biodiversity network that they would not negotiate on UPOV, because it had already been rejected twice, but did not comply with this promise (Red de Coordinación en Biodiversidad 2004). Furthermore, the Biodiversity network was not invited to testify in the Agricultural Committee about the bill as it was being discussed, until after the first vote, and the text was changed with the addition of 23 new articles mid-negotiation. One of the changes eliminated the section that would have prohibited variety protection for genetically modified organisms (Red de bioviversidad 2007). All of this led to a sense of dirty politics.

In a final set of ironies, in a series of last minute legislative changes pushed through Parliament as part of the implementation agenda, the Biodiversity law of Costa Rica was changed, weakening the clause on the protection of community rights that Jorge had mentioned to me would be instrumental in protecting farmers' rights. The opposition Parliamentarian Jose Merino wrote, "The worst of it is that during the debates about CAFTA, COMEX [the negotiating agency] told the Costa Ricans that traditional knowledge would not be affected precisely because of the existence of this article, which they are now eliminating" (Merino del Rio 2008).

And there were further setbacks in August 2008, after the approval of UPOV. As a follow-up to UPOV, a new bill for the revised Seeds Law was introduced into the Legislative Assembly, once again without public consultation. The bill bears out the activists' worst fears. In a press release, the Biodiversity network explains that if the bill passes, all seeds sold in Costa Rica will have to be registered and certified, and comply with UPOV criteria. All *semillas criollas* will also have to be registered. They especially take offense that farmers are referred to as "users or consumers of seeds" and that seeds are referred to as "the finished product." The authors ask incredulously:

Who “finishes” the product? The seed companies like Monsanto, who now have almost a monopoly on the sale of seeds in Central America? Since when is the farmer not the producer *par excellence* and... the seeds the fruit of his or her tenacious daily work? (Red de Coordinación en Biodiversidad 2008).

The UPOV referendum then, much as the CAFTA referendum, was not successful in its outcome, but was undertaken as much for the process as for the content, in order to challenge the political system currently in place. Mario tells me that it is all part of a longer-term process that will take years, but that indignation is adding up, and by the 2010 elections, hopefully people will be more ready for real change, and will not accept fraud yet again.⁹¹

Thus for the environmentalists the question of seeds and UPOV was important on two levels. First, in the moment of a crisis of democracy, the supporters of the referendum saw it as a demonstration of the self-determination of the voters, on behalf of the *pueblo medio-campesino*. Rejecting UPOV would be a way of demonstrating national sovereignty and ensuring food sovereignty. On a higher level, the process was related to the idea of public control over information. The emphasis on the importance of the process, rather than outcome of the referendum, shows that circulating ideas and engaging people in spreading the word, mouth-to-mouth, was crucial, and parallels in many ways the circulation and exchange of seeds, hand-to-hand.

Privately public seeds

Chander and Sunder (2004:1345) cite Rose in saying that “It is a mistake to suppose that the public domain and private property are independent realms. Instead, the two are intimately intertwined, both historically and economically.” Indeed, we already saw the public administration of recently privatized land on Latvian organic farms in Chapter Six. Chander and Sunder (2004:1346) go on to say that the “public domain often functions in service of property, not in opposition to it.”

⁹¹ Many activists consider Arias’ presidential election in 2006 to be the first case of electoral fraud because it was a very close election with many nullified ballots.

What UPOV will do in the context of Costa Rica is take the *semillas criollas*, that have been placed through the organic law squarely in the public interest, yet with ultimate control by the communities exchanging them, and give them the possibility of becoming part of the private domain. But only for some.

This is so because it is not the property of the seed itself, but the knowledge involved in producing it that is protectable or patentable. The Breeders' Exception allows breeders public access to use seeds and knowledge if it is in order to make a new variety, while at the same time denying this same right to farmers who may want to cross their own seed with a protected variety. This is where the definition of breeder mentioned earlier becomes incredibly important, because the farmer-experimenter will not have the same right to work with the seed in order to obtain a new variety. In fact, Mario tells me that according to the new National plant variety protection law, if a farmer is even suspected of reproducing a seed from a protected variety, the authorities will have the right to stop all his or her activities and confiscate all products from the farm and market, before even confirming the suspicion. Thus, what is public in the public domain and "free" for the advancement of scientific knowledge for some, becomes a criminal offense for others. In a twist of how the Latvian farmers' land has become publicly private, these seeds have now become "privately public."

Practicing property rights

On one hand, it appears that the ecological movement, through initiating the referendum, has been more active on the UPOV issue than the organic farming community itself. MAOCO was involved in working with the patriotic committees to work towards the CAFTA referendum. Once the UPOV referendum was announced, many farmers also worked at the local level to aid in collecting signatures. MAOCO, however, was not one of

the signing organizations calling for the referendum, and has not made any press statements about the UPOV referendum.

This is not due to lack of support for the need to stop UPOV, but perhaps more a difference in emphasis. As expressed by the 2007 slogan of the Agroecology week, “*La agroecología como alternativa de vida frente al TLC*” (Agroecology as an alternative way of life to CAFTA), this is an approach based more on practice. Maria from MAOCO tells me that after the defeat of the CAFTA referendum, the movement began working more on developing alternatives. Thus, the actual practical work of designing the regulation for implementing the new Organic law became more of a priority than the UPOV referendum, which seemed politically doomed from the beginning.

For farmers, the laws, conventions, and free trade agreements are some of the main threats they see to their lifestyles, and the CAFTA referendum was indeed a historic moment when they organized and tried to lobby against it. But now that the referendum was over, they intended to keep fighting at the level of practice. They spoke with great determination about the fact that they would not stop working with their seeds. One farmer told me that as long as she is alive and no one physically stops her, she will keep saving and reproducing her *semillas criollas*:

Seeds are ours, yours, everyone’s. You can take these seeds and plant them. There is a threat now of patents and that you can go to jail. But if I have to put them in a little box and hide them until you can take them out again, I will do it.

This statement seems to indicate an assumption that UPOV is a passing political fancy that will be overturned again in a different political era, and then farmers’ seeds will be valued again. Other farmers are more pessimistic:

Whoever has the seeds will be the owner of everything. If you don’t have seeds, you won’t have anything. Without seeds, what will we eat? People don’t know how important it will be that they tell you, “You can’t plant this.” We who are older can understand this.

But almost all of the farmers with whom I spoke came back to the same theme: the best way of resistance is to keep planting the *semillas criollas*. This suggests that to the farmers, the most important element is their practice, and only through this practice can they maintain control.

Circulating seeds, cultivating democracy

The different perspectives by the National Seeds Office representative and the various activists in fact reflect relatively well entrenched positions in the so-called “seed wars.” There is a vast literature on the topic of plant genetic materials and intellectual property rights. The situation is variously characterized as the North- South “Seed Wars”, as a conflict between Farmers’ Rights vs. Breeders’ Rights, or as a conflict between scientific vs. traditional knowledge systems (Kloppenburg 1988; Cleveland and Murray 1997; Hayden 1998; Borowiak 2004; Brush 2005).

But rather than just reflecting positions or interests in a political debate, the idea of social imaginary is a useful tool for understanding the ways that social movements like the ones in Costa Rica are organizing for broader changes in society. As mentioned in the introduction, Taylor (2002) notes in his analysis of social imaginaries that there is a central link between discourse and practice in forming social imaginaries. Thus, we can see here that the environmentalists’ focus on farmers’ rights and food sovereignty legitimates the organic farmers’ practice of seed-saving, and vice versa. Thus, while the two groups were not always working together, their goals were complementary and made up part of a larger social imaginary that is being constructed by the social movements as an alternative to CAFTA. This demonstrates that the organic farmers’ and environmentalists’ positions together define the Costa Rican social movements’ conception of organic agriculture as an alternative lifestyle, rather than just an alternative production system. This vision has

emerged out of the decades of struggle against neoliberal reforms and the broader agricultural and political landscape of the country.

Charles Taylor (2002) has elaborated his theory of new social imaginaries by discussing the example of the emergence of the idea of Western modernity. He identifies three key cultural forms- the economy, the public sphere, and the self-governing people – that are central to the new social imaginary of Western modernity. What is striking about the Costa Rican case, if we reflect on the collection of examples presented in previous chapters, as well, is that the various social movements together are also attempting a transformation of these key elements. The development of participatory certification mechanisms in organic agriculture is a way to transform consumer-producer relations as a key part of the economy; the insistence by members of MAOCO that it remain a movement rather than become institutionalized, and the formation of neighborhood patriotic committees for the anti-CAFTA campaigns are both ways of transforming the public sphere to be a more truly interactive space; and the use of this newly formed public sphere to try to co-opt electoral politics from party politics through the CAFTA and UPOV referenda are ways of taking back the idea of a self-governing people from the party-based electoral system.

In some ways the case in Costa Rica is also similar to that presented by Appadurai (2004) of the housing alliance in Mumbai. He uses the term deep democracy to characterize the mix of intimacy and locality of these networks with their deep lateral connections across the globe. They seek to build partnership with various state and funding agents, and to scale up their experience in showing that the urban poor are better at resolving their own problems, and eventually eradicating their poverty, than states, markets and development agencies. It is perhaps telling that in the case described by Appadurai, it is the urban poor who are the experts, becoming involved in all aspects from housing design and construction to sewage removal. In the case of Costa Rica's organic farming communities, it is the farmers who are

the experimenters and experts, breeding the seeds, creating alternative markets and new social networks. This reveals that the social imaginary that is being created transcends the field of organic farming or environmental activism, but shares certain values with other transnational activist networks like the one in India. Elements of this new social imaginary include the making of powerful subjects with their own agency, reversal of expert knowledge, interactive and participatory governance systems that bridge from local levels through to the transnational.

Like the urban poor in India, nearly all of the networks I have described in Costa Rica, such as MAOCO, Fecon, and the anti-CAFTA movement, are tapped into global networks that are connected in webs that stretch across Latin America and to other corners of the globe and share at least parts of a similar social imaginary. For example, at the Latin American Agroecology Movement (MAELA) meetings in Nicaragua in 2007, activists from all over Latin America adopted resolutions about the need to transform markets to restore social connections, and various sessions took place on participatory certification. The self-stated goal of MAELA is to “contribute to social and political changes that enable the construction of a new development model that is sustainable, with social justice, recuperation, and conservation of our ecosystems for our people” (MAELA n.d.). This is a mission that is much broader than simply promoting sustainable agriculture practices. There are also active global agricultural biodiversity networks emerging where farmers and environmentalists come together to share experiences and knowledge, such as the Planet Diversity meetings held outside the CBD Conference of the Parties in Bonn in May 2008. And the anti-CAFTA website notlc.com that featured daily updates on activities during the pre-referendum period is being revamped as a Latin American-wide site on struggles against free trade agreements. Finally, within Costa Rica, a new alternative digital daily newspaper

www.elpais.com grew out of the campaign as a way to address concerns over the lack of access to information and alternative viewpoints.

All of these examples show that the struggles for and against certain laws by activists and farmers in Costa Rica are not ends in themselves, but rather elements of a new social imaginary they are trying to create, and link with others at the global level. Brush (1999:11) in a plea that intellectual property rights are not the way to govern agricultural resources states:

Ethnobotanical knowledge, design motifs in material arts, musical styles, and other immaterial elements pass through cultural boundaries with ease, making it all but impossible to attribute authorship. Indeed, it is fair to assume that ethnobotanical knowledge is cosmopolitan. The permeability of cultural boundaries that blurs authorship of cultural knowledge is amplified in ethnobotanical domains by the usefulness of knowledge about plants, the naturally wide distribution of plants, and their easy transport.

In the new organic social imaginary of Costa Rica, knowledge and ideals of deep and participatory democracy are also cosmopolitan, and circulate like and with seeds.

CONCLUSION: Land and Seeds

A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo. The tree is filiation but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree imposes the verb 'to be,' but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, and...and...and..."This conjunction carries enough force to shake and uproot the verb "to be."
- Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 27.

Without land and seeds, one cannot farm. This perhaps explains why control over land and seeds were the two main sites of rural development struggles that I witnessed in Latvia and Costa Rica, respectively. These sites are intimately tied up with the histories, practices, and future goals and imaginaries of the organic farmers in both countries.

In the first part of the dissertation I demonstrated how the particular places and landscapes inhabited by Latvian and Costa Rican farmers have been created out of histories of interactions with local, national, and global processes and positioned them differently in the global economy. Through their agricultural practices organic farmers in both countries are appropriating biodiversity conservation into their own ways of dwelling and farming, but their efforts often remain unrecognized by policy-makers.

In the second section of the dissertation I have tried to show the intimate link between social relations and market processes. The commodification of seeds disrupts social networks upon which their diversity depends. Attempts such as these to commodify and

conventionalize the processes associated with organic production, both social and ecological, ultimately prevent the commodification and sale of the final products and the development of organic market sectors. This perpetuates the marginality of small organic producers in small peripheral countries in relation to global power dynamics.

In the final part of the dissertation I have analyzed the processes of regionalization and globalization through the two main rural development struggles that I observed during my fieldwork: control over land and land management practices in Latvia, and the imposition of intellectual property rights on seeds in Costa Rica. In Latvia, the struggles over land boundaries and management practices echoed historic struggles for control over land under various regimes. The fact that land had only recently been regained gave it an almost mythical quality. Land restitution after independence had re-verticalized social relations from lateral relations fostered in the *kolhozes*, refocusing attention on family ancestry, lineages, and recreation of imagined historic landscapes. This recreation of an imagined past came into conflict with the bureaucratic realities of EU regulations, the administrative practices of local officials, and a constantly changing Europe.

In Costa Rica, organic farmers' struggles over seeds represent a fight for control over that which has not yet been lost, but is increasingly at risk in the rapidly industrializing agricultural landscape. As land plots have steadily decreased in size, seeds have been passed down through generations, and efforts by MAOCO were refocusing from these vertical family ties to more lateral networks of relatedness with other organic farmers. These and similar networks were also used to fight CAFTA from the ground up, as an attempt to reconfigure social and political relations.

In both cases, the organic movements perceived regionalization and globalization as occurring through intensification of historically dominant patterns, as increased state and supranational control in Latvia, and as increased foreign corporate control in Costa Rica.

Thus in Latvia the techniques of resistance involved a retreat from the state, trying to minimize its interference, and in Costa Rica, an attempt to use the law to regulate corporate control. Both movements, however, were using their marginality as a protective space from which they could imagine and attempt to create new social and political possibilities.

On trees and rhizomes

Land and seeds can also be seen as symbols for the ways the two movements have organized and structured themselves. In Latvia, the organized structure of the Association tends towards stability and permanence of the land. The ways of resisting the EU thus also came about through reterritorialization, by emphasizing the sovereignty of the nation within a federal Europe, and regional flexibility within strict EU standards. In Costa Rica, MAOCO's fierce insistence to keep redefining itself and not lose the momentum of movement is parallel to the need to keep seeds in motion, circulating, exchanging hands, and adapting to changing conditions. The resistance to CAFTA in Costa Rica was also dynamic, adapting to new setbacks with new tactics in a longer-term effort to create a more participatory democracy.

If taken as symbols for the structure and tactics for the two movements, it is tempting to note the parallel with Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) arborescent and rhizomal forms. The stability of the land fits the unity of the tree, grounded in genealogy and a binary logic with a strong central taproot. This characterizes in many ways the approach of the Latvian Organic Association. The movement and circulation of seeds in Costa Rica, on the other hand, parallels the multiplicities of rhizomes that are heterogeneous and make and re-make connections. Seeds are the tiny objects that keep moving, spreading, in a rhizomal fashion. They exchange hands and travel, they take root in some soils better than others, they reproduce and change. The continuation of the anti-CAFTA movements even after defeat in the referendum is very much in line with Deleuze and Guattari's (1987:10) characterization

of rhizomes and their continuity: “A rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines. You can never get rid of ants, because they form an animal rhizome that can rebound time and again after most of it has been destroyed.” This characterization may provide hope and strength for those who feel that the battle for an alternative future was lost through the CAFTA referendum.

Deleuze and Guattari, however, discount the majestic strength of the tree, seeing it as antiquated and inadaptable. But a seed cannot grow without soil, without letting down roots, without making connections with the land. Thus in this work I celebrate the different forms of these movements. In the name of biodiversity, I insist that there is a place and necessity for both trees and rhizomes, and that there can be no tree without seeds and no rhizome without land. While each movement’s approach has its own strengths and weaknesses, both approaches have grown out of specific cultural circumstances and historic conditions. Yet both movements can also learn from one another. Seeds need some degree of stability and time to germinate, while trees need the ability to adapt to changing conditions in order to survive and weather the storm.

Imagining organics

The way in which these struggles have transpired in both countries also shows us a number of things about the larger processes that are transforming the producers’ cultural, ecological, and political landscapes. We see in both cases fundamental changes to property relations, intermingling public and private and reconfiguring rights and responsibilities in ways that confound simple ideas of privatization or public domain. Latvian farmers have tried to transform their farms from Soviet spaces to national places, only to see them abstracted again by European ‘maps from space.’ Costa Rican farmers’ seeds have been passed down through families and kin, to be exchanged through wider organic communities,

but are threatened to be taken out of the hands of farmers only to make them publicly available to breeders. Thus, land becomes “publicly private” and seeds “privately public.”

Despite the many differences between the approaches used in both countries, it is clear that both movements are engaged in far broader contests than the immediate ones for land and seeds. Both are struggles for sovereignty in defining organic agriculture against a tangible push from above towards legibility of the farmers, their land, and their seeds. Farmers in both countries emphasize their own practice as a form of resistance against what they see as the undemocratic forms of measuring land, counting species, or simply counting the votes. This reveals a fundamental conflict between imagining organic agriculture to be focused primarily on the product, that becomes a commodity to be bought and sold, and envisioning it as a complex set of processes and relationships.

Furthermore, this research reveals that the rural development debates surrounding the role and shape of organic agriculture are fundamentally political in nature. As one farmer put it, “Organic agriculture is not neutral.” Rather it is the embodiment of a social imaginary of a different type of rural existence, consumer-producer relations, and ideal of democracy. The processes that constitute organic agriculture in both countries go beyond planting, harvesting or seed-saving, to retaking local and national sovereignty and recreating an alternative democracy as a political possibility.

Deconventionalizing the global

By juxtaposing these two countries and movements that are in so many ways “worlds apart,” we are able to see the interplay between various types of globalization. The global and the local are often seen as opposites, or as mixing to form creative hybrids. On the one hand, the very existence of organic agriculture in its present forms in Latvia and Costa Rica is the result of multiple international interactions. Latvian organic farmers began through

German biodynamic methods and Costa Rican farmers started by making Japanese bokaschi fertilizers. The Costa Rican movement started with US models of certification, while the Latvian certifiers have had Italian advisers come to help revamp their systems. Finally, this study itself is the result of and a catalyst for multiple global interactions. One farmer in Costa Rica noted, “If we weren’t organic farmers, you wouldn’t be sitting at our table, and we wouldn’t be drinking Latvian herbal tea. Nor would we have gone to Nicaragua to meet other organic producers from Latin America. Converting to organic agriculture has opened up a whole new world for us.” Thus, true to the roots of the global organic movement described in the introduction, organic agriculture is a creative and productive *mélange* of local traditions with ideas that come from other parts of the world and from scientific advances.

On the other hand, there is a homogenization in legislation that is being pushed from the top down, through complex interactions of international treaties and national laws. The example of seed legislation is the most stark, where nearly the exact same legislation is being implemented in two countries with such different histories, practices and needs. At this level, the form that globalization takes is one of bureaucratization and standardization. Or, to relate it to the debates on organic agriculture, it can be seen as yet another type of conventionalization that is being imposed on organic movements.

Throughout the dissertation we have seen various types of conventionalization. At the level of organic practices, farmers in Latvia were struggling against regulations that promote more conventional and tidy approaches to organic agriculture, while in Costa Rica the organic movement was fighting against the “organic packet” approach to pineapple production. On the market side, there are the first signs that the long struggle of overcoming various bottlenecks of creating domestic organic processing facilities and markets with the goal of reversing core-periphery models of export- oriented production may be pre-empted

by buy-outs by Wal-mart and import of protected seeds and ready-made inputs. Finally, the insertion into regional and global economic networks can be seen as a new type of conventionalization, quite literally through the joining of international conventions like UPOV that force standardization upon difference.

Yet we see that the way these policies are interpreted and implemented is context-dependent.⁹² Even in the face of increasing homogenization of standards, the reactions and responses by the movements have been incredibly different. This reinforces the fact that globalization is more than just the top-down flows of rules or standards, but that social movements are trying to de-conventionalize both organic agriculture and globalization, to allow for multiple local, regional, and global identities. Thus, they are trying to redefine regionalization and globalization on their own terms, rather than prevent it.

Organic world?

How, then, is it possible to unite into one organic world two places that are worlds apart? How, for example, can one define organic beef regulations that would be appropriate for the two very different scenarios described, where in Latvia it is imperative to maximize extensive grazing to preserve diversity of grasslands, while in Costa Rica there is a focus on bio-intensive organic production to minimize land pressure and deforestation?

This unification of diversity is the challenge facing IFOAM at the international level. One long-time coordinator at IFOAM told me proudly in 2007 that “IFOAM is one of the examples of good globalization.” Since the definition of the first IFOAM Basic Standard in 1980, IFOAM has attempted to unite very different needs and perspectives in defining “from the bottom up” what organic agriculture is and how it should be recognized. This is

⁹² Lemos describes how cultural and political contexts define policy development and decision-making. Lemos, M. C. d. M. (2003). "A tale of two policies: The politics of climate forecasting and drought relief in Ceara, Brazil." *Policy Sciences* 36: 101-123.

becoming an increasingly complicated task however, with members from such diverse places and institutions.

At the 2008 General Assembly of IFOAM, after three years of work by the World Board to implement the members' directive to work towards revising the IFOAM Basic Standard in a way that would allow it to serve as a benchmark for standards from such diverse corners of the world, fierce debates erupted that the effort was watering down the standards that had been at the core of IFOAM's identity for 30 years. A flurry of member motions, primarily from Western European and US members were discussed and passed as a way to protect the integrity of organic agriculture standards, requiring the IFOAM World Board to return to the drawing board. Other disputes emerged surrounding the weight of farmers,' consultants,' and certifiers' voices within IFOAM. Members also discussed the balance between big organic businesses and farmer social movements, and of developed vs. developing country perspectives. Thus, variations of the debates and struggles taking place at the national and regional levels are intensified at the international level. This reflects the difficulty in fulfilling IFOAM's mission of "uniting the organic world in all its diversity," yet also perhaps the necessity to do so.

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