Performing National Identity, Civic Resistance and Cultural Memory in Costa Rica's Masked Traditions

By
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Submitted to the graduate degree program in Theatre and the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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April 11, 2017

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Date approved:
May 05, 2017

Abstract

"Performing National Identity, Civic Resistance and Cultural Memory in Costa Rica's Masked Traditions" studies two performance traditions that date to the 17th century: *Las mascaradas del Valle Central* and *El juego de los diablitos* in Boruca. The project was developed during twenty months and included three research trips to Costa Rica ranging three to six weeks each, to witness performances, conduct interviews and recollect bibliographical resources. Methodologically, this project borrows from observant-participatory ethnography and historiography to analyze these two performance traditions through the lenses of Performance Studies and Cultural Studies.

This dissertation examines the process of appropriation of popular culture by colonial authorities and later by the Costa Rican state to shape, disseminate and legitimate a national identity project based on an assumption of whiteness and of a heteronormative, Catholic, European-descended nation. This construction is based on the ideals and values of 19th century's dominant class and excludes large portions of the population such as Indigenous, African and Asian communities that have resided in the nation, –in many cases prior to colonial time– actively contributing to the economy, social development and cultural heritage of the country.

The study traces the origins and development of masked performance traditions parallel to the construction of a national identity project in Costa Rica, unveiling the points of contact suture and rupture between popular culture and the state and unpacking the ways in which the performances are complacent or subversive to the official narrative of Costa Rica's national identity. The discussion of these points of contact, suture and rupture emphasize the crucial role of embodied practice and oral tradition in the transmission of cultural memory, and the potential

these traditions offer to develop coded performances for their communities that mock and subvert authority while appearing to be complacent to the status quo.

This dissertation contributes to the fields of Performance Studies, Latin American Studies, Central American Cultural Studies and Performance Ethnography.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the University of Kansas, the Department of Theatre, the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies and Watson Library for providing guidance, mentorship, bibliographic resources and financial support to conduct this interdisciplinary and transnational project.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the love and support of many people. First, I would like to thank my husband Jake for his incredible love and perseverance. Thank you for proofreading my drafts and for not giving up on me. Your kindness and love were my rock during these past four years. This dissertation is also yours.

I would also like to thank my mother Alicia, who taught me with her example to dream big and work hard for what is right. My brother and sister and their respective families for cheering me and encouraging me throughout this process, and to my extended family, Cindy and Scott Woods, Lucy and Jerry Miller, my grandmother and my aunts and uncles who have always been there for me with a smile and open arms. I love you all and could not have done this hard work without your encouragement and pampers. To my friends who have stood by me these four years and have been my confidants throughout this process, thank you! Also, a big thank you to my furry babies Maya and Dwight who have been there for me countless nights, cuddling me as I was writing and juggling all other responsibilities.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the guidance of my faculty committee. To my adviser, Dr. Henry Bial, thank you for believing in me and encouraging me to shape and develop my dissertation project in the way I visualized it. Your encouragement and

advice made this experience challenging and incredibly pleasant. To Dr. Hodges-Persley and Dr. Barnette, thank you for being there for me when I had doubts and thank you for being fierce and always reminding me of 'the elephant in the room' that demanded my attention. You are both inspiring women and role models to me. To Dr. Zazzali, thank you for allowing me to be your Assistant Director and learn from you so much of the craft of directing. To Dr. Day, thank you for always receiving me with a smile and a joke, for making me feel comfortable and welcome in your department and especially, thank you for the professional development opportunities you provided me with throughout this journey.

I also want to extend my gratitude to Alejandro Tosatti, Guillermo Cubero, Kamel González, Bombi, Alex Bermúdez and Elena C. Hernández for their generosity in conversing with me and for sharing their knowledge on mask making and their artistic creations with me. I am also grateful to the Centro de Investigación y Conservación del Patrimonio Cultural del Ministerio de Cultura y Juventud, and to the Museo de Cultura Popular de la Universidad Nacional, for providing me with valuable bibliographic resources for this dissertation.

Lastly, I want to dedicate this project to the memory of *mi abuelo* Isidro (Chilo); *Papi, ahora entiendo que mi pasión por las historias viene de vos. Gracias por este regalo tan hermoso.*

¡Gracias infinitas a tod@s!

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Introduction

From as far back as my earliest memories, I was always enchanted by the masked performances that took place in my neighborhood in San José, Costa Rica. I was terrified of these creatures, yet I could not keep my eyes off them. I remember peeking over the gate of my childhood home, with half of my body leaning over to get a better look at *el diablo* and *la calavera* while the other half stayed firmly planted on the other side. For some reason, knowing that my feet were securely grounded in our front yard made me feel safe. 'If they come to hit me,' I thought, 'I will run inside the house and shut the door in their faces and that will be that.'

Just as I grew, so too did my fascination with the masked characters that wandered through the streets during Catholic celebrations. Slowly but surely, I ventured beyond my secure front yard and into the streets to participate in the event. The most vivid memory I have is from when I was around 13 years old. The players had moved into our neighborhood's sports park and the masks were circling the running track. Suddenly, I found myself face to face with the character *la calavera*. We looked at each other for a split second and then I turned around and ran as fast as I could. *La calavera* chased me for what seemed like an eternity. I ran, and I screamed my lungs out until it finally caught up with me and whipped me in the legs with a thin branch. I fell to the ground screaming and laughing at the same time while this character continued to whip me. Then, just as quickly as it had appeared, it was gone, off chasing after someone else. I was left

lying there on the ground, full of adrenaline and feeling both terrified and incredibly happy, yearning to do it all over again.

These contrasting emotions of terror and excitement have stayed with me over the years, and now every time I see a masked street performance I find myself making my way through the crowd so I can get a good look at the characters. A part of me is still hoping that one of them will spot me and chase me down the street, while another part of me feels afraid, which gives me the urge to grab whoever is standing next to me to use as a human shield.

Motivated by the affective responses that I experienced and hold close to my heart with regards to the masked traditions of my community, I decided to make masked traditions the focus of my dissertation study. While traveling through Central and South America, I witnessed similar masked performances in other countries such as Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Peru; however, when I watch these event as a tourist—an outsider—I do not experience the same strong emotions of fear and excitement that I do when I am immersed in the festivities in my home country. Why is that? Is there a connection between affective responses and 'the nation' that is responsible for the presence or absence of these feelings? Do cultural memory and the sense of belonging to a cultural group determine one's affective responses to these performances? These questions were the starting point for this project.

I narrowed the scope of my dissertation to study two types of masked performance traditions in Costa Rica: *La mascarada del Valle Central* and *El juego de los diablitos.* Both blossomed during colonization and have religious and

civic roots, yet each of these traditions is circumscribed in a different set of cultural and socio-political contexts. Both social groups were colonized by the Spaniards but each process was different in terms of power struggle, imposition and resistance. As a result, each of these masked traditions is circumscribed in a complex weave of cultural codes that speak to two very different audiences.

My positionality as a Costa Rican mestizo woman from the Central Valley that is currently residing abroad is very important to the analysis conducted in this project. The first case study is *La mascarada del Valle Central*, also known as *Payasos* or *Mantudos*. It is tied to Catholic festivities held in urban communities in Costa Rica's Central Valley. The performance is a carnival in which masked characters parade down the streets of the town, dancing to the beat of live music, while also chasing people and whipping them with sticks or dried cow bladders. These sites are hybrid products of a Spanish tradition called *Gigantes y cabezudos*, and the Indigenous and African communities that resided in colonial Costa Rica. *Gigantes y cabezudos* is a celebration in honor of the Spanish Crown brought to Costa Rica by the Spanish colonizers. *Mascaradas*, thus, is an event that speaks to the mestizo people of urban Costa Rica. My positionality with respect to this masked tradition is very important for this study since this is the tradition I grew up with and toward which I still experience strong affective responses when I attend the performances.

The second tradition is *El juego de los diablitos*, a three-day, end of the year celebration of the Boruca people, who make up one of the country's eight Indigenous ethnic groups. This festival can be traced back to the 17th century and

consists of a performance/game that incorporates masks, costumes, and music with community parties where traditional alcohol and foods are consumed. In the eyes of the community, the event is part ritual, part game. This dualistic quality allows the sight to be filled with symbolic meaning, and yet, it constitutes a sort of carnival where civic laws are undermined to allow transgressive behaviors. I decided to include this festivity as a case study vis-à-vis the Central Valley tradition to explore my affective responses in connection to my sense of identity. Since I grew up in San José—capital city of the country—as a middle class, suburban city resident, I feel deep connecting roots to the *mascarada* tradition of the Central Valley. On the other hand, even though I have visited Boruca on many occasions and have conducted artistic projects with the community in the past, I am still an outsider to their worldview and cultural heritage. The contrast of being an insider and an outsider to two similar yet unique masked traditions of my country excited me and motivated my initial approach to the project.

Methodologically, this dissertation project borrows from observant-participatory ethnography and historiography to analyze two performance traditions of Costa Rica through the lenses of Performance Studies and Cultural Studies. The dissertation examines the correlation of a national identity project constructed on western ideals of Whiteness and Christianity, and the origin and evolution of masked traditions in Costa Rica, a product of marginalized Indigenous and African communities of colonial time. The correlations of state and popular culture reveal a process of appropriation of popular culture by colonial authorities and later by the state to shape, legitimize and disseminate a

national identity project that reflects the values and virtues of the dominant class, excluding large portions of the population that do not align with the neoliberal, patriarchal and Catholic affiliations of contemporary Costa Rican state. The intersectionality of scholarship will allow an exploration of how these performances contribute to the construction of cultural memory in the nation, how they speak to a history of resistance and/or subversion based on the socio-political characteristics of the country, and what they say about Costa Rica's national identity and its relation to the nation state.

Performance studies is inherently interdisciplinary. This dissertation draws on Richard Schechner's broad understanding of performance as "human actions ranging from ritual, play, sports, popular entertainment, the performing arts (theatre, dance, music) and everyday life performances to the enactment of social, professional, gender, race and class roles, and on to healing (from shamanism to surgery), the media and the Internet" ("Performance Studies" 2). His definition of performance as "restored behaviors" or "twice-behaved behaviors" (28) implies that all social behavior is performed because it has been learned through repetition and rehearsal. Along the same lines, Victor Turner, a pioneer in the study of ritual as performance and close collaborator of Schechner, argues that performance resides at the core of all ritualized behavior. The deep interconnectedness of ritual and performance explored by Turner and Schechner informs my analysis of *mascaradas* and *juego de los diablitos* as ritual/games performances that fulfill a social function.

To explore how these case studies speak to collective memory and Costa Rica's national identity, my study will support Peggy Phelan's conceptualization of performance as "representation without reproduction" (3), which emphasizes the ephemeral nature of performance, noting that once it is recorded, saved, or documented, it becomes something other than performance. Performance's quality of "becoming" itself through "disappearance" (146) allows it to function as an act that can be complicit with the norms and regulations of the dominant order, or resistant to the status quo by questioning and subverting the impositions of the dominant culture, and thus, speaking on behalf of oppressed communities. This dissertation is particularly interested in the ways certain communities perform masked performances to subvert and resist the impositions of a dominant culture by developing coded performances that mock and subvert authority while appearing to be complacent to the status quo.

In keeping with Roach's *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*, the masked traditions in this dissertation will be understood as *genealogies of performance*, suggesting that cultural knowledge is passed down to younger generations through embodied practices, such as masked performances. Roach suggests that even without a conscious process, oppressed communities embody cultural memory through cultural performances that function as "surrogations" to the original cultural production which used to meet a community need.

Lastly, performance will also be understood as "acts of transfer" with the capacity to transmit information regarding a social group's sense of identity and

cultural memory (Taylor *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* 2). Because these festivities are complex products of transculturation[1] processes that started during colonization and have adapted and mutated over time, my study will try to answer the following questions: What does the embodied performance say to the community that creates it and what does it say to the dominant culture? Does the information transmitted assert or subvert the dominant construction of Costa Rica's identity?

Brief Chapter Description

Chapter 1 introduces masked traditions in Central America in the context of colonization. It examines the three main cultures—Indigenous, African, and European—that shaped the multiplicity of masked tradition forms across the region. A literature review examines the scholarly contributions made to the study of *Rabinal Achí* in Guatemala and *El Güegüense* in Nicaragua, two of the most important masked traditions of Central America due to its precolonial roots, in the case of *Rabinal Achí*, and to the first appearance of a clever mestizo character who outsmarts colonial authorities in *El Güegüense*. The review of such scholarship allows me to introduce the characteristics of Costa Rica's masked traditions—*La mascarada* of the Central Valley and *El juego de los diablitos* in the South Pacific Indigenous community of Boruca; and introduce the particular elements that made Costa Rica's colonization process, an exception in the region.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to the blossoming and the development of the *mascarada* tradition in the colonial capital city of Costa Rica: Cartago. It traces

the development of the tradition as well as the intervention of the state and the Catholic Church in converting elements of *mascaradas* into symbols of national identity. Special attention will be paid to the figure of the 'idealized peasant.' I argue that this figure, originally found in the national literary movement of the early 20th century, replaced the representation of *macho ratón*, a clever and witty mestizo who outsmarts colonial authorities. The idealized peasant, designed to embody the virtues and values of the 19th century Costa Rican liberal state, is a good-hearted peasant, complacent to the dominant culture and naïve to the evil in the world. I will trace the clever mestizo representation of *el macho ratón* and its transformation into an idealized peasant through the iconic representations of Indigenous peasants present in the myth of La Virgen de los Angeles (the patron saint of Costa Rica) in colonial Costa Rica, the 19th century story of how our national hero Juan Santamaria came to be, and the 20th century idealized peasant characters created by performers Carmen Granados, Lencho Salazar and more recently, Mario Chacón.

Chapter 3 traces the distortions of the *mascaradas* in the 20th and 21st centuries, shaped by the indoctrination of neoliberalism and the privatization of state services. It examines the roles of media and politics in constructing a new identity for the *mascarada* tradition that differs from its origins. This construction seeks to eliminate the tradition's social critique and mockery, selling it as a tribute to authority figures; and it also strips the performances of its agonistic nature. The characteristics of a neoliberal society have provided a new window of opportunity for artisans and mask makers who are now making figurines and other

commercial items, such as coffee mugs, tote bags, and stickers with iconographic elements of the *mascarada* tradition to sell to domestic and international tourists, thereby linking *mascaradas* to the marketing of national identity. So far, the market has been successful and it is providing new sources of income to artisans and mask makers. However, I argue these trend risks the loss of the oral tradition and embodied knowledge transmitted through *mascarada* performances for centuries.

Chapter 4 shifts its attention to the Indigenous community of Boruca, located in Costa Rica's South Pacific mountains. *El juego de los diablitos* is a three-day annual celebration at the end of the year when the Boruca people perform a symbolic representation of the clash between Indigenous communities and Spanish colonizers. The event is considered a ritual/game and serves as a purging ceremony for the new year. Although *mascaradas* and *El juego de los diablitos* share many elements in terms of their content and form, this Indigenous performance has resisted the infiltration of European elements in its celebration and remains true to Boruca's precolonial cultural heritage. My analysis unveils the erasure and invisibility of Indigenous cultures in the official narrative of Costa Rican identity, but also in the documented history of the country, even though the country supports the market of Indigenous arts and crafts and constantly associates their products with Costa Rican national identity.

Finally, Chapter 5 reflects on the use of the mask as a performative object that safeguards and transmits cultural memory and a sense of belonging to a community and/or cultural group. Kamel González's painting *El espíritu oculto*

de la máscara will guide my analysis of the conclusions drawn during this study and the potential for masks to transmit cultural memory and thus promote social change. During this reflection, I return to the question of affective responses mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation. Here I reflect about my positionality with respect to this project. I reflect on how growing up in suburban San José and attending public schools developed in me a sense of identity complacent with the official narrative of identity carried out by the state, and how I now question and problematize this sense of identity due to my life experience living abroad for over 8 years and to my academic journey. I end with the recognition that masked performances function as ephemeral-materialized collective memory, generating affective responses in the individuals who identify themselves as members of that cultural group. The mask, as an object of material performance, encapsulates and safeguards a culture's history, thus it is intertwined with a social group's sense of identity.

Chapter 1

Central American Masked Traditions and the Costa Rican Colonial Exception

Masks have long been a part of cultural expression in all parts of the world. Scholars such as Solano Laclé et al., Bell, and Chang[2] agree that their use in performance is tied to religious rituals and civic ceremonies. Evidence shows that masks existed before the development of agriculture, during the Paleolithic period, and were associated with agrarian cultures, natural cycles, rites of passage, carnivals, and changes of season (Chang 15). Given the intrinsic relationship between masks and rituals, their use is closely related to religion and spirituality. Masks are common in rites of renovation, purification, war, birth, and death. Thus, the mask is an artifact that connects the material world to the spiritual world.

Chang observes that the mask has several different social meanings in any given culture. It may appear in civil ceremonial activities, or it is used to worship gods, or it emerges during carnivals to conceal identities, transgress social norms, and mock authorities. In Mesoamerica, Indigenous cultures such as the Maya produced masks with anthropomorphic and zoomorphic forms that were commonly used by shamans during rituals and festivities. Masks were also common in funerary rites, usually covering the face of the deceased to provide guidance during their transition to the other world. The Maya believed these

masks had qualities that linked them to specific deities and helped the gods identify the person who had worshiped them in life (18).

Because masks often accompany religious and civic ceremonies, and because they might also become sites of resistance—such as in carnivals and civic protests—I argue that these objects functions as what Diana Taylor refers to as "acts of transfer" (Taylor *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* 2). According to Taylor, performances are "acts of transfer" with the potential to pass cultural information from one generation to another. In this sense, the performances circumscribed in the masked traditions studied in this dissertation function as living memory. The performances in question date back to the 17th century. The performance, as it materializes in front of our eyes—along with the mask and embodied performance that goes with it—reveals and transmits cultural knowledge to its audience. Because masks are made objects that survive the passage of time and are passed down through the generations, their material existence carries with it an ephemeral body of collective memories.

In *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, Peggy Phelan defines performance as "representation without reproduction" (3). With this definition, Phelan stresses the ephemeral nature of performance, noting that once it is recorded, saved, or documented, it becomes something other than performance (146). Since Phelan is concern with the relationship between the self and the 'other' as it is represented in cultural productions (photographs, paintings, films, and theatre), stressing the ephemerality of live performance becomes central to

her argument because it supports the idea that representation not only reveals the visible, but unveils the invisible. Thus, representation allows for multiple readings, including resistant readings (2). According to Phelan, performance "becomes itself through disappearance" (146). The mask, which is the core element of the performances examined in this dissertation, comes alive once it is manipulated. Its embodied presence has the potential to transmit knowledge related to a group's understanding and interpretation of the world. Precisely because masks carry and transmit social knowledge, I believe they are suitable objects to use to engage audiences' critical thoughts on social, cultural, and political matters. Thus, these objects have the potential to promote social change.

To understand the significance of the mask in Central American cultures and their ability to transfer cultural memory while functioning as an act of resistance to the dominant culture, it is important to first review the cradles of Central American cultural identity—Amerindian, European, and African. This chapter will develop the main characteristics of these cradles, followed by a summary of the scholarship developed on Central American masked traditions thus far. After this exposition, the chapter will discuss the particularities of the masked traditions of Costa Rica and how these were the result of an exceptional colonial process experienced in the country.

The Three Cradles of Central American Masked Traditions

Masks, puppets, and performing objects have been present in many theatre and performance traditions across time and space, such as Greek tragedy and

comedy, Roman carnivals, Noh theatre, Bunraku, and Commedia dell'arte, etc. Gustavo Boada, mask maker for Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani, notes, "in the history of theatre the great moments of theatrical renaissance are initiated with a return to the mask" (Boada 170). For Boada, Greek theatre, Commedia dell'arte and the interest in African and Asian masks of the experimental theatre of the 1970s all point to the reclamation of these objects for performance purposes.

Central American culture developed as the result of the interaction of three major cultural cradles: Indigenous, African, and European. According to Solano et al., masks are a window to the past because they reveal "socio-cultural relationships that used to exist [and] are now materialized, amalgamated and settled…[they are] the result of prolonged historic processes" (135). Each of these cradles is complex and diverse. Thus, it is not surprising that the masked traditions of this region—some of which are pre-colonial while others originated during colonization— are informed by elements and characteristics of all three cultures.

Indigenous Cradle

Indigenous masks were common in rituals and community celebrations throughout Mesoamerican Indigenous cultures. Some of these rituals and celebrations were meant to honor the change of season and the fertility of the land, such as *La danza del garrobo*, a Lenca Indigenous dance performed in Honduras. Originally, it was meant to thank and celebrate nature's abundance. During colonization, the practice met and assimilated Christian religious

practices, modifying the meaning of the dance for the community. Today, it is performed to thank angels and saints for their favors and to ask god for forgiveness.

Other celebrations have a civic nature meant to commemorate historic events. For example, *Rabinal Achí* tells the story of the broken alliance between the Rabinal and the Quiché people, and the events that led to the capture and honor killing of Quiché Achí (the Quiché warrior) at the hands of Rabinal Achí (the Rabinal warrior). Aside from commemorating the story, *Rabinal Achí* pays homage to the cultures of Mesoamerica that practiced ritual sacrifice and to their cosmology. In a sort of metatheatrical form, the play stages aspects and moments within Mayan rituals that are valuable to preserving the cultural heritage of its people. For example, before being offered as a sacrifice to the gods by his enemy, the Quiché warrior is freed for 260 days so he can visit and bid farewell to his family and community before his death. *Rabinal Achí* masks also include zoomorphic representations that honor Mesoamerican cultures' interpolation of man and animal. Specifically, two warrior man-animal clans in the performance represent the warriors of the Quiché and the Rabinal people: The 12 Golden Yellow Eagle Warriors and the 12 Yellow Jaguar Warriors. Mythologically speaking, these clans are the personal guardians of the ruling class of Mesoamerica's Indigenous cultures (Solano Laclé et al. 141). They are represented in yellow, signifying their association with the sun, and are called 'nahuales,' which means 'protectors' in Quiché.

Another example of a Central American masked tradition with pre-Hispanic origins is *La danza del tigre y el venado*, celebrated in El Salvador. Although the plot of the story underwent certain modifications during colonization, the ritualistic annual celebration predates the presence of Spanish culture in the region. Today, the story narrates the day a couple of peasants wandered into the forest to gather wood and were cornered by a hungry tiger. Desperate, they prayed to the patron saint of the community, *El Señor de la Caridad*. The couple waited for mercy until a deer entered the scene and distracted the tiger, thereby saving the peasants' lives. The dance, accompanied by the live music of a drummer, is carried out by the masked characters of *el viejo* and *la vieja* (the couple), the tiger, and the deer. The performance lacks dialogue, and the dance simulates a hunter and prey chase until members of the community catch and kill the tiger. Then, the costume and mask of the tiger character is ripped into pieces. The pieces are symbolically given to members of the community. Each piece is compared to a local or national event happening in the present. A performer gives away each piece while reciting a comedic copla,[3] such as this one:

> Lo de adelante, para el comandante
>
> Lo de atrás, para el Juez de Paz
>
> La cabeza para la Teresa
>
> La degolladura para el señor Cura
>
> Los riñones para los mirones… (qtd. in Solano Laclé et al. 150)

This moment, symbolizing an ancient community ritual, uses humor, double meaning in language, and parody to create verses that address the local and regional social problems affecting the community. As an example, among the verses it is said that the front of the animal will be reserved for the commander-in-chief and the back for the justice of the peace. The head will go to Teresa, the neck to the priest, and the kidneys to the gossipy. All these claims are made through rhyme. Hence, they are funny, but they are also subtle critiques of the people who occupy positions of power in El Salvador.

African Cradle

Elements of Central American masked traditions have African origins. Solano Laclé et al. mention that in the 17th century, during the conquest and colonization of the new continent, the Portuguese, and later the Spanish, consolidated their slave trade industry. During this time, African slaves were sent to the Central American and Caribbean areas, brought to replace the Indigenous population that had been decimated (152). As expected, the African people that arrived in the New World practiced their cultures and eventually integrated their ways with the cultural practices of colonial Mesoamerica. Example of masked traditions with African elements are *Los congos*, celebrated by the Caribbean communities of Panama, and *La danza del wanaragua*, practiced on the island of Saint Vincent.

Los congos pays tribute to multiple historic events and celebrates the cultural traditions of African slaves. According to Solano Laclé et al., through *Los*

congos the black populations of these communities "reenact insurrections, the cruelty of the slave masters, the resistance strategies, and [the] formation of slave societies... [inspired by rules and laws of African societal organizational models]" (158). This demonstrates the amalgamation of a cultural practice molded to function as an act of resistance against an oppressor. By functioning as living memory, re-enactment has the power to resist further domination.

La danza del wanaragua, on the other hand, commemorates a successful technique used by the Garinagu to fight the English army at the end of the 18th century when England wanted to conquer the island. Garinagu's oral tradition narrates how Garinagu warriors dressed as women to distract, approach, and attack members of the British army. The dance celebrates these acts of bravery while at the same time it celebrates the wit and guile of the Garinagu people.

One example of syncretism among Indigenous, African, and European cultures is *Las negras*, celebrated in Masaya, Nicaragua. According to Vega and García (cited by Laclé et al.), the performance probably originated on the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua towards the end of the 19h century (162). The festival consists of four pairs of dancers dressed in costumes and wearing masks. The characters are supposed to represent different cultural origins, so one notable characteristic of this performance is that characters and costumes (which are meant to appear expensive and luxurious) change from year to year. Common characters and costumes include pirates, royalty, Spaniards, gypsies, and Hawaiians (162). Due to the nature of this performance, the characters represented wear white masks featuring European facial characteristics. Performers dance to the rhythm of

marimba music, touring through the community and making short stops at community members' homes.

In keeping with its African cultural roots, this dance used to be performed by black women living in the communities located along the Atlantic coast, however, during the 20th century, the festivity spread throughout the country, thanks to the arduous work of cultural promoter Alonso Montalván, and it eventually found a permanent home in Masaya—which is near the Pacific coast. Montalván introduced changes to the tradition; the most drastic was making it an all-male performance. This suggests that Montalván was influenced by European colonial street performances and wanted *Las negras* to fit European street performance standards, something that still predominates in many cultural performances of colonial origins in Central America.

In *Las negras* the syncretism of Indigenous, African, and European cultures resulted in a dance currently practiced in a Nicaraguan community with strong Indigenous roots, performed by mestizo men, wearing masks designed with European features. In my opinion, Montalván's work has prevented this cultural event from disappearing, but his intervention has also introduced elements foreign to the origins of the festivity that have unfortunately obscured the contributions of Africans to Nicaragua's intangible cultural heritage.

European Cradle

Indigenous and African cultural forms of expression also mixed with European culture, as noted in the example of *Las negras*. The colonial enterprise

carried out by Spain in Central America meant a new social order for the Indigenous peoples of Mesoamerica. According to Solano Laclé et al., the interaction of Indigenous and European cultures did not take away from the meaning of the mask for Indigenous people, but instead gave it new added meaning: "within the new forms of expression permitted by the conquerors, some elements infiltrated and slipped in[to the culture]…recalling their indigenous origins, even in the celebrations of European traditions" (137). Thus, in Central America, many masked traditions are the result of Indigenous and European syncretism.

It is important to note that within the new social order imposed by colonization, censorship played a significant role. To Christianize and indoctrinate Indigenous people and African slaves, all cultural forms of expression coming from marginalized communities were censored and punished. Nonetheless, many managed to incorporate elements of their own cultural traditions into mandatory European celebrations, such as Corpus Christi and patron saint festivities. In fact, most colonial street performances that are still practiced throughout Latin American are tied to, or at least rooted in, Catholic celebrations. Some of the common street performances of Spanish origin that were represented during Corpus Christi included *La danza de Moros y Cristianos*, *El baile de los diablitos*, *Las mojigangas*, and *mascaradas*.

La danza de Moros y Cristianos originated in Spain in the medieval period and consolidated itself in the 17th century after the Spanish Crown had successfully expelled the Moors that had been living in Spain for 800 years (Laclé

et al. 168). The central theme of the performance is the confrontation of Christians and Moors, which represents good versus evil. The Christians, representing good, always win the match due to the intervention of heavenly figures, such as saints and angels. In 1492, Spaniards not only reached the American continent, but Spain also reconquered the province of Granada, thereby completing its imperialist project along the Iberian Peninsula. At that time, this dance was widely practiced as it called attention to the superiority of Spain and the Catholic religion over other cultures and creeds.

El baile de los diablitos, on the other hand, originated in colonial Honduras and is not to be confused with *El juego de los diablitos*, practiced in Boruca, Costa Rica (which is used as a case study in this dissertation). This Honduran performance, also called 'the torment of Saint Sebastian' represents a historic event dating back to the Roman Empire in which Sebastian—a captain in Emperor Diocletian's anti-Christian army—converts to Christianity, and upon doing so is tortured to death by his fellow soldiers. The dance is represented in a similar form to the *Moros y Cristianos* dance, with Saint Sebastian representing the triumph of Christianity (good) over the torturous treatment of the savage pagans (evil), represented here as *diablitos* or 'little devils' wearing masks with exaggerated or deformed Moorish facial expressions, wearing turbans on their heads and carrying mallets in their hands.

Las mojigangas, or *mascaradas*, originated in Spain during the 14th century. These are street performances composed of an ensemble of ridiculous masked characters accompanied by musicians. They interact with, engage, and

entertain the audience while touring the streets of the community, announcing the beginning of religious festivities such as Corpus Christi and the celebrations of patron saints. The masked parade *Gigantes y Cabezudos*[4] is also a part of this Spanish tradition and it can be traced back to medieval times. It consists of two types of masks: the 'giants,' who represent kings and royal personalities, and the 'big headed,' who represent the people. Roberto Le Franc speculates that the Spaniards brought this tradition to Costa Rica during the conquest (1). Brenes Tencio agrees and argues that after three centuries of colonialism, the population of Costa Rica had adopted respect and devotion not only for the Catholic Church, but also towards the Spanish kings (121). According to Laclé et al., even though this type of performance is tied to religious festivities, its nature is satirical (186). This type of street performance is present throughout Latin America with various degrees of syncretism between Indigenous, African, European and sometimes Asian cultures, depending on the historical and geographical context of the festivity.

I want to conclude this section by connecting my understanding of performance to the examples of Central American masked performance previously described. These traditions, especially the ones that blossomed out of Indigenous and African cultures, seem to "facilitate the understanding of determined cultural perspectives" (Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire* 3). They function as "acts of transfer" (3) where the cultural group transmits, through embodied knowledge, elements of their culture that are essential for the survival of their culture. They may also function as acts of resistance and struggle against

domination and discrimination, usually by mocking authority figures, although they may appear to be complacent with the dominant culture. This will be further discussed in the following chapters.

Particularly in the traditions coming from Spain, the performance enacts, or allegorically represents, a historical event tied to the identity of the cultural group. In these cases, the performance functions as an artifact that not only preserves memory, but also determines how those events should be remembered in the future. They assert power and domination by representing the colonizer's culture as the one that has god's approval, and thus is superior to the colonized groups, who are often depicted as evil and savage, such as in the *Danza de Moros y Cristianos*.

Scholarship on Central America's Masked Traditions

Among the wide variety of masked performance traditions in Central America, two examples stand out as the most significant to the understanding of Central America's cultural heritage, and thus, these two examples are also the most studied masked traditions of Central America. They are the *Rabinal Achí*, in Guatemala, and *El Güegüense*, in Nicaragua. Although both performances have been widely studied, the scholarship developed tends to privilege literary analysis and the theatrical elements found in these performances, thereby neglecting the performative nature of the traditions that could shed new light on what these cultural productions say about cultural memory, affective responses, civic resistance, and national identity.

I would like to contribute to the conversation by adding a performance studies perspective that focuses on the analysis of embodied practice and spectacle. I highlight the power of ephemeral spectacle and of material performance—"performance that assumes that inanimate matter contains agency not simply to mimic or mirror, but also to shape and create" (Posner et al. 5)—to analyze audiences' receptions of the event and their affective ties to the identity of the cultural group. While literary analysis scholars tend to mention the visual power of the performances, they do not undergo an analysis of what these visual elements mean for the culture in which they are constructed. An analysis based on performativity will allow for exploration of the sensory power of elements such as costumes, masks, and other performing objects in the context of their performance, and most importantly, reveal how these elements impact the audiences' reception.

Latin American history is marked by European colonization and exploitation. Masked traditions are the result of transculturation processes between the colonizers and the Indigenous and African cultures, which explains why similar *mascaradas* are found all over Latin America. *Mascaradas* first appeared in Mexico around the 16th century (Romero de Terreros 7). Romero de Terreros' book, published in 1918, accounts for the origins of multiple festivities with ties to the Catholic Church that involve masquerades, bull runs, and other sorts of tournaments in honor of saints. At that time, *mascaradas* were only performed by men and the goal was to tease and to court women. Men would be masked and strolling around town, engaging in conversation with women and

their chaperones. Masquerades were also used to depict important historical events, like the Spaniards' first encounter with the Aztec Empire.

The oldest documented masked tradition of the region is Guatemala's *Rabinal Achí*, or *Danza del Tun.* This performance dates to pre-colonial origins and have resisted the amalgamation of European elements in its representation. Dennis Tedlock's *Rabinal Achí: A Mayan Drama of War and Sacrifice*, published in 2003, is the most complete English translation and study of the performance to date.

The first published version of the text in the West appeared in 1862 and was written by Charles Etienne Brasseur de Bourbourg, although most scholars agree that the performance dates to the 15th century. According to Tedlock, during his time as a priest in Rabinal, Brasseur actively tried to transcribe the only written version of the text, which was owned by Bartolo Sis—but he refused. Ultimately, Sis agreed to recite the text to Brasseur, who then published his version of it. Tedlock notes that Brasseur later sent a copy of this script to his former servant in Rabinal, and that eventually this became the official script used during rehearsals in its annual performances. By 2002, the play's director, Manuel Pérez, was using his own version of the text, which he crafted based on a 1913 handwritten copy of Brasseur's manuscript (Tedlock 6). Perez's version of the Rabinal text was published in 1994 by Alain Breton, accompanied by a transcription and French translation.

Most Spanish translations of the text are based on either Brasseur's or Breton's versions, although Francisco Monteverde's *Teatro Indígena*

Prehispánico: (Rabinal Achí), published in 1979, is mostly based on Luis Cardoza y Aragon's 1930 translation of Georges Raynaud's version of the text that was published in 1928 (Henriquez 81). Monteverde's study is mainly literary and overlooks the visual elements and embodied nature of the performance, which partly justifies my examination of it from a performance studies perspective. *Rabinal Achí* is a Mayan drama about war and sacrifice. This piece is considered an exceptional text—in comparison to other colonial traditions in the region—because it is the only masked performance that has not incorporated any elements of European culture into its performance and today remains an original Indigenous drama composed of music, dialogue, dance, and masked characters.

Tedlock's study supports this argument as it suggests the piece is meant to commemorate the ritual-ceremonial importance of human sacrifice/executions to Mayan society. Using iconic and graphic evidence from Mayan mythology, and from archeological and anthropological sources, Tedlock demonstrates that human sacrifice played a significant role in Mayan culture, and that the victims were warrior prisoners of enemy tribes. Prisoners were tried and judged before they were sentenced to death, which Tedlock interprets to mean that sacrificial ceremonies were also public executions. In this drama, Cawek of the Forest People is captured by the Man of Rabinal, and following the rules of Mayan society, he is judged and sentenced to death in a sacrificial form. While he prepares to die an honorable death, he praises his people as well as his enemy, thus purifying his soul before leaving the material world.

Tedlock perceives certain similarities between Rabinal and Noh theatre because of its ceremonial nature. *Rabinal Achí*'s origins are pre-colonial, nonetheless, it evolved during colonization and continued to transform into the form that we recognize today. Tedlock's work offers a more complex understanding of *Rabinal Achí* as a performance, and he undergoes a detailed examination of its gestures and visual elements, such as masks and costumes. A valuable element of Tedlock's analysis is that it calls attention to the dangers of comparing *Rabinal Achí* to the cultural outputs of other parts of the world that are also products of colonization. The danger, he stresses, is that it simplifies and overlooks details that are autochthonous to this practice in its own context.

The rest of the region has syncretic masked traditions of colonial origin tied to Catholic celebrations. In Nicaragua, for example, the dance-drama piece *El Güegüense* is considered the first masked tradition performance with dialogue. This performance is tied to the celebrations in honor of Saint Sebastian, patron saint of the Diriamba community. *El Güegüense* is a mestizo merchant who travels and sells his goods around the country with his two sons. One day, Spanish authorities stop him and demand that he pays taxes. *El Güegüense*, however, is a clever man that uses his audacity and wit to fool the authorities. He twists the dialogue and confuses his interlocutors in order to benefit from every aspect of the conversation. At the end, he manages to marry one of his sons to one of the Spaniard's daughters and leaves without having to pay any taxes. *El Güegüense*, thus, is a masked performance that celebrates mestizo identity while at the same

time it critiques and subverts the authoritarian hierarchy established by the Europeans.

Emilio Alvarez's *El Güegüense o Macho-Ratón: Comedia-bailete anónima de la época colonial* (1975), Jorge Arellano's *El Güegüense, o el gran burlador Güegüense* (2000), and Carlos Mantica's *Escudriñando el Güegüense* (2007), constitute the three main studies of this tradition. *El Güegüense*, also known as *El macho ratón*, utilizes dialogue, music, and dance, along with elaborate costumes and masked characters to tell the story. As Arellano points out, this is the first performance in the region to make a mestizo its main character (3-4). The original author of the piece is unknown, however, this cultural product has been transmitted orally and through embodied practice since the 17th century. The three studies mentioned in this section developed their analysis from a literary point of view, privileging what the characters say and not what they do. I believe these studies are shortsighted and undermine the powerful role of embodied practice in unpacking social critique.

UNESCO declared the theatre-dance performance *El Güegüense* an expression of Intangible World Heritage in 2005, due to its colonial origins and the syncretism of Indigenous, mestizo and European cultural elements. *El Güegüense* is one of the many cultural performances carried out in honor of Saint Sebastian. Other popular dances include *El toro huaco*, *El viejo y la vieja*, and *La giganta*. All performances have in common the use of masks and elaborate colorful costumes that transmit Indigenous and mestizo knowledge through their symbolism.

The core of these festivities is composed of religious masses and processions. After mass, people carry a human-sized statue of Saint Sebastian, and other neighboring towns' patron saints, thereby generating a procession that travels through every street in town. Meanwhile, masked characters dance and sing alongside the procession, and people dance, eat traditional foods, and drink alcoholic beverages. The party goes on all day, creating a festive atmosphere charged with religious fervor that makes this event a unique Nicaraguan experience. During an ethnographic visit to the communities of Dolores and Diriamba in January of 2016, I witnessed two major events associated with these festivities: *El tope de los Santos* and *La procesión de San Sebastián*.

El tope de los Santos took place in Dolores on 19th of January and consisted of three community processions: one that started in the neighboring town of San Marcos; one that started in Diriamba, and one that started in Jinotepe. Each of these processions carried with it the life-sized statue of their community's patron saint (*San Marcos, San Sebastián,* and *Santiago*) and they all met in the community of Dolores, where the *Virgen de los Dolores* awaited them. When they arrived, all saints were carried into the atrium of the church (see Image 1). People carrying the statues shook and moved them simulating that the saints were dancing and greeting each other as the audience also danced, singed and cheered: *"Viva San Sebastián!" "Viva San Marcos!"* and *"Viva Santiago!"* Following the procession, the community continued to party outside of the church, eating and drinking while other traditional dances and performances such as *El toro huaco* and *El viejo y la vieja*, were performed.

The second event, the procession of *San Sebastián*, took place in the community of Diriamba on 20th of January, and this procession is considered the most important event of the whole celebration. The event starts with a Catholic mass, followed by a procession that walks *San Sebastián* though all the streets in the town as people take part in folk and traditional dances. Here, *El Güegüense* is performed along *El toro huaco* and *La giganta* (see Images 2, 3 and 4).

Unfortunately, a lack of funds has forced the community to shorten the performance of *El Güegüense*, and today, the masked characters only dance around the town. All dialogue has been cut out. About this, Alberto Guevara states that although *El Güegüense* has traditionally been used as a symbol of national identity by the government, the same government does not invest the necessary funds and resources to keep the tradition alive (76). This has forced the communities to shorten the performance since they cannot cover the costs of the musicians, costumes, and masks, or the rehearsals and meals for the musicians and actors.

My conversations with artisans, the information I gathered during my visits to these communities, and my attendance at the Saint Sebastián celebrations in January of 2016 suggest that in contemporary Nicaragua, *El Güegüense* has indeed become an icon of national identity as stated by Guevara. All artisan markets sell paintings and masks that resemble those used in the festivities, but are now exclusively made for tourists and commercial gain. The original materials used to fabricate the masks, and the oral and embodied knowledge that was once passed down through generations to produce the masks and to reproduce these

performances is slowly disappearing. Most of these items are now massively produced for tourist consumption. As stated by Laclé et al.:

> [c]ommercial dynamics have had an effect on the development of the dances, because, in many cases, the demand for folklore activities aimed at tourists exerts pressure on them by restricting or conditioning the representation according to the commercial interest. (201)

Nonetheless, it is important to mention that like any other product of popular culture, these masked traditions mutate and adapt to their current socio-cultural context. The commercialization of these masks as consumable objects is a response to the global market-oriented economy, and the complexity of this phenomenon must be taken into consideration when examining these traditions. Chapter 3 and 4 will further explore these aspects.

Having reviewed the existing literature and scholarship on Central American masked traditions, it is important to point out that Costa Rica is an exception. The following section seeks to explore the different characteristics in terms of geography, socio-political context, and colonial enterprise that have separated Costa Rica's history and experience from the rest of the Central American region, and resulted in a unique repertoire of masked performances.

The Costa Rican Colonial Exception

Central America is both a geographical isthmus and a cultural and economic bridge between the Americas. It is also a rich ecological area that holds up to 4% of the world's biodiversity (Cuevas Molina 4). Ancient civilizations

settled in this territory known as Mesoamerica, developing important cultures such as the Olmecs, the Toltecs, and the Maya. The Maya, known for their astronomical, mathematical, and architectonic abilities, along with their holistic cosmology that integrated man and nature, occupied the territories known today as Guatemala, Belize, and parts of Honduras and El Salvador. Further south, less complex social groups of hunters and gatherers eventually settled in what is today Costa Rica.

The colonial enterprise in these territories was begun by the Spanish in the 16th century, truncating the development of these cultures and changing the landscape through the introduction of cattle and foreign crops. Spanish settlements were usually located near mountainous areas where the weather was more pleasant, while Indigenous groups were forced to migrate into the deep jungle or to the Caribbean coast—both regions that experience more hostile weather conditions.

Colonization had a major impact on the Central American territory, particularly in the regions occupied by the Mayan civilization, which the Spaniards wanted to annihilate. Their lands provided good agricultural conditions and many natural resources, including gold, which made it a focal point of the Spanish colonial enterprise. The land known today as Costa Rica, however, consisted of dense jungles and high humidity, thus preventing it from being heavily populated by native groups. Carlos Meléndez divides Costa Rica's colonial territory in three sections: the Atlantic slope and plateau region; the Diquís region; and the Nicoya region (11). The Atlantic slope and plateau region

occupies the Northeast territory of the country, as well as the Central Valley (today the metropolitan area) where *mascaradas* are found. According to Meléndez, Spanish expeditions around 1575 described this territory as composed of dispersed settlements in which no more than 80 Indians lived together (12).

The Diquís region, on the other hand, is in the South Pacific zone of the country. The settlements in this area were not dispersed, but characterized by large groups of multiple families. Conqueror Juan Vázquez de Coronado described the Indigenous settlements of this region as "pueblos palenques," which translates to 'fenced villages' (Meléndez 14), most likely because the lands they occupied were rich in natural resources and thus the cause of many wars and violent encounters with neighboring villages that wanted to appropriate the land. The Boruca people, who are used as a case study in this dissertation, are natives of this land. Vázquez de Coronado described the natives of this area as skillful warriors who did not drink (alcohol) or possess much gold or many clothes. He mentioned that they were honest—which he considered uncommon among native villagers—and had barns full of corn, beans, squash, cotton, yucca, plantains and other fruits:

> es gente bien agestada, belicosa, muy guerrera, abilísima en su manera. Tratan verdad, cosa pocas veces bista entre ellos; no se emborrachan; tienen mucho oro y ropa, grande abundancia de mantenimientos, mays, frisoles, calabacas, algodón, yuca, plátanos, capotes, y todos otros géneros de frutas de las que ay en estas partes. (qtd. in Meléndez, 15)

Finally, the Nicoya region is found in the North Pacific area of the country. According to Meléndez, the population that occupied this region belonged to a more advanced culture than those of the other regions, and shared the same origins as those in Nicaragua (16). The settlements in this region were large, located around central sacred squares and near their tillage.

The Colonial Enterprise and the Indigenous Settlements of Costa Rica's Central Valley

The Central Valley is what is now the metropolitan area of the country. It consists of four provinces: Alajuela, Heredia, San José, and Cartago, and it is located in the center of the country. It provides the best weather conditions for agricultural purposes. Due to its geographical conditions, the landscape of this area is divergent, and thus, it must be understood as having two subdivisions: the Oriental region and the Occidental region (Meléndez, 50). The Ochomogo Hill divides the two regions, occupied today by Cartago in the Orient and San José in the Occident. Due to the climate and land conditions at the time of the arrival of the Spanish in 1561, the Oriental region had the largest population of Indigenous people.

As briefly mentioned before, it was not until 1561 that Spaniards, guided by Juan de Cavallón, started interacting with the Indigenous population of what is now Costa Rica. This is about twenty years after they first began their conquest of the Americas, which means that the conquest and colonization of Costa Rica had a late start. At the time, the *Leyes Nuevas* of 1542 (New Laws) were already in

place. According to Meléndez, these laws demanded that the conquest be undertaken with moderation and justice (51).

On the other hand, performance artist and ethnographer Alejandro Tosatti thinks that due to the lack of gold in Costa Rica's Central Valley, and because of its distance from the colonial centers of Granada and Antigua Guatemala, the colonial process in Costa Rica was not as heavily supervised by the Catholic Church and the Spanish Crown, as was the case in Guatemala or Nicaragua ("Personal Interview"). He believes this allowed for a more fluent syncretism of cultures in a less violent environment. These are important characteristics because they shaped the methods and strategies used to dominate the region, and thus, delivered very different results than the forms of conquest experienced by other native civilizations, such as the Aztecs and the Maya, which were characterized by extreme violence and ethnic genocide.

The Indigenous population that occupied the Central Valley shared the same ethnic roots as the culture known as *Intermedia o Circumcaribe de Kirchhoff* (Meléndez, 51). They lived in small, dispersed settlements of no more than two or three multifamily ranches found near rivers. These ranches were probably affiliated by clans: "Vivían dispersos en las vegas de los ríos, sin constituir verdaderos poblados, sino más bien pequeñas agrupaciones de dos o tres ranchos multifamiliares, cuyo factor de unión y solidaridad era seguramente clánico" (51).

In 1561, the Spanish built their first city, Garcimuñoz, on the Occidental side of the valley, keeping their distance from the Indigenous settlements. Since the Oriental region provided the best agricultural conditions and the largest

population of Indigenous people, the Spanish slowly moved their city closer to this territory, settling in it by 1564 and changing its name to Santiago de Cartago. Meléndez claims that this was all part of the colonial plan, which required the Spanish to slowly settle alongside the largest Indigenous settlements (51-52).

The colonial plan starts to materialize around 1573-75, meaning that by this time, most Indigenous resistance had been overcome. The Spanish relocated the now decimated Indigenous population into 'Indigenous reductions', aiming to congregate disperse settlements into communities with the main intent of evangelizing and converting them to Christianity. Nonetheless, these reductions were also designed to serve two other purposes. On the one hand, Indigenous labor was used to build and sustain Spanish colonies, and on the other hand, Indigenous settlements were also in charge of protecting the Spanish colonies from foreign invasion.

In the Oriental region of the Central Valley, the following reductions were created: Cot, Quircot, Tobosi, and Ujarrás. The Occidental region also had four reductions: Aserrí, Curridabat, Barba, and Pacaca. Curiously, the towns that currently practice and preserve *mascarada* traditions are in these territories, which suggests that the history of the tradition has long Indigenous roots.

Costa Rica's Masked Traditions: Main elements

Masked traditions in Costa Rica are a form of cultural expression practiced by lower income urban communities of the Central Valley with strong Indigenous heritage and by Indigenous communities located outside the Central Valley. Like

any form of cultural expression, masked traditions are not static or clearly delimitated. They are malleable, constantly changing practices that adapt to the socio-political and cultural context in which they are performed. This means that elements such as the materials from which the masks are made, the techniques used to make them, the aesthetic characteristics of the designs, and even the type of characters that appear in these traditions may change over time or according to geography, but the cultural practice of dressing up, as well as the confrontation of masked characters and community members remains the same.

This dissertation examines two types of masked performances in Costa Rica, the *Mascaradas* of the Central Valley, which is representative of the mestizo people—a syncretism of Indigenous, European, and African cultures—and *El juego de los diablitos*, also called *La danza de los diablitos*, which is representative of the Indigenous cultures of the South Pacific side of the country. The map in Image 5 delimitate each of these territories.

Las mascaradas del Valle Central abounds in multiple locations of Cartago, San José, and Heredia, where whole communities are known to be home to mask makers: *pueblos mascareros*. They are found in the central communities of Cartago, such as El Carmen; in San José communities, such as Aserrí, Desamparados and Escazú; and in Heredia communities, such as Barva. The masks expose different characteristics depending on the community in which they are made and used, as will become evident in Chapters 2 and 3. Boruca, on the other hand, has developed a masked tradition of its own—not related to the

Central Valley tradition—and has managed to link this cultural practice to the community's central economy, as will be explored in Chapter 4.

Both types of masked performances examined in this dissertation are brought to life by the following roles: the masked characters, the male participants (community members) that actively engage in the ritual/game, the audience, and the musicians.

The Central Valley's *Mascaradas*

According to performance artist Alejandro Tosatti, who is a renowned researcher of masked performances in Costa Rica, the *mascaradas* of the Central Valley, also known as *payasos*, or *mantudos*, are the main festive and popular traditions in the country (*Máscaras tradicionales festival del Valle Central de Costa Rica* 5). During Catholic celebrations, such as Corpus Christi, or festivals held in honor of patron saints, *mascaradas* join other cultural practices such as bullfights, *turnos*[5], religious ceremonies, and fireworks to engage the whole community in a festive environment.

Community engagement is of course one of the main elements of the festivity, although not all members of the community assume the same role during masked performances. Male children and young adults are the main participants in the game/ritual. Usually both the performers and the participants that are chased and hit during the event are males of these age groups. Young women are also sometimes chased and hit, although it is usually done with the intention of wooing them, which means that it is usually not done in an aggressive manner,

but a playful one. Older women and men participate as audience members, usually cheering on the masks as they chase boys, and laughing and dancing around the musicians and masks.

Masked traditions in Costa Rica are performances where normal, everyday senses of time and space are inverted. During the performance of *mascaradas*, the social rules that apply with regard to civil obedience, gender roles, authority figures, and the like are turned on their heads and openly broken. Hence, *mascaradas*, much like European medieval carnivals,[6] are liminal spaces where the 'mundane' is cast aside in order to access a different reality—a different time and space where other behavioral rules apply. This in meant to join the material world with the spiritual one. This becomes particularly evident in Boruca, where all the members of the community value the purifying nature of the *diablitos'* ritual. It is an act of resistance against foreign domination.

Three types of masks are found in the Central Valley performances: *gigantes*, *cabezones*, and *caretas*. *Gigantes* are tall masks. The head of the mask is attached to a metallic or wooden structure that adds about 6 feet to the height of the player using the mask. There is always at least one pair of *gigantes*—a wife and husband—in each performance. They represent family structure and are usually depicted as happy and healthy. *Cabezones*, also known as *máscaras de casco* (helmet masks), are masks that cover the whole head of the player. These are the most common type of mask because they do not limit the players' mobility and thus allow the masked characters to run, dance, and chase people. Two traditional helmet mask characters are *el diablo* (the devil)—also known in these

festivities as *Cuijén* or *Pizuicas*—and *la calavera* (death)—also knowns as *la muerte* or *la pelona* (see Image 6). Other characters in this category are characters from folk stories, such as *la bruja Zárate*, *la llorona*, *el cadejos*, and *la cegua*; authority figures, such as the police, the president, and judges; and famous characters from popular culture, such as TV personalities, athletes, and politicians. Giants and helmet masks are dressed in colorful, clownish costumes made out of *retazos.*[7] The third type of mask, *caretas*, cover the face only, leaving the rest of the head exposed. This type of mask is now rare, but it used to be popular during the 19th and early 20th centuries (see Image 7). These masks were decorated in a variety of styles, depending on the creativity of the mask maker. According to Tosatti, mask makers would often make and rent *careta* masks to community members that wanted to dress up during the festivities ("Personal Interview"). This allowed mask makers to add a source of income during festive celebrations.

The traditional technique used to manufacture all types of masks is *papier-mâché.*[8] Mask makers first create a mold of the mask—the mold is made of a base of mud and water—and once it dries, they build the mask onto it using a *papier-mâché* technique (see Images 8 and 9). Although this technique is time consuming, many mask makers prefer it because it is cheap, less damaging to the environment than other techniques, and because it contributes to the community's paper recycling efforts. Another technique to mask making that is now popular among the younger generations of mask makers is the use of fiberglass. This technique is still affordable to mask makers and allows them to create more masks

in a shorter amount of time than *papier-mâché*. However, this technique is not considered traditional; hence, some mask makers are resistant to using it because they believe it takes away from the Costa Rican tradition. (see Image 10)

Central Valley *mascaradas* are accompanied by a *cimarrona* music group that uses instruments such as trumpets, trombones, tubas, and drums. The music is fast paced, cheerful, and invites people and masked characters to dance together in a festive atmosphere. During masked performances, the musicians—who do not wear costumes or masks—perform on the back of a pickup truck, which allows them to follow the performance everywhere while playing.

Boruca's *Juego de los diablitos*

Boruca is an Indigenous community located in the southern region of the country, about an eight-hour drive from San José, the capital city of Costa Rica. Located up in the mountains that surround the river *Grande de Térraba*, this community is still resisting the oppression of Costa Rica's dominant culture over their cultural heritage. Multiple organizations and associations created by its people struggle to keep elements native to their language, cuisine, and cultural practices alive.

El juego de los diablitos is a masked tradition that dates to the 17th century and has survived the passage of time and the influence of a global economy. The community understands this masked tradition as a ritual and a game. It starts at midnight on 31 December and ends on 2 January. The event consists of many masked men dressed as 'little devils' fighting against a bull that represents the

Spanish colonizer and the imposition of Christianity. For three nights, the *diablitos* confront the bull. On the third day, the bull symbolically kills them all only to see them resurrect in the evening more powerful than they were before. The bull is ultimately symbolically killed and parceled out among the families of the community.

According to Rojas Gónzalez, this festivity is a constant reminder of the struggles of the Borucan people. It not only symbolizes the fight against colonizers but also the current struggle against the dominant class that continues to marginalize and discriminate against Indigenous people: "la fiesta es un permanente recordatorio de la lucha que emprendieron y soportaron nuestros ancestros hace 500 años, y de que aún persiste la marginación y discriminación de los pobladores nativos, por parte de la clase dominante" (23). Nonetheless, this event may also reference agrarian rituals, since it symbolizes the rebirth of Borucan culture after colonization, and it also seems to reference the Catholic belief in Jesus's resurrection, represented through the rebirth of the *diablitos* and their ultimate victory.

The masked tradition of Boruca differs from that of the Central Valley both in the types of masks and in the techniques used to fabricate them. Borucan masks are made of balsa wood, handcrafted and painted with natural dyes found in the region. The design of the masks is usually a mixture of anthropomorphous shapes mixed with animals and natural elements commonly found in the region, such as animal furs and bird feathers. Masks usually have frightening features, such as big sharp teeth and horns (see Images 11 and 12). There are three types of

masked characters in *El juego de los diablitos*: *diablos mayores*, *diablitos menores*, and *el toro*.

This game/ritual is structured into ranks. The highest-ranking players are the three *diablos mayores*, of which one is the main leader of the whole game/ritual and the other two are his right and left hand. Their masks are bigger than the lower ranking *diablitos*, and more detailed in terms of decoration and paint colors. With regards to *diablo menores*'s masks, traditionally, each player is responsible for making and decorating their own mask.[9] These are smaller in size but share the same features as the ones used by the *diablos mayores*. All masked characters wear costumes made of jute bags and banana leaves. Their costumes are not elaborate or colorful; instead, they are simple, shapeless dresses meant to hide the identity of the player by covering their everyday clothing.

The third type of character is *el toro* (the bull). There is only one bull character competing against the ensemble of *diablitos*. According to Kamel González, a high ranking player in the festivity, the *toro* mask used today was made by his father—the late nationally renowned mask maker, Ismael González—over 40 years ago ("Personal Interview"). The bull's mask is attached to a wooden structure that simulates the body of the bull. The player carries this structure, also covered in jute bags, over his shoulders to create the appearance of a four-legged creature.

Music is also a part of the festivities. At least three musicians playing wind and percussion instruments join the game/ritual. In Boruca, the musicians walk alongside the *diablitos* while playing. The musical instruments consist of drums,

flutes, and a large seashell. The seashell is used to mark the beginning and the end of each confrontation between the *diablitos* and the bull. The other musical instruments are played while the ensemble of *diablitos* and the bull march from one community location to another on parade.

So far, I have explained and described the multiplicity of masked performances found in Central America and the syncretism of Indigenous, African, and European cultures which constitute them. I also discussed the late colonization process of Costa Rica and the distribution of Indigenous settlements in the Central Valley, unveiling the connection of these traditions to Indigenous roots. In the following chapter, I will further discuss the colonization project carried out by Spain in the Costa Rican territory. The chapter will focus on the development of the city of Cartago, which was the colonial capital of Costa Rica, and the blossoming of the *mascarada* tradition in this city. The chapter's discussion will center on the institutionalization process this cultural practice has experienced through the intervention of governmental institutions meant to protect and promote the tradition.

Chapter 2

Performing National Identity:

The Institutionalization of Popular Culture

The *Capitanía General de Guatemala*, colonial capital of the Central American region—which included the province of Costa Rica, the poorest and most underdeveloped province of them all—became independent of the Spanish Kingdom in 1821. By mid-century, the newly independent nation of Costa Rica had adjusted to the new political and economic order by successfully consolidating a market for the exportation of coffee to England.

Trade with England had a European and 'modern' capitalist influence on the country, influencing the values and ideals that made up the identity of the newly born nation. The country's entire workforce was organized to serve the coffee exportation industry, with a large segment of the population employed in building, and then working on, the railways that were used to transport the coffee from the Central Valley to the Atlantic port. Nonetheless, only a small segment of the population benefitted from the economic growth of the coffee trade because a small oligarchy monopolized its processing and exportation, along with the market's sources of international finance, and the internal distribution of imported industrialized products to serve the sector.

The economic power of the oligarchy was complemented by its political power. According to Quesada Soto, some of the tactics used to guarantee economic and political control of the country included endogamy and highly

restricted requirements for occupying governmental positions, including the ability to read and write, which automatically excluded around 80% of the population in the mid-19th century (98). The new episteme that shaped the economic, political, and ideological policies of Costa Rica was based on the values of a *liberal* political view and a *positivist* philosophical frame, modelled by European nations such as England, France, and later the United States.

This ideological turn set up a process of economic, political, and ideological centralization of power to serve the now-dominant culture of the oligarchic elite. Because their economic power was intertwined with political power, the oligarchy took advantage of the public education system to assert its control over the population. According to Quesada Soto, the education model was basic and religious in content, meant to promote obedience and respect of tradition and authority as the only way to preserve the values and morals of the people: "educación elemental y religiosa, que fomente la obediencia y el respeto a la tradición y la autoridad como forma de preservar los valores 'cívicos' y 'morales' para la gran mayoría del pueblo…" (99). As will be discussed later in this chapter, along the way, the educational system of Costa Rica slowly substituted the army as an apparatus of ideological repression, thus consolidating it as the major institution of hegemonic indoctrination in the country.

The liberal and positivist ideology constructed an official narrative of national identity congruent with the values and morals of the powerful oligarchic elite. This construction represented Costa Rica as a homogeneous nation of white descendants of Catholic Spain, leaving out the vast majority of social groups with

Indigenous, African, and Asian cultural roots. Nonetheless, in 2015, the recognition of the syncretism of multiple cultures in Costa Rica led President Luis Guillermo Solís—a former sociology professor at Universidad de Costa Rica—to modify the country's constitution. Since then, Article 1 of the Constitution defines Costa Rica as a nation that is democratic, free, independent, multicultural and pluri-lingual (Murillo). Change is slow and many decades might pass before Costa Ricans incorporate a multicultural and pluri-linguistic dimension into their imaginary construction of national identity, but the government's recognition of these dimensions is, without a doubt, a step in the right direction.

The introduction to this chapter exposes the official process of national identity construction based on the socio-political panorama of the country and the ideological dimensions that shaped the 19th century national identity narrative in accordance with the needs and demands of a liberal oligarchic dominant class. That is because this chapter examines elements of popular culture that have become intertwined with the official narrative of national identity promoted by the Costa Rican state and its hegemonic institutions. In this sense, it is important to note that the cultural production of the oligarchic elite will be countered with the cultural production of the working classes.

I will use Barzuna Pérez's definition of popular culture as collective responses made by society's subaltern population "respuestas colectivas elaboradas por el sector de la sociedad que ocupa una posición subalterna" (29) to denote the cultural production emerging from the working classes that resists, mocks, and subverts the hegemonic authority of the dominant culture. The chapter

traces the evolution of the *mascarada* tradition after its first appearance in the colonial capital city of Cartago and its relationship with hegemonic institutions such as the Catholic Church and the state. Ultimately, the chapter argues that the liberal views that shaped the national identity projects starting in the 1870s focused on an ideal image of the Costa Rican peasant and appropriated popular culture representations to legitimize such idealizations, thus engraining in the Costa Rican people iconic representations of Costa Rica's national identity.

The liberal ideology of the early 19th century permeated the generation known as *La generación del Olimpo*. This group was formed by men belonging to the oligarchic elite that were public intellectuals, artists, and government officials. Their artistic production, mostly in the form of literature, played an important role in disseminating a national identity project based on the image of *el labriego sencillo*, which was an 'idealized peasant' characterized by patriarchal views and compliance with hegemonic authority, a pillar of Costa Rica's traditions and customs as stated by Quesada Soto: "un campesino patriarcal y sumiso … baluarte de las 'tradiciones y costumbres nacionales'" (108).

The idealized image of the Costa Rican peasant is an iconic representation of what it means to be Costa Rican. This character, found in many cultural productions of the late 19th and early 20th century, such as the visual arts, performing arts, cinema, and especially in literature, embodies the hegemonic values and virtues set up to represent Costa Rican citizens.[10] Cuevas Molina defines the idealized peasant as a popular figure that became integral to the national literature project that intellectuals—supported by the state—carried out

in Costa Rica at the beginning of the 20th century. In Costa Rica, *La generación del Olimpo* was responsible for the establishment of the liberal state and thus the national identity project that accompanied it. Their work infiltrated the social, cultural, and political spheres of the country. In literature, the work of Aquileo J. Echeverría (1866–1909), author of *Concherías* (1905), and Manuel González Zeledón (Magón 1864–1936), author of many *cuadros de costumbres* (sketch of manners), known as *Los cuentos de Magón*, are examples of Costa Rican literature that combines all the values and virtues admired by the Costa Rican people at the time.

Even though the idealized peasant is a figure usually linked to the national literature project of the early 20th century, I want to contribute to this discussion by linking it to two other figures of national identity that appeared before the Olympus Generation. I argue that the appropriation of popular culture to legitimize the power of the state—and other hegemonic institutions such as the Catholic Church—have been present since colonialism and have served as successful strategies of domination and indoctrination. The two figures I will look at are *la negrita*—Our Lady of the Angels, patron saint of the country—and Juan Santamaria, a legendary national hero that emerged from the battle against the Filibusters in 1856.

After analyzing the embodiment of the idealized peasant in these two figures, I will trace and analyze its legacy in the 20th century, specifically in the work of folklorists Carmen Granados (1915–1999) and Lencho Salazar (1931). Finally, I will discuss the recent success of the fictional TV character Maikol

Yordan, played by actor Mario Chacón (1975), a member of the comedy group La Media Docena. Discussing the overlaps of official national identity narratives and popular culture is important to this chapter because it will unveil the process through which the Costa Rican state has appropriated representations of peasants that are cherished and valued by the working classes to legitimize its power and control over popular culture.

Unveiling the interconnectedness of popular culture and the hegemonic values and virtues of Costa Rican identity will ultimately reveal the process through which censorship has distorted the *mascarada* tradition of Cartago, imposing hegemonic views of Costa Rican identity onto *mascarada* characters that were originally designed to mock and subvert colonial authority, and later the hegemonic state constructions of Costa Rican identity.

Pratt uses the term 'contact zones' to describe places where "cultures meet, crash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of power" (34). Given that Cartago was the first colonial city and the former national capital, the contact zones between the colonizers and the oppressed produced hybrid forms of cultural expression. It is no coincidence that this city is also home to the first Central Valley masked tradition, which dates back to the 17th century.

This chapter will review the origins and evolution of the *mascarada* in Cartago in order to unpack the process of appropriation it later experienced at the hands of the official cultural institutions of the country. The institutionalization of *mascaradas* in the city of Cartago materializes and legitimizes idealized images of Costa Rican citizens. By doing so, it not only consolidates these images as

symbols of national identity, but, most importantly, it represses the elements of the traditions that function as social critiques and that subvert the status quo, thereby exercising power and control over popular cultural production.

As mentioned above, the values that described national identity during the formation of the liberal state characterized Costa Ricans as white, Catholic, patriarchal, and compliant with the authority of the state. The category of race is particularly important to understanding Costa Rica's process of developing a national identity. Costa Ricans perceive themselves as direct descendants of Spanish colonizers, which in general terms means white and Catholic. According to Córdoba, even before independence, Costa Rica was perceived by its people as a "homogeneous society characterized by a direct relation to the Spanish and their traditions, such as the Catholic religion" (54). These elitist ideals automatically excluded all non-white, marginalized groups that did not fit into this construction.

Mascarada performances, a product of the marginalized communities of the colonial city of Cartago, seem to contradict the construction of Costa Ricans as a homogeneous, white, and Catholic group promoted by the nation state. By contrast, the tradition speaks to a history of oppression and foreign domination. It also stresses resistance to and subversion of the social order, and therefore appears to have the potential to reveal how the people contest the construction of the 'nation' through performance.

Following Antonio Gramsci's understanding of cultural hegemony as the domination of one ruling class over an otherwise culturally diverse society, this chapter concentrates in the ways in which the state appropriates popular culture to

legitimize power over a diverse cultural society. The dominant class manipulates the beliefs, perceptions, values and morals of society, imposing their view of these elements onto the rest of the population and hence, validating unequal social, political and economic realities that ultimately are assimilate and accepted by oppressed cultural groups as status quo. Louis Althusser's notion of ideological state apparatus also serves this dissertation as it explains the ways in which the hegemonic culture makes use of the state institutions to disseminate and legitimize cultural hegemony.

Because Costa Rica's colonial history differs from that of the rest of the region, this chapter explores how masked traditions contribute and/or subvert the discourse of identity that is legitimized by the hegemony of social institutions in the country. Since the 'nation' is a socio-cultural construct that is constantly mutating, this chapter will be delineated by the hegemonic identity constructions carried out by the Costa Rican liberal and neoliberal state of the late 19th and 20th centuries. These constructions will be contrasted to the embodied practice transmitted in the masked performances of *mascaradas*. Based on the above exposition, I propose that studying cultural performance sites that date back to colonial times, but that continue to exist today, can elucidate how the Costa Rican hegemonic culture has constructed the 'nation' over time, and how this construction is remembered, mutated, and contested in *mascarada* performances.

La Negrita and the Emergence of *Mascaradas*

As discussed in the previous chapter, the city of Garcimuñoz, later named Cartago, was the colonial capital of Costa Rica. During colonization, Costa Rica answered to the *Capitanía General de Guatemala*. The long distance in between isolated Costa Rica from the colonial center in Guatemala, and even though Cartago was the capital city at the time, it was not a wealthy city by any means. Its often-cold weather conditions made it difficult for its habitants to work the land, which forced them to farm away from home, leaving the city abandoned for most of the day. The population was poor and segregated into different social classes. Historian Víctor Sanabria, quoted in *Teatro y Sociedad Cartaginesa* describes how Cartago's population was organized:

> En el centro de la ciudad habitaba la población española o blanca, como si dijéramos 'el señorío'; en el pueblecito o vecindario llamado San Juan de Herrera…hacia el sudoeste de la ciudad, vivían los indígenas a quien se confiaba el servicio doméstico de las casas hidalgas, y en 'gotera de la ciudad', al este, se había establecido desde mediados del siglo XVII, un grupo africano, el de 'los pardos de la Puebla'; finalmente en los alrededores de la ciudad, en las chácaras y haciendas, levantaron sus habitantes diversas familias mestizas… (Sanabria qtd. in Calderón 23)

The above quote describes the city center as occupied by Spanish colonies, while Indigenous groups were forced to the edges of the city, charged with the domestic labor of everyday life in the Spanish homes. In mid 17th century, a group of marginalized Africans settled in the east edge of the city and were called 'the

pardos—mix of Indigenous, African and European blood—of La Puebla.' Lastly, mestizo families were allowed to settled in between the city center and the marginalized communities of Indians and Africans. Cartago was undoubtedly the poorest and most forgotten province of the *Capitanía General de Guatemala*. According to Calderón, in 1719, Don Diego de la Haya, governor general of Costa Rica, described Cartago's people as quarrelsome, chimerical, and riotous (22). It is safe to assume the city did not enjoy a favorable reputation in the eyes of the colonizers.

With regards to its cultural life, Cartago was home to two different types of performances. The first is traditional author-based theatre consisting of comedies, *loas*, and *entremeses* that were presented inside theatrical buildings to honor the Spanish Crown. The second, and of most interest to this project, were the street dances of *Moros y Cristianos*, which were performed throughout Latin America during Corpus Christi celebrations, and particularly in Cartago during the celebration of its patron saint: *La Virgen de los Angeles*. As discussed in Chapter 1, *Moros y Cristianos* is a performance that depicts the superiority of one culture over another, and thus justifies colonialism. The Christians represent the heroes and the Moors their enemies. Spaniards used this dance to educate Indigenous populations on the superiority of the Spanish race and credo, and to suppress Indigenous resistance.

Another form of street performance that was common during Corpus Christi celebrations were *las diabladas*. These were part of the catechist theatre project to educate the Indigenous people and convert them to Christianity. In this

type of performance, characters, like angels and devils engage in a fight, which the angel always wins. The main objective of these performances was to inculcate fear of the Christian God and to legitimize the triumph of good over evil. Known as *teatro de conquista* (Calderón 35), this form of performance evolved into *escaramuzas*, which are short street representations of famous historic battles, such as the Aztec warrior Montezuma vs. the conqueror Hernán Cortés. Calderón notes records of these types of representations show they were still being performed happening in the mid 20th century. It is through the performance of *Moros y Cristianos* and *las diabladas* that *mestizos*, *mulatos*, *pardos*[11] and blacks coexisted and created the syncretic cultural practice of *mascaradas*, commonly known in Cartago as *mantudos*.

Parallel to the use of theatre to preach the virtues of Christianity and authority, the Church also used other performance techniques to convert the masses to Catholicism. The nomination of *the Virgen de los Angeles* (Our Lady of the Angels) as patron saint of the city is one example. The *Virgen de los Angeles* became Costa Rica's official patron saint in 1782; however, the story behind it began on 2 August, 1635.

The legend is that a twenty-centimeter-tall doll of the Virgin Mary carved out of stone appeared in the woods to a young *mulata* peasant, named Juana Pereira, when she was collecting wood. Thinking it was a doll, she took it home and placed it in a box. Later that afternoon, she found the doll again in the same location, and thinking it was another doll, she took it home. When she opened the box to save both dolls together, she was surprised to see that the first doll was no

longer there. The next day, again she found the doll in the same location in the woods. This time, she took it to the Catholic temple and gave it to the local priest. He placed the image in a locked cabinet and promised to study it later that day. When Juana returned to her work in the woods, she found the doll in the same spot yet again, so she ran back to the temple to bring the priest to the woods as witness. Members of the church followed, and Juana led them to the doll's location. The priest declared it a miracle, claiming that the Virgin Mary was asking for a shrine to be built in her honor on the spot where she was found.

A small temple was built, and over the years, the structure was rebuilt several times. The current altar's structure dates to 1777 ("Santuario Nacional Nuestra Señora de los Angeles"). Sometime after 1852, it was renamed *Basílica de Nuestra Señora de los Angeles* by Costa Rica's first bishop, Anselmo Llorente y la Fuente.

The Cartago community in which the miracle supposedly took place and where the temple is now built was called Puebla de los Pardos, home to marginalized *mulatos*, *pardos*, and blacks. According to the Basilica's official website, this community was located east of the city and its limits were marked by *La Cruz de Caravaca*, a cross sculpture designated to mark the 'no trespassing' zone for residents of non-European descent. The Bishop of Costa Rica and Nicaragua, Pedro A. Morel de Santa Cruz, wrote in 1751 that this neighborhood was a marginalized area of Cartago occupied by poor *mulatos* treated with contempt by the rest of the mestizo population (González Vásquez 71). Curiously,

mascaradas first appeared in this marginalized community, potentially suggesting the contentious origins of the *mascarada* tradition.

The process through which *la negrita* became a symbol of national identity in Costa Rica already indicates the appropriation of popular cultural elements. It involved the Church taking advantage of the strong folktale, storytelling, and oral tradition of the people of Cartago. It is important to highlight that both the folktale and the iconic representation of the Virgin are well-thought-out and executed tactics to 'win' the population's approval of the doll as its patron saint. In the story, the motherly figure of Virgin Mary purposefully chooses to take the poor colonial city of Cartago under her wing and she chooses Juana Pereira—a poor *mulata* girl—as the medium to communicate her message. The Virgin's direct contact with the *mulata* girl and the girl's role as mediator between the priest (representing the Church) and the community (mestizos) is a carefully chosen narrative strategy to win over Cartago's subaltern population. On the other hand, the stone carved doll resembles the racial and ethnic features of *La Puebla de los Pardos*' habitants. The doll, carved in stone, has Indigenous facial features. Moreover, the dark marble color of the stone gives it a dark skin tone, which is why Costa Ricans lovingly refer to the icon as *la negrita*. Needless to mention, most of La Puebla de los Pardos' inhabitants were dark skinned (see Image 13).

The use of performance techniques to entice and engage the population of Cartago with its patron saints continues to this day. The *Basílica de la Virgen de los Angeles*' official website states that the stone figure is made of graphite, jade, and volcanic rock. It then states that at the time, graphite was only available in

Europe, while the other two types of stone were available in America, which leads them to the conclusion that the doll speaks to the Catholic congregations of both continents. Nonetheless, what the statement seems to do best is to underscore the European Catholic roots of the doll, giving it superior authority over the *mestizo, pardo* and *mulato* congregation it was meant to protect.

The Basilica also offers a performative experience for its visitors. The basement of the Church holds a room exhibiting the exact location where the doll was found. To honor the place, a mural recreating the landscape of where Juana Pereira first found the icon of Virgin Mary is painted on the wall. A large stone,[12] supposedly the original rock where the icon was found, is placed in front of the mural, with a replica of the doll sitting on top of it. Juana Pereira—painted into the landscape—is standing next to the rock, looking at the figure of the doll while holding chopped wood in her arms. A bar-shaped gate separates visitors from the rock and mural, because pilgrims often reach their arms inside the gate to try to touch the stone while praying and asking the patron saint to grant a miracle for their family or loved ones in need (see Image 14).

The exterior plaza surrounding the Basilica is also arranged as a performative site for visitors. The plaza offers an outdoor chamber filled with water fountains and canals of holy water where people can 'cleanse' themselves of their sins and ask the patron saint for miracles. It is common to witness people performing their faith in these locations. In addition, on 2 August, Costa Rica celebrates the day of their patron saint the *Virgen de los Angeles*. This event is the ultimate performance of faith. Catholics perform their devotion to the virgin by

walking from their homes—located anywhere in the country—to the Basilica, filling Costa Rica's streets with pilgrims on their way to Cartago (see Image 15).

The nomination of the *Virgen de los Angeles* as the country's patron saint, and the consolidation of la *Cofradía de Nuestra Señora de los Angeles* (Our Lady of the Angels' Brotherhood) in 1653—responsible for the organization and sponsorship of the festive activities performed to honor the patron saint—are important events that allowed for the development of *mascaradas* in Cartago. Other festive activities that traditionally accompanied *mascaradas* during the month of August were bullfights, community dances, *turnos*,[13] and fireworks. By the 19th century, *mascaradas* were already a core element of *La Virgen de los Angeles* festivities. It is no coincidence that the Catholic Church adopted and sponsored *mascaradas*. Being the organizational force behind the festivity allowed the Church to control the content, and ultimately the message, transmitted during these performances.

Costa Rica's First National Identity Project

Parallel to the development of *mascaradas* as a popular form of expression emerging from underrepresented minority groups during colonization, after the independence of the Central American region from the Spanish Crown, the new independent nations started to construct their own national identities to differentiate themselves and declare their uniqueness to the rest of the world. Benedict Anderson argues the 'nation' is a socially-constructed imagined community that is limited and sovereign. He describes these constructions as

"complex 'crossings' of discrete historical forces" that "once created […] become 'modular,' capable of being transplanted, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, to a great variety of social terrain, to merge and be merged with correspondingly wide variety of political and ideological constellations" (4). As a result, imagined communities generate deep attachments among their members. Each nation created hymns and shields, installed monuments and statues of their respective 'heroes,' and slowly established the human prototypes that characterized their nation and separated it from its neighbors. Costa Rican national identity was characterized as white and Catholic, thereby leaving out the diversity of the communities that did not fit into this construction. However, during the 1860s, an iconic figure embodying other virtues of Costa Rican national identity such as loyalty and compliance to the status quo appeared.

In 1856, William Walker and the Filibuster army defeated the government of Nicaragua and tried to conquer all Central American nations, including Costa Rica. The then president of the country, Juan Rafael Mora Porras, incited Costa Ricans to fight and personally led troops to Rivas, Nicaragua, where they fought Walker's army on 8 April, but were unable to subdue them. Later, on 11 April, General José María Cañas and his men spotted Walker and his army at an old house in Guanacaste, Costa Rica. The legend surrounding these historical events claims that the general suggested a man sneak onto the property and set it on fire. Juan Santamaria, a young peasant from Alajuela,[14] volunteered to do just that. The action cost him his life, but also defeated Walker's army and ended the war.

There is a lot of controversy surrounding the official account of the story. Although the battle was indeed won by Costa Rica, and a fire did destroy the house where Walker's army was based, many historians claim it is impossible to confirm whether this was the work of Juan Santamaria. Nevertheless, this account of the story became the official one, and a few years after the war, the image of Juan Santamaria became the primary symbol of Costa Rican national identity. He was recognized as the country's national hero and his iconic representation—dressed as a soldier and carrying a torch in his hand—became emblematic of Costa Rican patriotism (see Image 16).

According to Córdoba the nomination of Juan Santamaria as national hero is "the result of the government's desire to divert attention from the conflict that the country had just gone through during the previous years" (55). After the war, President Juan Rafael Mora was overthrown in a coup d'état by his opponent, José María Montealegre, in 1859. He was exiled, and upon his return was sentenced to death and executed by a firing squad on behalf of the state on 30 September, 1860. However, Mora enjoyed a good reputation and was considered a hero thanks to his victory against the Filibusters; thus, these events divided the country between the supporters and opponents of President Mora. To Córdoba, "[i]t is after Mora's death that the formation of national identity becomes so essential to the stability of the country" (56). It is important to mention that in recent years, the Costa Rican state has received pressure from members of the senate to issue an official apology to the country for the execution of former President Mora and his son-in-law, General José María Cañas. On 3 October,

2012, the senate discussed, approved, and observed a minute of silence as an official apology for its involvement in the assassination of the two men, now considered national heroes (Asamblea Legislativa de la República de Costa Rica 7)[15] .

So far, I have exposed how the Catholic Church intertwined performance with elements of Cartago's popular culture to legitimize its power and control over the people, and how similar techniques were used to craft the image of the Costa Rican national hero and thus promote a national identity narrative. As has hopefully become evident, even though the figure of the 'idealized peasant' is commonly linked to the national literature project of the early 20th century, state institutions and the Catholic Church have been exploiting the image of the 'idealized peasant' (*el labriego sencillo*) since colonial times. Now, I will move on to examine the national identity campaign that exalted the figure of the Costa Rican idealized peasant during the 20th century, and discuss how *mascaradas* become entangled with such a figure.

Costa Rica's National Identity Construction and the Development of *Mascaradas* in the 20th Century

Historian Rafael Cuevas Molina points out that between 1870 and 1940, Costa Rica was ruled by a liberal political ideology based on an agro-export economic model that was then the norm in many Latin American nations. At that time, the region joined the world economy thanks to the implementation of a capitalist economic model that introduced the exportation of coffee to the rest of

the world. This period witnessed the consolidation of a national identity cultural project that Cuevas Molina calls *la nación costarricense moderna* (the modern Costa Rican nation) (*Tendencias de la dinámica cultural en Costa Rica en el siglo XX* 3). Stuart Hall reminds us that cultural identities are "unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture" (226). Noting that 'to create a nation' means to create an imaginary representation for a conglomeration of people who will identify themselves as a social group and give meaning to their existence based on a shared past and a set of traditions, Cuevas Molina highlights the role of intellectuals in this process, specifically historians, who worked alongside the ideological political agenda in order to determine what was to be remembered and how it should be remembered.

As has been stressed before, at the end of the 19th century, the political elite of the country consisted of families of liberal oligarchs residing in the Central Valley who occupied important leadership positions in Costa Rica's state institutions, such as the National Museum and the National Register. They were known as the Olympus Generation. This made the new national identity project in Costa Rica a highly-institutionalized endeavor, which is relevant because it marks another exception to the historical and sociopolitical trends of the region.

According to Cuevas Molina, the liberal national identity processes of other Central American nations, such as Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, were marked by strong popular resistance that contributed to the civil uprisings and the political repression that these nations experienced in the second half of the 20th century (*Identidad Cultural* 10-11). By contrast, Costa Rica's cultural

identity project was based on the ideals of order and progress, and was strongly targeted towards peasants and artisans—the popular classes—in an effort to transform them from "barbarians" with "old fashioned lifestyles" into healthy, hygienic, educated and patriotic citizens, respectful of the law and loyal to a liberal ideology (Cuevas Molina *Tendencias de la Dinámica Cultural en Costa Rica* 5). The liberal model valued industrialization and a way of life that privileged production. For the popular classes, especially peasants, it meant elevating national patriotism over their already established local identities, and it also meant abandoning a lifestyle that valued and respected natural cycles of farming and harvesting in favor of industrialized working schedules.

It is important to mention the role of plurality and diversity in the Central American region. As discussed in Chapter 1, for over 500 years, the region has represented a mixture of cultural, ethnic, and racial intersections between Indigenous, European, African and Asian cultures. In *Identidad Cultural en Centro América*, Cuevas Molina points out the schizophrenic nature of the modern national identity construction projects throughout Central America (8). On the one hand, these projects seek to incorporate popular cultural elements that are representative of marginalized populations, such as rural peasants, artisans, and Indigenous groups, as symbols of national identity because they speak to a country's authenticity; yet, these new liberal cultural projects look to the United States, France, and England as examples, thereby highlighting foreign values that in turn continue to oppress and condemn the underrepresented groups whose symbols they are exploiting.

Around this time, Costa Rica records evidence of its first professional mask maker. Lito Valerín (1824–1910) is believed to have been the first professional mask maker in Cartago, and thus is considered the father of Costa Rica's masked tradition. According to the Martinez brothers—two of Cartago's most beloved mask makers of the second half of the 20th century—Valerín found a giant *papier-mâché* head hidden in a trunk inside the city's main church. The head was a *Gigantes y Cabezudos*[16] female helmet mask that had been brought to the country by Spanish clerics. Valerín decided to make a wooden structure covered in a large print cloth to serve as a body (62). This is how the first *giganta* masked character of Costa Rica was born. Valerín was a devoted Catholic and he decided to march his giant puppet down the streets of Cartago after the religious celebrations held in honor of the *Virgen de los Angeles*, patron saint of the city. The audience's reception of the masked character was encouraging, so Valerín created a male partner for it, giving rise to *el gigante* and *la giganta*. Eventually, Valerín, and later his son, Jesús, began to make more masked characters and performed during the festivities held in honor of the *Virgen de los Angeles* in the month of August.

Although it is well known that Valerín made masks, and in fact owned a full set of them, and was very passionate about the tradition, it is highly unlikely that a Spanish mask was what originally inspired him. As my exposition has shown, a series of community folk festivals with Indigenous, European, and African roots mingled and evolved to form the tradition that Valerín practiced. Nonetheless, the Martínez brothers' anecdote speaks to the types of oral tradition

and folk storytelling techniques favored by the popular classes of colonial Cartago.

Another great mask artisan was Guillermo Freer. Originally from Cartago, he and his family moved to San José, where he continued his mask making tradition. Along with his family, Freer was responsible for having taught his mask making technique to people in communities between Cartago and San José.

In 1946, Jesús Valerín passed away. According to Calderón, his death partly explains the decline of the *mascarada* tradition in the mid 20th century. The practice also declined due to the censorship imposed by the Catholic Church, which slowly separated *mascarada* performances from celebrations of the *Virgen de los Angeles*. In 1977, the Catholic Church stopped sponsoring *mascarada* performances during *Virgen de los Angeles* celebrations due to its pagan roots, which clashed with the religious and spiritual nature of the celebrations (Leiva). The turbulent political context of the 1940s is yet another factor that affected the popularity of *mascaradas* at the time, as will be discussed momentarily.

The contradiction between exalting patriotic symbols appropriated from the popular culture of oppressed and marginalized groups while enabling and legitimizing a national identity project that ignored and made such groups invisible was the motivation behind this chapter. So far, I have traced the development of Cartago's *mascaradas* from the 17th to the 20th century. The remaining part of this section will compare *mascarada* representations of social figures to the liberal identity project that the nation carried out during the 20th century.

Mascaradas allowed the popular classes to represent themselves and the dominant classes through archetypal masked characters. The aesthetic of the festival is *carnivalesque* in nature, relying on farce and ridicule to highlight the differences among the social groups. Characters associated with social authority figures, such as those of the police, governor, king, and doctor (intellectual), usually represent the dominant classes. The popular classes are represented through characters such as *macho ratón*—a character that represents a clever mestizo whose wit and sassiness outsmarts the Spanish colonizers—and *la copetona*—a female character that must carry her lazy husband on her back to make ends meet.

The rest of this chapter will concentrate on the figure of *el macho ratón*, which literally translates to the 'manly mouse,' and follow its transformation into the 'idealized peasant.' By tracing the socio-political events that shaped Costa Rica's national development from independence into the 21st century, I hope to unveil the process through which the oligarchic elite, and later government officials, appropriated elements of popular culture to sustain and engrain an idealized image of a Costa Rican citizen.

Costa Rica's Civil War and the New National Identity Construction Process

In the mid 20th century, a civil war divided the country, after which Costa Rica was forced to renew and reassert a new national identity that could reunite its citizens. As a result, the country transitioned from a liberal to a neoliberal ideological model, adding the values of peace and happiness to its 'white,

Catholic and loyal to authority' constructed identity. Although national identity construction is a process that started before independence in 1821, I will focus on the historical events that led Costa Rica to purposefully craft a new national identity throughout the 20th century. *Mascaradas* will serve as an example of the institutionalization of a popular cultural practice, meaning the appropriation of popular culture by the hegemonic group in power to create symbols of national identity while stripping popular culture of its subversive and socially critical elements.

During the second half of the 20th century, Central America experienced a series of violent events that included repressive governments, dictatorships, military coups and civil wars. Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua were all devastated by extreme violence, upsetting all aspects of civic life. Costa Rica remained on the margins of these conflicts because it had privileged a political model based on social democracy since the 1940s.

However, the 1940s was still a turbulent decade in terms of the country's political stability. During this period, two presidential elections were won by the National Republican Party—first by Rafael Angel Calderón Guardia (1940–1944), and then by Teodoro Picado (1944–1948). Both presidents implemented a series of social reforms in favor of the working classes of the country. These increased the popularity of the party among civilians, but generated tension with the powerful oligarchic elite of the country. As a result, the presidential election of 1948, presumably won by the opposition, was derailed by a fire that destroyed many of the ballots—and that remains unsolved by authorities—forcing Congress

to cancel it. The tension between the National Republican Party in power, led by Dr. Calderón Guardia, and the opposition, led by José Figueres Ferrer, gave rise to Costa Rica's civil war, known as *La revolución del 48*.

The war lasted two months and claimed approximately 2000 lives, a significant number considering the relatively small size of both the country and the scale of the armed conflict. The opposition won the war and in May 1948 it placed José Figueres Ferrer in power. His government abolished the army that same year, and by 1949 had redrafted the country's constitution, giving women the right to vote. This is the start of Costa Rica's social-democratic state.

Just as it had in the 1860s, during the 1950s the country had to face the consequences of the war. Scholar Anabelle Contreras describes this process as the mending of the country's broken body (109). People were still antagonizing each other based on their political allegiances and alliances. As often happens after a period of violence, the group in power had to develop strategies to control what would enter the official historical account, that is, decide what was to be remembered and what had to be forgotten about the war. It became evident that in order for the new reforms to succeed, and in order to achieve political stability, something had to be done to reunite the population; thus, the country had to implement a process of national identity construction. According to Contreras, in 1958, only 10 years after declaring war on Calderón Guardia's regime, Figueres Ferrer was calling for people to stop their rivalries, thereby initiating a reconciliation process.

As discussed earlier, before 1948, Costa Rica's identity was based on the idea that the country was predominantly white. From colonial times up to this point, a small, oligarchic elite had held power and asserted its dominance by creating an ideal country of white, Catholic people who were proud of their humbleness. After 1948, however, the country was divided and angry. People needed to mourn and the powerful elites saw this as an opportunity to start a new national identity construction process. At the core of this project was the representation of the idealized peasant, discussed earlier. The same virtues imposed on the image of Juan Santamaria as a well-intentioned, hard-working and loyal peasant were transposed onto the peasant representations found in Cartago's *mascarada* tradition.

From Clever Mestizo to Content Peasant: The Institutionalization of the Idealized Peasant

The new national identity project relied partly on the ability of popular culture to enter and permeate the imagined community of Costa Rica. After the practice of *mascaradas* had nearly died out with the passing of Jesús Valerín, *mascaradas* experienced a new resurgence after the civil war. By 1951, Avelino Martínez, whose interest in masks started at a very young age, learned the tradition in Cartago by visiting Jesús Valerín's family and purchasing the head and body molds used by the Valerín family to make masks. He also purchased six masks that had already been made to help him continue the aesthetic traits found in Valerín's masked tradition. Martínez and his brother Guillermo repaired most

of the masks found in the Valerín family home, and, in coordination with Oscar Guevara, started to perform *mascaradas* during *las fiestas cívicas*—community parties—in Cartago, of which Guevara was part of the organizing committee (Calderón 102). It is important to note that during this resurrection of *mascarada* performances, the festivity was no longer tied to the Catholic Church, only to civic celebrations.

The Cartago traditional *mascarada* carried out by the Valerín, Freer, and Martínez families during the 19th and 20th centuries included *gigantes* (giant masked characters), helmet masked characters and musicians. There were two giants: *la giganta* and *el gigante* (the female giant and the male giant). Some of the smaller mask characters represented mythological figures, such as *el diablo* (the devil) and *la calavera* (death), and some represented popular stereotypical figures, such as *el loco* (crazy lunatic), *el diplomático* (the diplomat), *el macho ratón* (the clever Indian), and *la copetona* (a mestizo women with a pained expression because she carried her lazy husband on her back) (see Image 17). The musicians did not wear masks or costumes.

The giants were taller than the rest of the masks and they were depicted as white Europeans, with happy facial expressions, an appearance of wealth and good health, wearing golden jewelry and dressed in expensive fabrics and suits. The smaller masks, on the other hand, were shorter in size and the expressions of the masks were commonly disfigured, meant to mock authority figures and to frighten the audience. Aside from the four main traditional characters: *la giganta*, *el gigante*, *el diablo*, and *la calavera*, Cartago's *mascarada* characters tended to

be caricatures of authority figures and other members of society. Some authority figure characters are the policeman, the judge, and the doctor (intellectual), while characters such as the alcoholic and the *copetona* represent the popular classes.

It is important to mention that *mascaradas* are products of popular culture. In Costa Rica, *la chota* is a popular way of criticizing people or situations by ridiculing, mocking, or otherwise joking about them. It is a cultural trait found in the use of language or gestures, usually involving double meaning and/or hyperbola to make fun of someone or something. This element is very much present in *mascaradas*, which can be understood as materialized 'chota.' Thus, for example, *la giganta*—meant to be a wealthy high-class elite woman—is portrayed as voluptuous, wearing excessive makeup and an extravagant dress, while characters such as the doctor and the judge—representing the intellectual elite of the city—are portrayed as fat, with rosy cheeks and funny looking glasses (see Image 18).

Formally represented as a clever mestizo named *macho ratón*, this character not only chased and scared people, but was also a clever speaker that recited *coplas* (funny musical verses) to entertain the population. This character, still alive in Nicaragua as *Güegüense*, represents *la malicia indígena*—a European depiction of natives as savage and inherently evil. Natives appropriated the negative stereotypes imposed on them and integrated them into a clever character that resists and transgresses colonial authority in a non-threatening way. The *macho ratón* is clever and witty, using double meaning in language to confuse and insult the Spanish authorities without them realizing that they are being insulted.

According to Fumero, this character was still present in Cartago's *mascaradas* at the beginning of the 20th century (9). However, I was unable to find a photograph of this character and in contemporary *mascaradas*, this character is no longer represented. I argue that its disappearance is link to the dissemination of the idealized peasant and the state's efforts to eradicate the social critique embedded in *mascarada* performances.

Fumero notes that the literary figure of the 'idealized peasant,' created and legitimized by *la generación del Olimpo*, exhibits contradictions in character: "por un lado es malcriado, brusco o rudo, y por otro es el representante del '*labriego sencillo*', quien conquistó el '*eterno prestigio, estima y honor"*" [on the one side he is bratty, rough, and rude, and on the other he represents the "simple peasant," who conquered the "eternal prestige, respect and honor"] (8).[17] I believe these contradictions support my argument that the *macho ratón* was slowly transformed into the 'idealized peasant.' The colonial censorship imposed on *mascaradas*, and the hegemonic view of the peasant promoted by the liberal state of the 19th century slowly stripped the *macho ratón* character of its wit and cleverness, instead transposing new characteristics, such as naiveté and humbleness onto this character.

Today, the *macho ratón* character has been completely transformed into an 'idealized peasant' that is happy, loyal, good-hearted, peaceful, and naïve. Examples of the 'idealized peasant' abound in current Costa Rican popular culture. Without departing from the theme of this dissertation, which is *mascaradas*, I want to discuss three examples of the 'idealized peasant' found in

popular culture that have left a mark on Costa Rica's construction of its imagined identity.

The first example is the work of Carmen Granados (1915–1999), multi-faceted Costa Rican folklorist who played a crucial role performing idealized peasant roles for the radio and the theatre. An outspoken supporter of President Figueres' revolution, her artistic production (she was also a poet and a singer-songwriter) was committed to promoting Costa Rica's popular culture and the revolution's new values of national identity, which included the ideals of peace and happiness.

Granados wrote *el corrido de Pepe Figueres*, an ode to Figueres' victory over Calderón Guardia. She performed the song live from the Bellavista barracks—today Costa Rica's National Museum—as Figueres and his troops entered San José's central avenue after the armed conflict. Her outspoken support of Figueres' victory earned her the title of 'soldier of the revolution' "*excombatiente del 48*" (Centro de Documentación y Bibliografía. Biblioteca Nacional "Miguel Obregón Lizano"). Following the revolution, Granados enjoyed great popularity, especially on the radio, as she embodied her characters' representations of Costa Rica's popular culture. She was famous for her radio/theatre sketches. Some of her characters included 'Rafela,' a humble, honest peasant woman from rural Costa Rica whose famous phrase "yo soy Rafela, el alma tica" [I am Rafela, the Costa Rican soul] speaks to her commitment to the embodiment of Costa Rican identity; and 'Doña Vina,' an urban inner city woman

who spends the day gossiping and prying into her neighbors' lives, then calls the radio shows to gossip and broadcast the country's 'dirty laundry' (see Image 19).

Today, Carmen Granados is remembered as one of Costa Rica's most arduous folk artists to promote the country's national identity and patriotism. Grupo Tiquicia, an organization committed to the safeguarding and promotion of Costa Rica's folklore and popular culture, states that Granados' work "*exalts* the simplicity and vivacity of Costa Ricans, as well as the *richness* of our culture and peasant attitude. Her radio-theatre performances *re-create* the modest, happy life of the Costa Rican family" (emphasis added):

> En todas sus locuciones exaltó la sencillez y la vivacidad un poco tímida del costarricense. El costarriqueñismo fue su lenguaje favorito, mediante él logró exaltar la riqueza de nuestro pueblo, inyectó alegría a sus radioescuchas y les devolvió parte de su personalidad campesina. Con su participación en el radioteatro logró recrear en el costarricense una vida modesta y alegre que poco a poco se fue introduciendo en la familia en aquellos años en los que aún en la mayoría de los rincones de Costa Rica no existía la electricidad. (Grupo Tiquicia)

Granados' characters were often linked to her personal life. Her performance as an idealized peasant is so engrained in Costa Rica's imagination that it has become impossible for people to separate her from her fictional characters. Granados prolific career occupied a big portion of the second half of the 20th century. Her performances, aligned to the ideals and values of the new Costa Rica led by Figueres, contributed to the institutionalization of the 'idealized

peasant' as the emblematic figure of Costa Rica's patriotism and national identity.

Another folk figure who embodies the 'idealized peasant' is Lorenzo 'Lencho' Salazar (1931). Lencho is a folk musician and songwriter whose identity is strongly tied to the image of the 'idealized peasant.' His career started in 1953 as a member of the band Trio Costa Rica in the city of San Carlos. In 1957, he moved to San José to join the group Los Tatolingas, with whom he started to perform musical pieces based on folk stories and urban legends. He also worked as a music teacher in several places, including the Universidad Nacional in Heredia and the Conservatorio Castella, and for many years he directed the folk-dance company of Costa Rica's Ministry of Tourism. In 1965, he released his first album, *Idiay Lencho* [What's up Lencho], a collection of his compositions based on Costa Rica's popular culture and oral tradition. This earned him the title of 'father of the popular humor-music of Costa Rica' due to his humorous use of language to represent the jocularity and pleasantness of Costa Rica's peasant life.

Lencho's work has been produced for and mostly distributed by radio and television, and like the case of Carmen Granados, his performance persona cannot be separated from himself, as he uses popular language and his clothing imitates the dress of the rural peasantry (blue jeans, a short-sleeved, button-down white shirt, a red handkerchief tied around his neck, black rubber boots, and a *chonete* hat) (see Image 20).

Both Granados' and Salazar's performances are officially sanctioned, meaning they have the support of the state and the media to reach a national audience with their work. Their work represents the 'idealized peasant' with dedication and respect, as an emblematic figure of what it means to be a native, rural Costa Rican. However, the image of the idealized peasant can also be found in contemporary Costa Rican popular culture. A recent example is the TV character Maikol Yordan.[18] This beloved *campesino* is a peasant from contemporary Costa Rica who resides in the countryside but decides to head to the city to find a better job to support his family. Once in the city, he is constantly taken advantage of and mocked because of his naiveté and good intentions (see Image 21).

All three of these characters not only depict the 'idealized peasant,' but also consolidate the values and virtues of post-revolutionary Costa Rica into iconic characters that are representative of the country's national identity project. This phenomenon also permeated the *mascarada* tradition of the Central Valley where the new values of national identity were transposed onto the *macho ratón* character. The cleverness and rascality of this character mutated into naiveté, a character trait of the 'idealized peasant.' The work of mask maker Gerardo Montoya exemplifies this transition. Many of his characters represent real people from the *campesino* community and are meant to honor the popular culture of his native San Antonio de Escazú. His characters are mostly rosy-skinned (representing whiteness) and wear clothing associated with the *campesino* classes of Costa Rica. Their happy, relaxed facial expressions are meant to represent the

easy-goingness of Costa Rica's *campesinos*, as well as their humble, kind-hearted nature. Image 22 shows four of Montoya's masks: *el diablo* and three happy and relaxed idealized peasants. Image 23 illustrate the materialization of the idealized peasant in Costa Rica's imaginary. It is a figurine of a couple representing the idealized peasant. The couple wears traditional *campesino* clothing and carry sacks of freshly picked coffee beans. They smile proudly, representing the happiness and humbleness of the Costa Rican people.

This section has traced the process through which national identity and popular culture became intertwined to assert the power and control of the state and other hegemonic institutions. As demonstrated, the history of using popular culture to legitimize cultural hegemonic power over subjugated populations can be traced back to Costa Rica's colonial period. The institutionalization of popular culture is not only materialized through the performance of the 'idealized peasant,' but also serves to limit and control the content transmitted through such figures. In the case of *mascaradas*, the character of *macho ratón*, who once embodied the resilience and cleverness of colonial *mestizos* and *pardos*, has now mutated into an idealized image of a peasant. The transition is supposed to reflect the reality of hard-working *campesinos*, whose lives are marked by economic struggle, exploitation, and segregation—a far stretch from the naiveté, humility, happiness, and content with which they are represented by the hegemonic culture.

The Institutionalization of Intangible Cultural Heritage in the 20th and 21st Centuries

The new *mascarada* boom experienced after the 1950s extended from Cartago to the rest of the country and continues to grow in the 21st century. In addition to the national identity projects that took place in the 19th and 20th centuries, since the 1980s, two more characteristics have been promoted by hegemonic institutions to represent the people of Costa Rica: peace and happiness.

The abolition of the army in 1948 by President José Figueres Ferrer redirected funding towards education, making this social institution the primary source of cultural hegemony in the country (Cuevas Molina *Identidad y Cultura en Centroamérica: Nación, Integración y Globalización a principios del Siglo XXI* 7). The social democratic model that shaped the institutions of the 20th century led to the construction of a national identity predicated upon the ideal of peace. Costa Ricans are often described as a peaceful, happy people. As an example, Image 24 shows a small monument in Costa Rica that exalts the benefits of not having an army. The inscription reads "Happy is the Costa Rican mother who knows, when giving birth, that her son will never be a soldier." Furthermore, the Costa Rican state sometimes refers to the country as the 'Switzerland of Central America.' This idea of peace grew at the end of the century as former president Oscar Arias won the Nobel Peace Prize for his role as negotiator in the armed conflicts of Central America in 1986.

Moreover, in the last ten years, Costa Rica has launched a campaign to position the country as one of the happiest nations in the world, and the happiest in Latin America (Rodríguez (2012) and Lopez (2016)). Costa Rica is branded as an ecofriendly tourist attraction due to its rich biodiversity and the country's efforts to preserve nature and promote ecotourism. It is also promoted as the happiest country in the world because it has a stable economy and no army. Along with the construct of peace as a description of the country, the Ministry of Tourism has developed slogans such as "Costa Rica, Pura Vida,"[19] and the official branding of "Costa Rica Esencial," to embody the virtues attributed to the Costa Rican people in the 21st century (see Image 25).

Alongside the new additions to Costa Rica's official national identity narrative, contemporary state institutions such as the Ministry of Culture have dedicated efforts to support the practice of *mascarada* traditions. Among the contributions of the state, meant to document, preserve, and promote the survival of these intangible heritage practices, are the creation of the *Museo de Cultura Popular* in the National University of Costa Rica (1994) and the work of the Office of Intangible Heritage in the Ministry of Culture. Another important contribution includes the 1996 declaration of 31 October as National *Mascarada* Day ("Declaración del 31 de Octubre de cada año como Día de la Mascarada Tradicional Costarricense"), aiming to recognize this tradition in the country as an official celebration, while counteracting foreign, non-Catholic celebrations such as Halloween.

Nonetheless, the state's intervention has also altered elements of the practice in its form and aesthetic. For example, today, all m*ascarada* performers must first register with the Ministry of Culture before they can perform in any capacity. The registration includes committing to the rules and regulations set up by the institution. As an example, all masked players must provide their names and domiciles and must wear a registration number (like those worn during races and marathons) over their character's costume, thus altering the aesthetic of the character and making the characters less frightening to the audience. Some local governments also implement strict rules, such as regulating the age and gender of the players by only allowing men over the age of 15 to participate, and by asking for proof of domicile in the community as a prerequisite.

Both the Ministry of Culture and the Office of Intangible Cultural Heritage organize contests and fairs where mask makers can share their craft with the community. However, like most political organizations, they are subjective and exclusive of all forms of mask making, meaning these contests and fairs are only available to certain mask makers, and only the work of a few of them gets media coverage. Issues such as these have created competition and led to divisions among communities of mask makers that used to support the tradition as a group in the absence of government intervention, and were accustomed to carrying the whole weight of the tradition on their shoulders. Usually the judges of state-sponsored activities, such as contests and fairs, lack the required artistic or aesthetic qualifications to grade the artisans' work and simply end up promoting artistic rivalry. Moreover, the winners are generally people with

existing ties to the local government (by default, they become the local representatives of the tradition with no support from the other artisans), which serves to further divide the group.

As a response to these tactics, artisans have created independent cultural associations and co-ops. This allows them to organize activities beyond the reach of local government and to protect their rights as a professional group. Often, local governments and artisan groups clash and disagree. As a result, artisans are faced with the tough decision to either participate in governmental activities, thereby attracting more attention to their work while being excluded from the artisan community, or remain loyal to the artisan community and the origins of the tradition while remaining invisible to the general population.

Although the intentions of the government are good, as it means to preserve and promote the practice of *mascaradas*, in reality, the methods and actions it promotes only serve to control and direct the future of the practice in Costa Rican communities. For example, even though the state considers the community of Barba an artisan community and a symbol of national identity—this community is famous for being the home of generations of mask makers, artisans, and artists—it is currently involved in a dispute with the Office of Intangible Heritage because it refuses to nominate the mask making tradition of Barba as an official site of Costa Rican cultural heritage. The dispute revolves around the dried cow bladders with which masked characters hit people during the event. The government has made it clear that unless this element is eliminated

from the festivity, they will not give the city the official stamp of representing the country's cultural heritage.

This chapter has focused on the origins of *mascaradas* in Costa Rica in the colonial development of the city of Cartago and traced their development through the 19th, 20th and early 21st centuries. Within this arc of development, the last section of this chapter outlined the state's intervention into the practice through its institutions, like the Ministry of Culture, and its efforts to preserve and promote the country's masked tradition. Nonetheless, I have also exposed the possible negative consequences of state intervention, attempting to foresee what elements of the tradition are resistant to change. The following chapter will focus on the role of the media and politics in promoting this tradition, and reveal the influence of a market-oriented economy that forces artisans to seek new opportunities by commercializing the tradition as a form of consumable national identity.

Chapter 3

The Distortion of the *Mascarada* Tradition at the Turn of the Century

This chapter examines the distortions of the Central Valley's *mascarada* tradition at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries, tracing the clashing forces of the popular classes and the state that shaped the form of the tradition today. In order to understand what I call 'distortions,' it is important to describe the ritualistic nature of the festivities and the social function they originally served in colonial Costa Rica.

I will concentrate on the concept of agon—the classical Greek term for confrontation, struggle, or contest—to explain the core of the ritual, its social function in colonial society, and the process through which this element has been repressed and/or substituted in current *mascarada* practice. I will begin with an exposition of Costa Rica's socio-political context at the turn of the century, and later dig deeper into how the context have shaped and transformed the practice of *mascaradas* in the country.

The last three decades of the 20th century transformed the social, economic, and cultural panorama of the Central American region, and similarly affected Costa Rica's cultural and social landscape. The 1970s and 80s saw the rise of revolutionary movements in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua—where the *Revolución Popular Sandinista* ascended to power in 1979. According to Cuevas Molina, the region became the active locus of world revolution, causing

nations with geo-strategic interests, such as the United States, to intervene on behalf of the *contras*:

> Centroamérica se transforma en un "foco activo de revolución mundial" que provoca reacciones de aquellos que siempre la han tenido en el ámbito de sus intereses geoestratéticos, los Estados Unidos de América, los cuales intervienen en Nicaragua a través del apoyo a "los contras." (*Identidad y Cultura en Centroamérica: Nación, Integración y Globalización a principios del Siglo XXI* 98)

Cuevas Molina refers to this period as "the radicalization of politics and culture" (98) stating that artists were ideologically radicalized and resisted the cultural movement promulgated by the state. The following description unveils the radical and politicized vision of Costa Rican intellectuals during this period.

In 1972, intellectuals gathered at the *Seminario Latinoamericano sobre 'el escritor y el cambio social'*—sponsored by *El Centro de Estudios Democráticos de América Latina* (CEDAL) and the *Consejo Superior Universitario Centroamericano* (CSUCA), among others—and concluded that the capitalist and imperialist model of corrupt liberal-bourgeois institutions, and the rise and power of military forces in the region posed a cultural threat and were alienating to people, thereby necessitating a fundamental revolution:

> El orden capitalista e imperialista mantenido en nuestros países por la corrupción de las instituciones liberales burguesas y por la fuerza de las armas, amenaza nuestras culturas y cada día enajena más a los hombres. Ese orden exige un cambio integral, una revolución profunda (…) nos

> debemos enteros a la responsabilidad y a la lucha para cambiar de raíz el sistema que nos agobia y nos mutila. (quoted in *Identidad y Cultura en Centroamérica: Nación, Integración y Globalización a principios del Siglo XXI* 99)

Then again, in 1975, the *Seminario Centroamericano sobre arte y sociedad* met to discuss the incorporation of arts and culture in the revolutionary process, arguing that art can be an inclusive, liberating process when it promotes contextual awareness and takes the form of a '*lucha militante*' (militant fight). The *seminario* agreed to acknowledge the popular classes as creators of culture, and thus recognized the need to actively incorporate them in the process of cultural production, thereby invigorating the alliance among artists, the working class, and the *campesinos* (99). These conclusions of these meeting led the Ministry of Culture and other state institutions, such as *La Compañia Nacional de Teatro*, to dedicate funding and resources to create projects in rural areas of the country and in urban disenfranchised communities in an effort to promote and reinforce the making of popular art by these communities.

Parallel to the development of the efforts carried out by the cultural sector, the liberal and neoliberal policies of the country that were in place since the 1960s led to a population explosion in San José, Heredia, Alajuela, and Cartago. This was caused by the migration of rural peasants to the Central Valley in search of better work and education opportunities. In the 1980s and 90s, the proliferation of apartment buildings, condos, and lower-income housing projects, along with the construction of shopping malls and the increasing number of automobiles began

to saturate the narrow streets of the once small, agrarian Central Valley. The provision of public services however, could not keep up with the rapid urban expansion, leading to the deterioration of public infrastructure as a result of air and noise pollution, vandalism, and litter. According to Molina, urban expansion greatly impacted the cultural life of the Central Valley because it pushed people away from public spaces, promoting a more individualistic form of life which was more aligned with the capitalist model of a neoliberal ideology. By 1996, 51% of Costa Rica's population resided in the Central Valley, which only makes up 2% of the national territory (quoted in Molina 87).[20]

The armed conflicts in neighboring Central American nations at that time also caused massive waves of Salvadorian, Guatemalan, and Nicaraguan immigrants to flee to Costa Rica. These groups became the targets of xenophobic sentiments by Costa Ricans who claimed that immigrants were responsible for the increase of criminal activity and the lack of job opportunities in the country. Immigrants from Nicaragua—who constitute about 10% of Costa Rica's population[21]—suffered the greatest discrimination as the social imagination of Costa Ricans depicted them as violent, uneducated *machistas*.

It was also during the 1980s that neoliberal policies started to shape the political and economic decisions of the country, impacting social life and culture. The cultural policies designed to reach rural audiences and empower the masses to participate in cultural production and join the ideological revolution clashed with the interests of private corporations pushing their neoliberal agendas designed to limit the intervention of the state on society while giving the private

market free rein to regulate communal life. In this sense, the media, which is the main emissary of neoliberal ideology and globalization, has played a significant role in the molding of Costa Rica's new sense of cultural identity, especially television. According to Cuevas Molina, national TV stations offer mainly foreign shows exhibiting high levels of social discrimination according to gender, class, and race (*Tendencias de la Dinámica Cultural* 33). The massive scope of reach that television has in the average Costa Rican household—91.61% of Costa Ricans owned a television in 2002 (33)—speaks to the impact that television has on the construction of national identity, and the perception of cultural identity in the country.

This view is congruent with García Canclini's description of Latin America in the 21st century: "(h)oy concebimos a América Latina como una articulación mas compleja de tradiciones y modernidades (diversas, desiguales), un continente heterogéneo formado por países donde, en cada uno, coexisten múltiples lógicas de desarrollo" [today, we think of Latin America as a complex articulation of tradition and modernity (unequal and diverse), a heterogeneous continent formed by countries where multiple logics of development coexist] (*Culturas Híbridas* 23). For Canclini, hybridity is the main characteristic of Latin American culture and it consists of highly complex processes of negotiation between tradition and modernity. In this sense, to study Latin America through the lens of hybridity could potentially allow us to "ver cómo, dentro de la crisis de la modernidad […] se transforman las relaciones entre tradición, modernismo cultural y modernización socioeconómica" [see how, from within the modernity

crisis, […] the relationships between tradition, cultural modernism and socio-economic modernization are transformed] (19).

This chapter investigates the *mascarada* tradition in Costa Rica and the distortion it is experiencing in the neoliberal 21st century. It focuses on analyzing the role of contemporary media and politics in selling a twisted version of this tradition to suit neoliberal, market-oriented interests. Looking at García Canclini's definition of hybridity as "procesos socioculturales en los que estructuras o prácticas discretas, que existían en forma separarada, se combinan para generar nuevas estructuras, objectos y prácticas" [sociocultural processes where structures or discrete practices that used to exist separated from the rest, are now being combined to generate new structures, objects and practices] (*Culturas Híbridas* III), and his belief that processes of hybridity can help explain particular intercultural conflicts, I will explore how the Costa Rican state is appropriating a popular culture practice to resurrect a decadent national project of modernization in the country. I argue that the distortion of *La mascarada*—as it is represented and promoted by media outlets and political figures today—is meant to end its ability to critique society and to prevent the festivities from fulfilling a social development function in communities through the ritualization of the event.

Mascaradas are performed and safeguarded by the popular classes, and hence, are a product of popular culture or "cultura popular." As mentioned in Chapter 2, popular culture is understood as "respuestas colectivas elaboradas por el sector de la sociedad que ocupa una posición subalterna" [collective responses made by society's subaltern population] (Barzuna Perez 29). Unfortunately,

popular culture continues to have inferior connotations for art scholars in Costa Rica—it is a descriptor that drastically lowers its value as artistic cultural production. The clash is palpable in academia where traditional disciplinary approaches to studying social phenomena can only offer partial explanations for the highly complex processes of hybridity, and where each discipline has created a repertoire of knowledge used to study and understand the canon of Western art production as culture, thereby disregarding the products of all other social groups as folk, ethnic, or popular culture. The burden of 'subalternity' has diminished the attractiveness of these practices for art institutions, neglecting the potential insight that these practices can bring to our understanding of how particular social groups digest and respond to the impositions of neoliberalism.

Before delving into this chapter's discussion, it is important to briefly summarize the rise and fall of the *mascarada* tradition in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which was largely discussed in Chapter 2. *Mascaradas* are masked performances that accompany community celebrations and patron saint festivities and are considered the main festive, popular tradition of Costa Rica. The origins of Latin American masked traditions can be found in colonial times and are spread throughout Latin America. These traditions are hybrid products of transculturation processes the occurred between European, Indigenous, African and sometimes Asian cultures. In Costa Rica, masked performances date back to the 17th century. Like any form of cultural expression, Costa Rican masked traditions are not static practices, but malleable, constantly changing practices that adapt to the socio-political and cultural context in which they are performed.

Mascaradas, in the form and structure in which they are known today, first appeared in Cartago in the mid 19th century, promoted by a man named Lito Valerín. He was a devout Catholic and active member of his congregation and was well known for bringing his *payasos*, or *mantudos*—common names used to refer to the masked characters—to Catholic festivals. The tradition became very popular in Cartago, and after the Valerín family had dedicated decades to perfecting the practice, other families, such as the Freers—who brought the practice to San José and other Central Valley cities—and the Martinez's—who bought Valerín's mask collection after his death and continued his legacy—spread the practice throughout the country and it soon became a popular tradition practiced throughout the nation. Its popularity started to fade at the end of the 1980s, partly because of the deaths of the mask makers who promoted it, but also because of the censorship imposed by the Catholic Church, which pressured communities to limit the festival to a parade of masked characters, and then stopped endorsing the practice in 1977, calling it vulgar and violent.

However, *mascarada* performances refuse to disappear and are still practiced today, mostly sponsored by local governments and the mask makers themselves. For the last 30 years, several institutional and community-based efforts have worked hard to resurrect the practice. Some of these efforts include the government's 1996 declaration of 31 October as National *Mascarada* Day,[22] or the *Museo de Cultura Popular*'s decision to host a permanent exhibition on *mascaradas*. Nonetheless, the biggest effort to preserve the tradition has been made by the communities themselves. Typically led by the mask makers and their

families, communities in the provinces of Cartago, San José, and Heredia—known as *pueblos mascareros*—refuse to allow the practice to die, despite the deliberate decision of the Church and the state to not provide support for these events, and despite the constant efforts from state institutions to censor and/or distort the practice.

During Catholic celebrations, such as Corpus Christi, or festivals in honor of patron saints, *mascaradas* joined other cultural practices, such as bullfights, *turnos* (community gatherings where food, drinks, and live music are provided so people can celebrate), religious ceremonies, and fireworks to engage the whole community in a festive environment. Much like the medieval European carnival, *mascaradas* invert the social order, turning time and space on its head, and thus allowing transgressive behavior to go unpunished. The traditional characters of the event consist of ridiculous versions of authority figures in both a mythological sense (like 'the devil' and 'death') and a sociological sense ('the mayor,' 'the policeman,' 'the doctor,' and the 'lawyer'). However, the 21st century sociocultural context of Costa Rica has reshaped the tradition, and in keeping with the recent trend, the media is playing a powerful role in selling the festivals as tributes to authority figures, thereby eliminating the element of social critique embedded in the performances and disregarding the tradition's contribution to the social development of the community.

Based on this exposition, this chapter seeks to examine the role of state institutions and mainstream mass communications corporations in selling *mascaradas* as a tribute to authority, when in reality they mock and undermine the

hegemonic culture. The distortion consists of appropriating the *mascarada* aesthetic to promote the consumption of national identity through the purchase of items representing the practice. I argue this move risks the loss of the oral tradition that keeps *mascaradas* alive. This results in the state exercising power over popular culture by controlling the people's means of expression and capacity to socially develop. By aligning *mascaradas* with the organizational values of the hegemonic culture in the country, the people who practice and safeguard *mascarada* tradition are disenfranchised from its power. To analyze these pivotal points, I will start by explaining the concept of agon and its ritualistic function for the society in which the practice of *mascaradas* was born.

Agrarian Rituals, Agon, and Costa Rican Masked Traditions

For Victor Turner, a ritual is a process in which an individual or a group of individuals are separated from the rest of the community and taken into 'limbo' to perform a ceremony. Afterwards, they are re-incorporated into society. The ceremony demarks a change or transformation; meaning something has happened and that person or group is no longer the same as before. Turner was particularly interested in the 'limbo' stage, which he called 'the liminal.' He defined the liminal as a threshold that is in between spaces. When referring to rituals, the liminal is in between social life (secular living) and spiritual life (sacred living) (*The Anthropology of Performance* 25). The liminal is the place where performance becomes important because it is in the enactment of the ceremony that the transition from 'what was before' and 'what is now' happens. Turner

concluded that every ritual encompasses performance because this term allows us to understand ritual as a process of action. To this end, Schechner notes in his preface to *The Anthropology of Performance*, "all performance has at its core a ritual action, a restoration of behavior" (7).

The term 'liminal' is an important element of performance studies. For Schechner, the field is never fully defined and concrete. It is a field that is open, incomplete, and liminal, meaning it stands in the 'in between.' This characteristic allows performance studies to intervene and analyze multiple aspects of culture and social life. Schechner defines performance as 'restored behavior' present in multiple forms of cultural products, such as rituals, civic ceremonies, and the performing arts. Here, behavior is understood as materials—organized sequences of events, movements, gestures, or scripted texts—that exist separate from those who perform them: "they have a life of their own" (*Between Theatre and Anthropology* 35). These materials are manipulated, transformed, and transmitted in rehearsal processes. Thus, performance is always restored behavior. For Schechner, this is the main characteristic of performance.

In *Ritual and Its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity*, Adam Seligman states "Ritual […] is about *doing* more than about saying something"(4). In his view, ritual "provides an orientation to action and hence a framing of action that is relevant in understanding human activities beyond what might be done in temples, churches, mosques—or the Houses of Parliament for that matter" (5). According to Rodríguez-Adrados, agrarian festivities are the original locus of rites that later transformed into theatre: "es la fiesta agraria […]

el lugar original de los ritos de que deriva el Teatro" (Rodríguez-Adrados 371). Agrarian festivals celebrated the fecundity of the land, plants, and animals, also symbolizing the fertility and fecundity of humankind. Rodríguez-Adrados adds that agrarian rituals are meant to create a pause in time, seeking to renovate life and purge the impure elements left on earth by the passage of time: "buscan una pausa atemporal tras el curso cíclico del tiempo, pausa que ha de lograr una renovación de la vida —nueva cosecha, nueva felicidad— y una liberación de los elementos de impureza traídos por el curso de los días" (371). In summary, agrarian rituals celebrate the fertility of land, nature, and humankind through a series of rituals that cleanse the space and its habitants of the impurities found at the end of a cycle, creating fertile space for the new cycle to blossom.

According to Tosatti, the Spaniards that settled in Costa Rica had agricultural backgrounds and moved there to work the land. They brought with them a series of medieval agrarian rituals and traditions, and upon their interaction with the native population—who were also organized as an agricultural society—realized they had a lot in common. This allowed both cultures to coexist on friendly terms, and with time they started to combine their rituals and celebrations ("Personal Interview").

Like most colonial cities, Santiago de Cartago's center was the church and the plaza. Each town adopted a patron saint. On the day of the saint's commemoration, the community organized grand celebrations and held parties alongside religious activities. As discussed in Chapter 2, in Costa Rica, *mascaradas* are believed to have first made an appearance in a community called

La Puebla de los Pardos, located in Cartago. This was a community composed of native Indians, *mulatos*, *pardos*, and blacks—all marginalized social groups. Tosatti considers *la mascarada* a syncretic agrarian ritual with Indigenous and Spanish roots incorporated to Catholic celebrations due to the popularity of the event:

> La máscara carnavalesca ibérica se sobrepuso a la máscara ritual amerindia, y fusionadas coexistieron durante largos años acompañando el ritual católico en nuestras comunidades… Se trata de la realidad de la comunidad agraria enfrentada al drama cíclico de la renovación de la vida y la calavera en el plano humano y natural. (*Máscaras tradicionales festivas del Valle Central de Costa Rica* 7)

According to Tosatti, in Central Valley *mascarada* performances, the center of the performance is *La giganta*, a tall, beautiful woman representing Mother Earth, nature, and fertility. Surrounding *La giganta* are smaller masks based on mythological figures such as the devil, death, a witch, a gnome, and others. These characters dance around *La giganta*, as if to protect her, and they also chase after young people and hit them with sticks or dried cow bladders. Women with small children usually stay near *La giganta* during the parade. To Tosatti, this is important because mothers and small children represent the core of the family and thus of our society ("Personal Interview").

During this ritual/liminal game, the social core of society remains safe and connected to Mother Nature. The mythological characters traditionally referred to as *diablitos* protect it and engage in agon with the event's participants. In this

sense, *La mascarada* can also be interpreted as an initiation ritual, in which teenagers and young adults are introduced to the violent, aggressive behaviors that they will encounter as adults in society. Thus, the ritual/liminal game provides them with an opportunity to develop practical skills to face these possible threats in the future.

A typical *mascarada* performance is composed of the following elements: masked characters, active participants, spectators, and musicians. Traditionally, *mascarada* performances began in the Catholic temple, but today communities use other public spaces as starting points—usually the local public school or high school serves this purpose. The route of the parade is always circular, and always ends where it started. Although the festivity was originally tied to Catholic celebrations, its pagan roots are also apparent in the festive atmosphere. People fill the streets eating and drinking traditional treats and *chicha* (a fermented corn drink of Indigenous origins). The music is loud and people dance, sing, and party in the streets.

Mocking authority and defying power structures are elements embodied within the performance. Tosatti states that this festivity is a game circumscribed in a place and time, and therefore the experiences lived during the game are only significant within the context of the game, and everyone who is present must obey and play by the rules ("Las Mascaradas del Valle Central" 16). In this game, all masked characters are intended as mock representations of authority figures. The *gigantes* represent the country's upper classes of Spanish descent and are depicted with light-colored skin, hair, and eyes, and wear formal clothing and expensive

jewelry. Helmet masks representing *el policía* and *el diplomático* are depicted as fat and having rosy cheeks, reflecting the privileged position they enjoy in society. *El diablo* and *la calavera*—throwbacks to the medieval Catholic and European carnivals—are fearsome figures because of the power they hold in the Christian credo to either manipulate people into evil, or judge and condemn them based on their actions. Helmet masked characters chase and terrify the audience, hitting young men and scaring or harassing young women.

Participants willingly enter the game and defy the abusive power of the masked characters, purposefully crossing the line of fire between the people and the masked characters, and hence, subjecting their bodies to physical pain and injury. With these performative, yet real, confrontations, the performance is embodying the daily struggle of subaltern communities; it becomes a clear and literal depiction of the confrontation between oppressors and the oppressed.

Agon: Ancient Backbone of Community Building

Masked traditions in Costa Rica are performances where normal, everyday senses of time and space are inverted. During a performance of *mascaradas*, the social rules that apply to civil obedience, gender roles, authority figures and the like are inverted and broken. Hence, *mascaradas* are liminal spaces where the 'norm' is broken in order to access a different reality; a different time and space where other behavioral rules apply. Tosatti argues that *mascaradas* are hybrid forms of European agrarian rituals ("Mascaradas del Valle Central" 18-19), meant

to mediate between the material world and the spiritual world, and thereby serve an important social development function for a community.

Aside from the Cartago *mascarada* tradition, two other examples of masked traditions in the Central Valley of Costa Rica are found in Barva de Heredia and San Antonio de Desamparados. An element that differentiates Cartago's *mascarada* from the other Central Valley performances is the repression of the agonistic element. As discussed earlier, agon is a crucial element to agrarian rituals, Spanish medieval performances brought to the new continent (*Moros y Cristianos*), and Indigenous ritual/dance performances found in Mesoamerica, such as *Rabinal Achí* and *El Güegüense.* Its presence in all of these different types of cultural manifestations speaks to its importance in society, probably because it represents the clash of two opposing forces that will eventually lead to progress.

Agon has been mostly eliminated from Cartago's *mascaradas*. This has resulted in the conversion of a *mascarada* performance festivity into an organized parade in which the characters simply walk through the streets but do not interact with the audience. Agon and audience interaction were most likely suppressed by institutional colonial authorities due to their fear of losing control over marginalized populations and this has carried over to the modern day. Nonetheless, as exposed in Chapter 2, the absence of agon has made Cartago's *mascarada* an example of national identity materialized through performance.

Unlike in Cartago, where the tradition has slowly been transformed into a parade, the main element of mask performances in Barva and San Antonio de

Desamparados is the confrontation (or agon) between masked characters and young males of the community. As discussed in Chapter 2, Cartago's colonial context meant that the authorities exercised more control and censorship over marginalized communities and their cultural production, including *mascaradas*. The censorship seeks to transform the performance—characterized by the confrontation of masked characters and young men of the community—into an organized and controlled parade of masked characters. Nonetheless, Indigenous settlements located far away from Cartago, such as Barva de Heredia, that also practiced *mascaradas*, were less controlled and censored in the colonial period. As a result, the agonistic elements of the festivities, along with their characteristics stemming from Indigenous roots, are more prevalent there than they are in the Cartago tradition.

Both Barva and San Antonio de Desamparados are communities in which Indigenous settlements were created after colonization, and thus they have a long history of cultural syncretism, struggle, and resistance to Spanish domination. Although no records were found to prove these communities performed street 'conquest' theatre, such as the *diabladas* and/or *escaramuzas* performed in colonial Cartago's Corpus Christi and patron saint celebrations, it is likely that this was the case, due to their proximity to Cartago: Desamparados is 13 miles west of Cartago, and Barva is 54 miles to the north-west.

Characteristics of the San Antonio de Desamparados Masked Tradition

For the purposes of this dissertation, I will consider masked traditions in Desamparados, Aserrí, and Tres Ríos as all rooted in the Cartago tradition. This is the manifestation of Freer's dedication to teaching the tradition to the communities between Cartago and San José. These examples represent characteristics of the masked tradition of the province of San José, which is the capital of the country.

In June 2016, I attended the masked performances held in honor of San Antonio in Desamparados. For four consecutive days, at noon, the masks came out into the streets to chase, scare, hit, and terrorize people. For the first two days, 20–30 masks took part in the masked performances and they were attended by an audience of about 100 people. On the third day, the main festival day (Sunday), the masked performance consisted of at least 200 masks and an audience that was more than double the number of masked characters.

These events were supported by the local government. Usually a small budget is assigned to the event's community organizers to cover basic needs. However, in the last ten years, the San Antonio *mascarada* celebration has caught the attention of Costa Ricans around the Central Valley, and now hundreds of people come to the town to witness the event. This creates fissures between the community and the local government that lacks the resources to control an event of this magnitude. During my visit, I witnessed a couple hundred people gathered in the main street of the town, covering the sidewalks and streets. The streets remained open to regular vehicular traffic, even though hundreds of people—

including masked characters, small children, and elderly people with limited mobility—were enjoying the festival. On the second day, a woman was hit by a car that was driving through the crowds. The whole event was stopped because of the accident, making evident the need for greater resources to at least pay for a police officer to regulate vehicular and pedestrian traffic during the event.

What follows is an ethnographic report of the two main days of the festival experienced during my visit to the San Antonio de Desamparados *mascarada* event in June 2016:

Friday, 10 June: I arrive at the San Antonio high school ten minutes before noon. The street and sidewalks in front of the school are filled with students in their school uniforms and community members. The audience is mostly composed of young people, ages 12–20. Elderly community members as well as mothers and babies are also part of the audience.

At exactly noon, twelve *bombetas* (fireworks) announce the start of the game/ritual. Immediately, a group of young men jumped into the street and took off their t-shirts. They stretched their bodies and jumped around warming up, as if preparing for a boxing match (see Image 26). Suddenly, the doors of the high school opened and masked characters started running out into the street. People in the street screamed and ran to hide inside businesses and the front yards of houses.

I was standing in the doorway of a coffee shop in front of the school, awaiting the start of the performance. Once it started, a group of girls rushed in and grabbed me, holding on to me and hiding behind my back, seeking shelter

from a pirate masked character that had chased them into the coffee shop. Everyone giggled around me. Once the masked pirate was gone, the girls laughed off the experience and commented on how they used me '*la señora*' (the older lady!) as a shield. I could not help but feel a little offended at the comment, since I certainly do not consider myself an old lady, but at the same time, this was a moment of revelation. I then understood that I was not a target for the masked characters, which must have meant that I was considered too old to be chased and hit by the masked characters. This realization allowed me to walk freely and enter the performance space for the remainder of the festival without fear of being a target.

Sunday, 12 June (third day of the festival and the main day of the celebration with a couple hundred audience members gathered in the town's main street): I made my way into the center of the performance. There I witnessed a peculiar game/ritual taking place: for a few minutes, masked characters and young players confronted each other with their bodies. They intimidated each other with body postures and aggressive attitudes, and then suddenly the crowd of young participants ran towards the masks, purposefully crossing in between them, receiving *chililllazos* (lashes) from multiple masked characters (see Image 27). Once they had all passed by, they stopped to catch their breath as a group, a few feet away from the space occupied by the masks. They paused for a moment, and then all of a sudden, the masks ran after the young men, chasing them as they ran out of the center of the performance and into the streets of the community. Then they gathered again in the center of the street and started the sequence all over

again. As I witnessed these aggressive confrontations, I could not help but confirm that the confrontation of masked character and young males—the agon—is very much alive in the community celebration of San Antonio.

About two hours after the performance had started, the *gigantes* made an appearance, followed by the musicians. The crowd cheered and danced to the *cimarrona* music. Throughout this event—which again attracted a crowd of a few hundred people—there were no state officials or police authorities present whatsoever. The community took over all the duties to control the activity with no official state representation whatsoever.

My visit to the San Antonio festival, a festival I had attended many times as a child due to its proximity to my home town, but that I had not witnessed in over 15 years, concluded with the realization that there are two very different moment to this celebration: the agon between masked characters and young males, and the community celebration (party) featuring masked characters, musicians, and community members dancing together.

Characteristics of the Barva de Heredia Masked Tradition

Aside from San Antonio de Desamparados, the other masked tradition where the clash between masked characters and young males is evident and resistant to the pressures of the local government is found in Barva de Heredia. Barva is located 3 miles north of Heredia's city center, in a province in the Central Valley located 25 miles north-east of Cartago. This community was a colonial city with an Indigenous settlement in the occidental part of the valley.

Today, Barva is well known for its arts and crafts. It is an artisan town with many of its citizens dedicated to sculpture, painting, and mask making.

Barva's first documented mask maker was Carlos Vargas. Although he was highly respected in his community and his work is considered a great source of inspiration for contemporary mask makers, he was also known for not sharing his techniques or knowledge of the tradition with anyone. Barva mask makers claim that when he was asked how he made his masks, Vargas would answer that the Barva volcano gifted the masks to him and that he only dusted them off before putting them on to dance (G. González 21).

While many of the community's mask makers publicly declare their admiration for Vargas, they also emphasize his unwillingness to share his knowledge of the craft. Mask maker Luis Fernando Vargas (Bombi) mentions that he was very intrigued by Vargas' masks and tried to approach him several times for guidance. However, Vargas refused to help and Bombi claims he had to learn the craft by observation, trial, and error. This experience led him to take a completely different approach. In contrast to Vargas, Bombi is always willing and able to share his knowledge with anybody who wants to learn about the craft of mask making or about the history of the tradition in Barva ("Personal Interview"). Bombi claims his interactions with the public and his dedication to sharing his knowledge of *mascaradas* with the people differentiates him from Vargas and fulfils his life purpose: the need to contribute to the promotion of popular culture in his hometown.

The Barva masked tradition exposes certain differences between it and the Cartago tradition, both in form and in the content of the performance. In terms of form, as opposed to the Cartago tradition, where most masked characters are anthropomorphic, in Barva, many characters are animals: the monkey, the dog, the parrot. Also, the authority figures and characters that resemble community members that are common in the Cartago tradition are replaced in Barva by folkloric characters and legends of rural oral tradition, such as *la bruja Zárate*, *la llorona*, and *la segua.*[23] Other characters, such as modern TV personalities, politicians, and soccer players are also present. The fusion of traditional characters and modern socio-cultural personalities makes this an interesting site for satire and socio-political critique. In content, the pagan residues of the festivity are visible: masked characters chase women to woo them and men confront each other (masked vs. unmasked). Zoomorphic masks are linked to Indigenous cultures, the honoring of Mother Nature, and animal worship.

In *The Future of Ritual*, Schechner states there are four great spheres of performance: entertainment, healing, education, and ritualizing (20). Originally, this event seemed to fulfill all these purposes:

- Entertainment: A festive atmosphere is pervasive in the communities in which these events take place. Labor becomes secondary to social interaction and celebration. People leave their homes and workplaces to spend all day and night out in the streets, interacting with neighbors, family, and friends. During this time, space and time no longer subscribe

to ‘normal’ social rules, and traditional working hours are spent instead in celebration.

- Healing: Ritual plays an important role in healing processes. Rituals are liminal spaces where we mediate our material dimension with a superior, spiritual dimension. Such experiences have power over our physical bodies and our psyches. Tosatti believes the origins of *mascaradas* are related to the healing sphere of ritual. Through this ritualized dance/game, humans developed their psyches and evolved into socially intelligent beings (Tosatti "Personal Interview").
- Education: Ritualized actions, as well as theatre, are reliable tools with which to teach social behavior. By doing, and by observing others, we learn what is expected of our behavior. The *mascarada* game presents learning opportunities for young male and female participants in two different areas: violence and sexuality. The confrontational nature of the masked characters’ interactions with young, male participants prepares the youth for adulthood and helps them develop assertive responses to conflict, aggression, and violence. Young men experience different physical responses to these threatening behaviors, and through practice develop the physical and mental skills necessary to confront conflict in adulthood. On the other hand, masked characters chase young women as a form of courtship. According to Tosatti, masked performances used to center around the idea of courtship. Before the practice evolved to include masks that depict frightening creatures, masked performances consisted of

men in the community wearing masks that only partially covered their faces. Young women would go out to the town plaza wearing their best dresses to wait for masked men to come out and woo them (Tosatti "Personal Interview"). Although this is no longer the main purpose of the event, it is common to see masked characters chasing after young women with the intention of clearly communicating their romantic interest.

- Ritualizing: The game of chasing and confronting men and wooing women becomes a ritualized action repeated year after year during these celebrations; thus, through embodied practice, it communicates the community's expectations regarding social behavior.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the state institutions of the country, responsible for the dissemination of the hegemonic culture have worked hard to eliminate the educational and ritualistic purpose of *mascarada* traditions, which once served to provide training opportunities for the youth to prepare and confront reality. This chapter, among other things, addresses the role of state institutions in enhancing the entertainment condition of *mascaradas* in order to obscure all of its other social functions. As briefly discussed above, the stakes of this ritual/game are high for the development of society since it not only entertains, but also serves educational and social development purposes.

The message of resilience embedded into the act of defying authority has always constituted a threat to those in power. To neutralize such a threat, powerful elites have managed to twist the significance of the practice, distorting its purpose from mocking and defying authority, to one that honors and respects

authority figures. The media has played an important role in this process of change by bringing together political figures and mask makers with their mocking version of the public figure, ignoring the ridiculous aesthetic of the tradition, and directing interviews to mask maker towards what they find 'inspirational' about the political or public figure, thereby eliciting positive reviews from the artisans.

The absence of agon has caused this event to morph from a carnival to a parade, which dramatically affects the role of the festivity in society, as well as its purpose within popular culture. As opposed to carnivals, where social roles are inverted as the oppressor becomes the oppressed and vice versa, a parade is a simple display of social roles performing accordingly. Carnivals incite chaos and catharsis, while parades are structured, and maintain social order throughout the event.

One of the main characteristics of masked traditions in Costa Rica is the level of community engagement they are able to achieve. All members of the community are welcome to participate in *mascarada* performances, although not all members of the community assume the same role. Male youths and young adults are the main targets of the event. Usually, both the performers and the participants that actively defy the masked characters are males in these age groups. Young women are sometimes chased and hit, although it is usually done with the intention of wooing them, which means that it is usually not an aggressive act, but a playful one. Older women and men participate as audience members, usually cheering for the masks when they chase boys and laughing and dancing around the musicians and masks.

According to Tosatti, the aggressive confrontation of masked characters and young males serves as an initiation ritual through which young adults practice and rehearse their responses to the aggressive behaviors they will most likely encounter as adults in society. Also, the exhibition of aggressive behavior, associated with virility, allows masked characters to impress and approach potential romantic partners as an opportunity to flirt with young women ("Personal Interview"). For Tosatti, the cathartic release of emotions that players and participants experience within the game is evidence of the ritualistic function of the performance ("Las Mascaradas del Valle Central" 13).

In my informal conversations and interviews with mask makers and players, they describe the experience of using a mask as a magical one. Comments such as "*yo me transformo en el diablo*" (I become the devil), "*no sé qué me pasa pero yo ya no soy yo*" (I don´t know what happens but I am no longer me) indicate the cathartic process they undergo. Helmet masked characters behave in aggressive, sometimes borderline violent, ways. They will chase girls and lift their skirts, or chase small children and corner them, threatening to hit them until they cry. It is an interesting phenomenon because the mask supposedly conceals the player's identity, allowing them to be transgressive, but this festivity usually takes place in small communities where everyone knows who is who, and they certainly know who the players are because they have been playing the same roles for years.

Even though the masks may not completely conceal their identities, the rules of the game protect them from being judged or punished for their aggressive

behavior. Taylor states that memory is "conjured through the senses; it links the deeply private with social, even official, practices" (*The Archive and the Repertoire* 82). This performance embodies a history of persecution and punishment. Every time it is re-enacted, it functions as a ritual that cleanses participants of such violence and strengthens the resilience of the people against the impositions of the hegemonic culture.

San José masked performances are known for their aggressive masked characters that chase and hit people with *chilillos* (thin tree branches or dried sticks), leaving marks on people's backs, legs, and arms. The Barva community is famously known for its use of cow bladders. The peculiarity of this choice attracts many tourists to the town during its patron saint celebrations in August, and it is currently a contentious element. While the government considers Barva's masked tradition an invaluable element of Costa Rica's cultural heritage—calling it an example of cultural identity and an 'artisan community'—it refuses to legitimize the practice due to the use of animal bladders. Nonetheless, the community refuses to let go of the use of bladders because they consider it part of their masked tradition's identity. Redirecting García Canclini's discussion, this example denotes the conflict between the 'traditional' and the 'modern'; moreover, it elucidates the absurdity of the Costa Rican socio-cultural development narrative, revealing instead the failure to reconcile tradition and modernity in favor of social development.

The ritualistic aspect of the tradition provides entertainment and contributes to the community's social development. It is no wonder that

colonizers considered this threatening. The efforts exerted to eliminate this practice have also survived the passage of time, and today, powerful elites continue to try and reduce this empowering event to the level of mere entertainment. Local governments, especially in Cartago (as discussed in Chapter 2), have reduced the practice to a parade of masked characters, eliminating the points of contact between masked characters and spectators, and thus castrating the practice of its social development intentions.

If during colonial times these events were censored and closely monitored to strip away all elements that could potentially empower performers and community participants to resist their colonizers, today, official institutions and powerful elites, such as governmental forces, intellectuals, and powerful economic groups, aim to exploit this practice for commercial purposes.

The distortions inflicted upon *mascarada* traditions facilitates the institutionalization of the practice. *Mascaradas*, a product of the popular classes, has become a manipulated artifact used by the dominant classes to assert their dominance. Furthermore, the state apparatus supports these practices under the guise that it is protecting the practice from dying out, and providing support so that it can grow. Assuming such statements as the norm is dangerous and problematic, since once the practice is taken out of its context, and especially out of the hands of its makers and practitioners, it runs the risk of being distorted and becoming something else.

From Mockery to Tribute

Today, even though *mascarada* traditions are very much alive and well, the tensions between tradition and modernity are palpable. For example, most of the traditional characters of the Cartago tradition, such as *el policía* and *el doctor*, have disappeared and been replaced by popular personalities with influence in the entertainment and political sphere of the country, such as soccer players, politicians, and TV personalities. This makes sense because in order for the hegemonic twist to work, it is necessary to strip the practice of its constitutive elements.

Along this lines, the state institutions of Costa Rica have incorporated *mascarada* performances into many official events, such as *El Festival de la Luz*,[24] Independence Day celebrations, and even official government celebrations, such as the inauguration of President Laura Chichilla's (2010) and Luis Guillermo Solís' (2014) governments. The presence of *mascaradas* in these events speaks to the country's commitment to popular culture practices, but it also plays a significant role in the distortion of the constitutive elements of the performance.

As an example, to celebrate the official *mascarada* day, *La Nación*—the newspaper with the largest circulation in the country—published a full-length article on 31 October 2015 that included influential political and television figures posing next to the masked characters that represented them. The article highlighted what an honor it was for these personalities to be 'cloned' by artists in the forms of masked characters ("Mascaradas en Costa Rica"). In the article, politician Leonardo Garnier, former Minister of Education from 2006–2014,

posed next to his mask (see Image 28). He mentions that the mask is an honor because it represents the 'role' he played for his country during his time as Minister of Education. He claims that what calls his attention the most to the mask is its long hair, because it resembles the controversy he experienced at the time regarding his position and whether it was acceptable for him to have long hair. Interestingly enough, he fails to mention the apathetic facial expression of the mask and its defensive posture, with its arms crossed around the torso—physical features that depict him as apathetic and unavailable to people.

Well-known news anchor Marcelo Castro was also highlighted in this article with a mask resembling him. He describes the experience as "un honor por varias razones: parte de mi vida viví en Barva, luego, me encanta que Costa Rica conserve tradiciones populares y también porque agradezco que el cantón se haya fijado en mi" [I consider it an honor because I once lived in Barva and I'm happy that the district noticed my work]. He also mentions his approval of Costa Rica's promotion of its popular culture ("Mascaradas en Costa Rica"). This is interesting because he is a well-recognized and highly polemical news anchor in Costa Rica. He is considered a public intellectual that constantly speaks the truth to people in power and has conducted several investigations into government corruption. Also, he has gained the people's trust and respect since he publicly announced his homosexuality in the 1990s, and has expressed his support of marginalized communities in the country (see Image 29).

In contrast with Leonardo Garnier's mask and the message it sends, Marcelo's mask appears relaxed and approachable. In fact, Castro says that what

he likes most about the mask is that "no aparezco como una persona seria o enojada" [I don't look too serious or moody]. The mask representations of both Castro and Garnier communicate the mask maker's interpretation of the person to the audience. In Garnier's case, he is depicted as apathetic and unwelcoming to people, while Castro's representation is welcoming and approachable. I think these representations accurately represent how most Costa Ricans feel about these public figures. In conclusion, even though *La Nación*'s article chooses to ignore these differences, and only highlights the masks as paying homage to the public figures, an analysis of the gestures and embodied behavior depicted by the masks has unveiled a social critique and mockery of such figures.

Other events in which masked characters have appeared to entertain the masses in the context of official government celebrations, or civic celebrations, include the *Traspaso de Poderes* (presidential inauguration). Selected mask maskers are invited to entertain the crowd with a parade of masked characters. As opposed to their traditional setting in the streets of their own communities, *mascarada* performances that are presented as parts of official government events function as parades rather than as game/rituals. The agonistic nature of the event is completely repressed. The masks and music are only meant to entertain the crowd. Some of the mask makers that have been invited to these events include Luis Fernando Vargas (Bombi) in 2010, and Miguel Moreira in 2014, who are both from Barva de Heredia.

During my interviews with mask makers, I was interested in finding out whether masked characters had participated in national protests, such as during

the referendum to approve or veto the free trade agreement with the United States in 2007, an event that polarized the country and generated massive public protests. Costa Rica was the last country in the region to accept the conditions of a free trade agreement with the United States. The country was divided between proponents and opponents and a national referendum was used to decide if the trade deal should go through or not. The agreement was approved despite the massive opposition and public protests that took place pretty much every day. Because masked performances have a transgressive nature that is capable of resisting imposition and mocking authority, I wondered if they had been used during these tumultuous protests.

Some of my interviewees, including Guillermo Cubero, a museologist at the *Museo de Cultura Popular*, believed that *mascaradas* did not participate in the public protests against free trade because masked performances are a product of the popular classes, and the protestors were mostly people from the more highly educated sectors of the population ("Personal Interview"). However, other sources claimed that masked performers did indeed participate in the protests. One informant recalled seeing ridiculous masked characters representing Oscar Arias (the former Costa Rican president) and George W. Bush. In Image 30, masked characters representing Bush and Arias posed for the cameras while holding their index fingers to their lips, a gesture that denotes they are acting suspiciously, plotting to collude against the interests of the people. Both are holding stacks of money in their hands.

Some specific masked characters have appeared during civic protests and marches. For example, during an Educators' protest in 2016, mask maker Esteban Segura dressed as President Luis Guillermo Solís to criticize the government's unwillingness to negotiate budget cuts to the education sector and cuts to the salaries of its employees (see Image 31). Similarly, in 2009, among the masked characters that participated in the National *Mascarada* Day in the city of Barva was a representation of the city's mayor, Mercedes Hernández (see Image 32).

Although it appears that the representation of influential political and public figures is meant to compliment them and highlight their contributions to society, the presence of these characters in massive popular protests against the government speaks to the transgressive nature of *mascaradas* and their potential use in social critique.

Mass Production and Consumption of National Identity

The last thirty years have marked a new social order for Latin America, characterized by neoliberal governments and economic models privileging transnational corporations, the mass production of goods, and of course, mass consumption. Under these conditions, García Canclini suggests we must explore the cultural and political need to signify the present and legitimize today's hegemony through elevating the prestige of heritage: "[h]abrá que explorar las necesidades *culturales* de conferir un significado más denso al presente y las necesidades *políticas* de legitimizar mediante el prestigio del patrimonio histórico la hegemonía actual" (Culturas Híbridas 49).

Even though *mascaradas* were originally meant to accompany civic and religious festivities in honor of patron saints, today this is not the case, and the tradition no longer has the support of the state and the Catholic Church in these types of events. Nevertheless, most mask makers in the Central Valley participate in the official *Mascarada* Day festivities organized by their local governments on 31 October. The rest of the year, mask makers offer *mascarada* performance services to the public. One can rent an ensemble of *mascaradas* to perform at any sort of private party. Sometimes mask makers are hired by government officials to participate in official events, but today, aside from the performances that take place on 31 October, and on the feast days of each community's patron saint, *mascarada* performances are only available for hire.

One characteristic of globalized neoliberal societies is the impact that their branding has on consumers. We perceive ourselves as part of a community based on the objects that we consume (García Canclini *"Latinoamericanos"* 25). Costa Rica's *mascaradas* have not escaped this process. Hybridity allows heritage (including a set of knowledge and techniques) to be reconverted[25] in order to reinsert it in new contexts to meet the demands of the market, and thus of production. Many artisans have found creative, innovative ways to commercialize the practice of *mascaradas* in order to earn a living. Companies are appropriating elements of the practice, particularly the characters, to brand their products. One can find figurines, beers, tote bags, coffee mugs, t-shirts, and other consumables branded with logos and icons inspired by *mascarada* characters (see Image 33).

Many of these companies belong to former mask makers that used to preserve *mascarada* traditions through performance, thereby respecting the oral transmission and embodied practice that goes with it. These mask makers now consider the manufacturing of *mascarada's* consumable items more lucrative than organizing *mascarada* performances. This is dangerous as more and more mask makers are moving away from the mask making and performance tradition—characterized by oral and embodied transmissions of knowledge—into small arts and crafts businesses that produce consumable items based on *mascaradas* on a large scale.

Because masked traditions can rely on little to no governmental support, most mask makers that still perform with their ensemble of masks must cover the costs of rehearsals, transportation, and meals for all their players, and they must spend many hours organizing the event and completing all the paperwork that is required before they are allowed to perform. All these tasks and requirements make *mascarada* performances an expensive practice to sustain. On the other hand, the blossoming of a market for consumable objects based on *mascaradas* is appealing to mask makers because it generates more money and demands less of their time and resources.

Although many mask makers consider the manufacturing of new products a good way to complement their income, the mass production of these items moves mask makers away from the tradition that is characterized by its oral transmission and embodied learning. The neoliberal economic and political order

is divorcing the practice from its social purpose, and reducing it to mere entertainment.

In García Canclini's words:

> [N]unca hubo tantos artesanos, ni músicos populares, ni semejante difusión del folclor, porque sus productos mantienen funciones tradicionales (dar trabajo a indígenas y campesinos) y desarrollan otras modernas: atraen a turistas y consumidores urbanos que encuentran en los bienes folclóricos signos de distinción, referencias personalizadas que los bienes industriales no ofrecen. (*Culturas Híbridas*, 18)

Canclini's citation states that the dissemination of folklore in contemporary Latin America is successful because it fulfills two needs: on the one hand, it employs Indigenous groups and peasants, and on the other it attracts tourists and consumers who find a sense of comfort in these items, a sense of distinction and of personalized references to their culture that globalized industrial goods cannot offer.

Although the objectification and commercialization of masked tradition practice allows artisans to adapt their products to meet the demands of our time, it also separates the practice from its ritual function and social development purposes. Consequently, it is at risk of losing the oral tradition and embodied learning process it has maintained for centuries.

Artisan and mask maker, Elena Cecilia Hernández, recognized by *El Colegio Universitario de Cartago* as the first female mask maker of the province of Cartago in 2012, is an example of entrepreneurship. She started making masks

in the year 2000, after an accident prevented her husband from working full time. She started as an artisan, collecting old CDs and painting bucolic Costa Rican landscapes on them. One day, she showcased her crafts at a town fair and was approach by a man who was looking to buy a set of figurines of *mascarada* characters. She had never made such a thing, but was familiar with the mask making tradition of her hometown, Cartago, and given the economic needs of her family, she accepted the challenge. She made the set of figurines and soon became a success in her hometown. People started to contact her asking for sets of masked characters for performances and she was even offered a position at the local vocational school teaching *mascarada* mask making techniques.

Although she had never made masks before, she was determined to take advantage of these job opportunities for the benefit of her family. She asked Guillermo Martínez—one of the Martínez brothers discussed in Chapter 2—for advice and developed a mentor/apprentice relationship with him. Although he offered her his masks after he retired, she refused to keep them because she did not want to be perceived as stealing his work and techniques; instead, she insists on perfecting her own technique and thinks that this is what distinguishes her brand from other mask makers in the region ("Personal Interview").

Hernandez's crafts are all inspired by the *campesino* traditions and customs of Cartago. Her work includes puppets, marionettes, complete sets of *mascaradas* for performances, collections of *mascarada* figurines, collections of characters from the area's oral tradition (urban legends), nativity sets inspired by the *campesino* lifestyle, and sets of figurines representing the traditional costumes

of each Costa Rican province (see Image 34). Her work has been showcased all around the country in national and international arts and crafts events, and she even represented Costa Rica at a South Korean festival in 2012.

The discussion above explored the tensions found in negotiating tradition and modernity in the context of the *mascarada* traditions of Costa Rica's Central Valley. Because *mascaradas* are a form of popular culture that is constantly evolving and adapting to suit its context, it is understood that modifications, such as changes in characters and techniques of fabrication, will occur. However, if overlooked, the tradition risks losing some of its constitutive elements, such as the agon, which plays a significant role in the social development of the community's members.

Another dimension to the process of adapting the tradition to contemporary Costa Rican needs reveals the burgeoning market based on the transformation of *mascarada* icons into consumable items. Most mask makers and artisans consider this a boon to their income and creative development, and it can also be argued that it contributes to the country's domestic and international tourist markets. Nonetheless, I believe it is the job of artists and scholars such as myself, as well as cultural institutions to supervise and remain attentive to the demands of the 21st century with regard to the practice of *mascaradas*, in order to preserve the intangible heritage transmitted through oral and embodied practice.

Chapter 4

Performing Cultural Memory and Resilience:

Boruca's *Juego de los diablitos*

Chapters 2 and 3 focused on the *mascarada* tradition of the Central Valley of Costa Rica, its adaptability to the context and to the national construction projects of the 19th and 20th centuries, and also on the distortions currently being experienced due to the influence of a neoliberal ideology in the country. As has been widely discussed, even though *mascaradas* are in part a product of the Indigenous settlements once located in the colonial capital of Costa Rica, most elements that link the festivity to Indigenous cultures have mutated into hybrid forms, including European, African, and Amerindian elements. That is to say, Indigenous elements, such as the zoomorphic forms found in the Barva masked tradition, are palpable and recognizable, but contemporary *mascaradas* are not considered an Indigenous tradition in the eyes of Costa Ricans.

As has also become evident, the Indigenous cultures of Costa Rica have been erased from the national identity construction projects of the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries, and have no points of identification with such constructions. According to Williams, after independence and throughout the period 1824–1920, the liberal Costa Rican state had little influence on the relationships between Indigenous communities and the state authorities (278). During this time, colonial patterns to control Boruca's political, economic, social, and religious dimensions persisted as they had before independence.

This chapter explores the invisibility of Indigenous cultures in the process of a national construction of identity in the country. This will be contrasted to the rich cultural production of the Boruca people and their national commercialization of products appealing to domestic and foreign tourists. My goal is to reveal the exploitation of Indigenous people first perpetuated by European colonizers and then later by a centralized Costa Rican metropolis that erases Indigenous cultures from its national imagination while at the same time exploiting their cultural products as symbols of national identity.

To support this observation, I will discuss three theatrical productions created during the liberal and neoliberal state that intended—and I argue, failed—to include Indigenous representations in the construction of Costa Rican national identity. The rest of the chapter will focus on the vast cultural production of the Boruca people, and analyzes in depth their cultural performance, *El juego de los diablitos*, as a performative site of cultural memory, resilience, and transgression. Since this festival can be traced back to Costa Rica's colonial period, I will analyze it as a site of traumatic cultural memory that embodies the natives' resistance to Spanish colonization and to contemporary Costa Rica's dominant culture.

Indigenous Representations in the Theatre of Costa Rica

How official narratives of the nation depict Indigenous lives differ greatly from how Indigenous people view their history and ancestry. To counter these two perspectives, I will address how traditional 'author' based theatre has

represented Indigenous populations in a failed attempt to include Indigenous voices in the national identity projects of the 19th and 20th centuries.

In "Drama histórico e identidad nacional: La configuración de la conquista en el teatro Costarricense," Wilfred Floeck discusses four Costa Rican plays of the liberal state that depict the process of conquest and colonization of the country. His goal is to track and uncover the ways in which the country has constructed its national identity. Floeck argues that historical dramas can reveal the development of the national discourse of a nation: "un análisis de dramas históricos de distintas épocas revela el desarrollo del discurso histórico de la nación;" thus, the confrontation between artists and history is also a confrontation between the artists and the nation's cultural identity: "el enfrentamiento del artista con la realidad histórica es, al mismo tiempo, un enfrentamiento con la identidad cultural de su país" (61).

The conquest and colonization of Latin America played an important role in the construction of many countries' national identities. Examples such as Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Peru are significant as they continue to perform theatrical performances that are the products of the syncretism of not only Indigenous and European cultures, but also of African and Asian cultures, reflecting the origins of those who came to reside—either voluntarily or by force—in these territories.

This is important because Floeck considers national identity formation to include the interaction of multiple cultures. To describe the identity of Latin American nations, Floeck cites Bonilla and Vladich: "identidad que no es la del

indígena, ni la del europeo, si no otra, producto de la imposición, integración-rechazo-marginalidad y asimilación de la cultura nativa y de los inmigrantes (europea, asiática, africana, etc.)" [identity that is not Indigenous, nor European, but a product of impositions, integration-rejection-marginalization and assimilation of the native culture and the culture of (European, Asian, African, etc.) immigrants] (62). Nonetheless, there are not many representations of the conquest and colonization of Costa Rica in Costa Rican theatre. According to Floeck, the process of national identity in Costa Rica started after independence and was strongly tied to the democratic-liberal movement of the country and by the economic trends of the mid 19th century.

In general, historians and researchers agree that after independence, the nascent Latin American nations started processes of national identity construction, and theatre was used as a tool to support such constructions. In Costa Rica, after independence in 1821, the inauguration of the *Teatro Nacional* (National Theatre) in 1897 and the liberal political movement of the second half of the 19th century consolidated the start of a theatrical movement concerned with the expression and dissemination of Costa Rica's national identity enterprise (Floeck 63). Although Floeck is concerned with plays that represent any aspect of the conquest and colonization of Costa Rica, I am specifically concerned with the representation of Indigenous cultures in these productions and the role that these representations play in the process of national identity construction. Thus, in the following pages I will discuss three of the four examples studied by Floeck to analyze the

depiction of natives and Europeans in these dramas and how they support or reject the nation's identity discourse.

El marqués de Talamanca (1900) by Carlos Gagini

El marqués de Talamanca debuted on 24 November, 1900 at Teatro Nacional de Costa Rica. This play is a historical *zarzuela* belonging to the *Comedia Española del Siglo de Oro* tradition. The story takes place in 1663 in Cartago, the colonial capital city. The main characters are Rodrigo Arias Maldodano y Dávila, conqueror and governor of Costa Rica, and his antagonists, Lope Mendoza y Lara and Juan de Obregón. The story revolves around Rodrigo's nomination by the Spanish king to become marquis of Talamanca, a title given to him due to his participation in the process of 'peacefully' converting the natives of the Talamanca region to Christianity. According to Floeck, what is interesting in this piece is the oppositional representation of the figures of the conquerors. On the one hand, Lope Mendoza and Juan de Obregón are depicted as typical Eurocentric conquerors: they treat the natives with disdain and believe themselves to be culturally superior to them. On the other hand, Rodrigo is depicted as a pacifist: a conqueror that respects the cultural 'otherness' of the natives and is receptive to their cultural worldview, even though he still speaks to the cultural superiority of Europe over that of the New World.

This play is important in the process of national construction because Costa Rica's national construction project was based on an ideal of peace from as early as the 19th century. This play consolidates this idea by affirming the myth

that the conquest and colonization of Costa Rica were not traumatic processes for the native people, but peaceful transitions. For Floeck, this play defends the new national discourse of the late 19th century based on the reconciliatory and peaceful interactions between creoles and natives: "[la obra] [i]ntenta defender una nueva identidad nacional que se basa en una reconciliación entre vencedores y vencidos y una convivencia pacífica entre criollos e indígenas" (66).

El anillo del pavo real (1988) by Miguel Rojas

This play is based on the Indigenous legend "la gran piedra de Acserí" (the great Acseri rock). According to the legend, during colonial times the village of Acserí was governed by Alonso de Pérez y Colma. An Indigenous woman named Zárate, who had magical powers, fell in love with the governor. He promised to marry her, she believed him, and slept with him; but he did not keep his promise and abandoned her once he had satisfied his lust and carnal desires. As revenge, she cursed the village and transformed it into a great rock in the jungle, turning the people into wild animals and the governor into a castrated peacock. Once a year over a 300-year period, the governor surprises Zárate bathing in the lake surrounded by a beautiful luscious rainforest. Consumed by lust and sexual desire, he violently attempts to rape her, but every year he fails because he is castrated. The only way he can break the spell is by treating Zárate as an equal, as a human being, and not as an object of his desire.

The governor (Spaniard) and Zárate (native) embody Europe and America in the play. According to Floeck, the representation of Europeans as masculine

and Indigenous people as feminine is not a new phenomenon. The European discourse that prevailed during the conquest and colonization of the Americas associated Europe with masculinity, knowledge, and reason, while America was associated with femininity, nature, and feelings. Traditionally, masculine traits are perceived as superior, but in this play the tables are turned because Zárate is the one in control of the governor. In the world of the play, Zárate lives in total harmony with nature and with the cosmos. Beautiful rainforests and animals surround her and they all happily coexist. Her communion with, understanding of, and appreciation and respect for all living things drives her to become aware of her own existence and value and it is this recognition and respect that she demands from the governor, who is incapable of such empathy. As a result, Zárate is represented as the wiser of the two—a representation that symbolically depicts Indigenous culture as superior to European.

With this play, Rojas attempts to empower Indigenous cultures and to include them in the cultural imagination of the country. Zárate's curse is not to be misinterpreted as evil; instead, it is an act of resistance meant to demand recognition, visibility, and respect on equal terms. It is a subversive action. Nonetheless, it is easy to assume Zárate is vengeful and bitter towards Spanish authority. This element brings to the fore the question of whether the play helps consolidate a positive representation of Indigenous people or does it fail to do so and simply stresses the already negative stereotypes imposed on Indigenous people by colonial authorities?

Garavito (Sol de la Libertad) (2007) by Miguel Rojas

Garavito was written from 1997–2007 and debuted at *Teatro Vargas Calvo* in San José in 2007. Floeck states that Miguel Rojas' approach to theatre is concerned with history. He quotes Rojas as stating that 'to know our history is an irrevocable obligation,' ["Es una obligación irrenunciable conocer nuestra historia"] (70). Rojas' theatre is a theatre of memory. It is a theatre that (re)constructs collective memory and the country's identity (70). Rojas is concerned with the cultural legacy of Indigenous groups. His play speaks to a complex process of national identity construction; one that not only recognizes the autochthonous cultures but also the contributions of all immigrant groups (69).

This play takes places during the conquest of Costa Rica and the action takes place during the multiple interactions between the recently arrived Spaniards with the Huetar Indigenous culture. Like in *El marquéz de Talamanca*, in this play two types of conqueror appear on stage. Juan de Caballón is depicted as ambitious, brutal, and extremely violent, while Juan Vázquez is generous and diplomatic (70-71). Nonetheless, unlike Gagini's play in which these are character traits, Rojas makes it clear that both conquerors are using different tactics (violence and diplomacy) to achieve the same objective: making Spain the most powerful kingdom in Europe. At different moments in the play, both conquerors justify their violent and oppressive actions by stating that politics requires them to behave in that way, and by suggesting that at least they can confess their sins to a priest and be absolved of all guilt by God.

On the other hand, according to Floeck, Rojas places a great emphasis on the world of the Huetars. The author depicts the Huetars as peaceful beings that live in harmony with nature "los indígenas viven en armonía completa con la naturaleza. Su vida consiste en la caza para garantizar su subsistencia y en fiestas y danzas pacíficas" (playwright's note qtd. in Floeck 71). Floeck believes, and I agree, that this is probably not historically accurate, but the fact that the author cares to depict Indigenous people in such a way speaks to his desire—and that of his generation—to include positive representations of Indigenous groups in the cultural imagination of the country, and thus, expand the discourse on national identity.

A commonality among these plays is that Indigenous people are rarely the protagonists of the story, and when they are, as in the case of Zárate, they are depicted as having strong, negative traits, such as being vengeful. Another interesting note is that their individuality is commonly denied, meaning they are usually depicted as a group with no individual characters forming part of the main plot. Although authors like Rojas have good intentions when it comes to including positive Indigenous representations as part of the national identity narrative, the fact that no Indigenous characters are represented as complex individuals (like the European characters are) falls short of creating a positive, impactful representation of Indigenous people.

Furthermore, all of these plays were written by male intellectuals residing in the city who have had little to no interaction with Indigenous people. Their interpretation of Indigenous life, and thus their representation of Indigenous men

and women, is marked by the legacy of a colonial European prism that presents Indigenous people as an inferior 'other.'

At the most, Rojas' representation of Indigenous culture is romantic and simplistic. It reduces Indigenous culture to living in harmony with nature and as compliant with the dominant culture. In my opinion, none of these plays portrays a complex, accurate representation of Indigenous people in Costa Rica, their cultural roots, and their struggles. To counter the romanticized, stereotypical Indigenous representations in these plays, the following section will address the worldview and vast cultural production of the Boruca people, emphasizing how they claim their identity and profess their belonging through the performance of *El juego de los diablitos*.

Boruca Culture

In modern Costa Rica, there are eight Indigenous groups.[26] Most of these groups, especially those living in the settlements located in the North Pacific and North Central part of the country, are Mayan descendants. The Boruca people belong to the Brunca ethnic group. According to Williams, people of Brunca origins are linked to the Indigenous groups of South America, specifically to the Chibchas located in the highlands of Bogotá, Colombia (Williams vii). Brunca land is located 240 km (about 150 miles of mountainous terrain) southeast of San José, with a population of approximately 2100 people (Fundación Museos del Banco Fundación Museos del Banco Central 2). It is the only Indigenous

community in the country that resisted being displaced by colonizers and government officials. Today, they continue to live on their ancestors' land.

The territory is demarcated by the *Río Grande de Térraba*, also called the Diquís River. The name Diquís comes from the Brunca word 'Di Krit,' which translates to 'big water' (Stone 3) (see Image 35). Brunca people have amalgamated at least twelve small communities in this geographical area,[27] with the community named Boruca being the largest and most populated of them all, followed by Rey Curré. The Boruca community is restricted to a three-kilometer radius, and it is home to about 500 people. In modern geopolitical terms, Boruca is a district of Buenos Aires County, located in the province of Puntarenas.

The term Boruca was first mentioned by conqueror Juan Vázquez de Coronado in a letter to the king of Spain in 1563. Documents of the time describe Borucas as "indios infieles y de guerra" [unfaithful warriors] (Stone 3). During the conquest, the term was applied to all Indigenous groups extending from the territory of the Quepos Indigenous groups (Central Pacific coast of Costa Rica) to the Chiriquí Viejo River in Panama. Around 1608—41 years after the Spaniards started to conquer and colonize Costa Rica—Fray Alonso de la Calle entered the Boruca tribe and, according to Stone, "succeeded in converting and pacifying them" (3-4). By 1666, the term Boruca was used to denominate not only this tribe, but also other small tribes from the south and the nearby coastal areas.

Before the arrival of the Spanish, Boruca had a communal barter-based economy, exchanging artifacts and agricultural goods with neighboring communities. After the Spanish invasion, this changed to follow a monetary

economic model, but Borucas remained outside of the national economy (which was based on the trade of coffee and banana plantations). This fact speaks of the segregation of Indigenous communities from the national economic project and the progressive expectations of the country. According to Williams, by 1975, the economic model of the community was transitioning from an agricultural model to a cattle-based economy, but still, the transition was meant to fulfill the needs of the community, and thus, it was not included in the economic force of the country.

Since colonial times, the Boruca people have endured the imposition of European culture, which has succeeded in modifying many elements of everyday life in the community. This includes the conversion to the Catholic religion, the suppression of their myths and legends (which explained their worldview), the loss of their traditional costumes, and the almost complete disappearance of their native language. On the other hand, after independence, Borucas have constantly fought a nation state that keeps them at the margins in terms of their contributions to and existence in the official historical narrative of the country, and provides very few resources to further the social development of Indigenous people. They also constantly endure the threat of national and international corporations attempting to steal their territory and exploit their natural resources.

Oral tradition plays an important role in Boruca culture. Many myths and legends are transmitted through storytelling and orally passed down through the generations. Legends are particularly important to Borucas as they help explain their history and cultural heritage. For example, *La leyenda de Cuasrán* is well

known among Borucas and used to explain their resistance and resilience when faced with the threat of foreign domination. According to the legend, Cuasrán was an Indian who ran deep into the jungle to hide from the Spaniards that first arrived in Boruca. Cuasrán opposed the domination of his people and resisted the indoctrination of the Spaniards. He never returned to the community but his spirit is very much alive in the mountain and in the everyday life of Borucas. The community believes Cuasrán watches them from a distance and protects the community from evil. Also, if foreigners invade the mountain with the intent to illegally hunt animals, cut down trees, or do any harm, they will be scared and punished by Cuasrán for not respecting the natural laws of the mountain. Most myths and legends are based on real locations that are still considered sacred and highly respected by the Boruca people, revealing the importance of the land in asserting cultural heritage.

During colonization, Borucas were indoctrinated into the Catholic religion. Today, the community is very committed to Christianity and are fervent practitioners. They do not maintain any rituals or practices to worship their pre-colonial gods; however, they do acknowledge *Sibú* as the god of their land, a god that must be respected because of his omnipresence, but who must not be worshiped (Constenla 33). Nonetheless, *Sibú* and other important mythical figures like Cuasrán continue to live in the community's social imagination, and their presence is constantly invoked in everyday life. This example demonstrates the imposition of a European worldview on the native belief system and how, aside from being rendered invisible, the Indigenous myth of creation refuses to

disappear and continues to be present in the community's collective memory, even though its significance and its sacred nature have been altered.

Most Costa Ricans are unaware of the vast cultural production of the Boruca people. As has been the case for many Indigenous cultures around the world, Costa Rica's official history, as it is taught in schools and published in books and official documents, does not include the Boruca people. As a result, most Costa Ricans believe Indigenous cultures in Costa Rica were mostly eradicated and that those that have survived have been completely assimilated into Western culture. This common belief could not be further from the truth. Borucas have a rich and vast history full of different types of cultural productions that function as vehicles to transmit cultural memory and to materialize their cultural heritage.

As an example, during one of my research trips to Boruca I was joined by four of my Costa Rican friends who had never visited an Indigenous community before and knew nothing about the Borucas. They had not even heard of *El juego de los diablitos*, even though this is one of the most significant cultural manifestations of the country. After the visit, they were surprised by the rich cultural experience they had had while interacting with people from the community, buying their arts and crafts, eating their traditional food, drinking *chicha*, and witnessing the performance of *los diablitos*. On our way home, one of my friends was really upset that he had known nothing about the Boruca people before his visit. He told me that he could not believe that after years of attending public schools in San José, his education did not include the history and cultural

heritage of our Indigenous groups. His comment and his resentment towards the education system resonated with me and made me reflect about the importance of writing this dissertation. If I accomplish nothing else, I want to contribute to the dissemination of knowledge about the Indigenous communities of my country. In that moment, I concluded that the Costa Rican people should be the target audience of this project, thus the urgent need to translate this work and make it available to readers in my country.

Coming back to the discussion of Boruca culture, their history of struggle, oppression, and domination is very strongly felt by recent generations of Borucas. They have consciously reactivated as many cultural practices as possible to preserve their culture and resist the homogenization of a globalized society. In the second half of the 20th century, artisan Ismael González (1928–2014) started to preserve the masked tradition in his community by offering free workshops and supplying all the materials needed for people to make masks. According to his son, Kamel González, Ismael González had been dedicated to the preservation of Boruca culture for as long as he could remember. Kamel describes how, during the 1970s and 80s, the *juego de los diablitos* was performed every year, but it was slowly losing some of its constitutive elements, such as the types of masks used for the festivity. Western influence was leading youngsters to use masks made abroad, representing American superheroes or TV characters. Ismael González saw this as extremely problematic, because when he was a child, his family members reunited for months prior to the festival to put together the masks that they would use that year. For him, the process of making the masks in a group

was a cultural practice in itself. It provided a space for dialogue and entertainment, as well as a space to develop and perfect the techniques used to fabricate the masks and passed through generations via embodied knowledge. Fearing that this tradition was disappearing, he organized an afterschool and weekend workshop for the children and youngsters of the community to teach them how to carve and decorate the traditional Boruca masks of their ancestors ("Personal Interview").

His example was followed by other community members, such as Angela González, who started teaching and preserving the Boruca weaving technique to make costumes, bags, and accessories; and Margarita Lázaro, who started a project to build a Borucan cultural museum in the community. The *Asociación Integral de Desarrollo Comunal* was founded in 1977 to preserve Boruca culture and serves as an intermediary between the community, the government, and autonomous institutions seeking to develop projects in the area.

These examples of community organization were fruitful and led to collaborations with state institutions such as *El Instituto Nacional de Aprendizaje* (INA), which sponsored a series of workshops in arts and crafts for people of the community in the 1990s. Today, many families in the community are dedicated to the making of arts and crafts, crafting masks and figurines to sell to tourists, and making items out of their weaved textiles. These techniques preserve their ancestors' way of life while complementing contemporary arts and crafts techniques that are learned at home and in school. Children learn by oral tradition and embodied knowledge, meaning they observe and practice the techniques

following their parents' example. Today, even though Borucas are still involved in agriculture and ranching activities to support their economy, the main source of income in Boruca comes from sales of arts and crafts and from tourism. Because of these efforts, Borucas value the sharing of their cultural roots and history with outsiders.

The Boruca community has branded itself as an Indigenous community of artisans, and the materials used to make their crafts are all-natural, organic, and freely available in their environment. Even though the community is hard to reach due to the steep, narrow gravel roads and the harsh weather conditions of the South Pacific jungle, each year the community is visited by thousands of domestic and international tourists. Boruca families profit from tourism by selling goods, renting out their front and backyards for camping, providing bathrooms and showers to visitors for a modest fee, and by preparing and selling traditional food and drinks to visitors.

Textiles

Borucas are the only Indigenous group in the country to maintain their traditional technique for the making and weaving of textiles. Traditionally, weaving has been restricted to the women of the community. Borucan ancestors used weaving techniques to make their clothing and to create crafts that were exchanged with other neighboring tribes. Today, Borucan textiles are used to create tote bags, wallets, and other decorative items for tourist consumption.

The textile production process begins with collecting dried cotton and its

seeds. The materials are processed in a *huso* (spindle) to create the threads which are then dyed with natural ingredients coming from trees, leaves, fruits, seeds, and clay (see Image 36). The color purple is obtained from *caracoles del múrice*, a seashell only available on the beaches of Ventanas and Pinñuela, which requires traveling by land to the South Pacific coast. This activity is one of the most deeply rooted traditions of the Boruca people (Fundación de Museos 7). It serves as a space for interaction and cooperation among the different generations of Borucas that produce textiles.

Drums, Bows and Arrows, Baskets, and *Calabazos*

Borucan artisans are also committed to the preservation of other traditional cultural items such as drums, bows and arrows, baskets, and *calabazos*. Although these items are no longer commonly used day-to-day, they are now made for and sold to tourists, and are decorated with Boruca motifs. The drums are made out of balsa wood and covered with cow hide—traditionally, peccary and deer skin was used. Bows and arrows are made of *pejibaye* wood and were traditionally used by Borucas to fish and hunt in the woods. Today, bow and arrows are produced for tourist consumption. They are found in many sizes and shapes and are decorated with Borucan textiles and dyes. Baskets are made of vegetable fibers coming from *bejuco negro*, *cabuya* and *pita* trees. Basketry is the least practiced artisanal craft in the community due to difficulties associated with finding the materials and the irrelevance of these items in modern Borucan life. *Calabazos* are a round-shaped fruit with a very hard shell, like coconuts, but smoother on the outside. Borucas

use these fruits to create *jícaras* (oval) and *guacales* (round) water containers. The fruit is cut and cleaned, preserving its oval or round shape. Then, the outside is carved and decorated with Borucan motifs, textiles, and dyes. *Jícaras* and *guacales* are used to carry water or *chicha* (fermented corn drink) and are commonly found in most households.

Masks

Boruca masks are the most well recognized cultural product of this Indigenous group. Masks were used in community rituals to engage the people with the spiritual world of their ancestors, and were also a common item used by warriors to defend their territory from other tribes. Masks are also a part of their performance culture, commonly featured in *La fiesta de los negritos* and *El juego de los diablitos*.

Boruca masks are carved out of balsa or cedar wood and are a syncretic mixture of anthropomorphous and zoomorphic shapes. Since the traditional Boruca mask was meant to frighten enemies, it commonly had big teeth, horns, and an aggressive facial expression. The traditional mask was not painted but maintained its original wood color (see Image 11); however, after the mask making boom of the 1990s, most mask makers are now painting the masks to make them more appealing to tourists (see Image 12).

According to Chang, all mask production in Costa Rican Indigenous communities was interrupted and eradicated right after the arrival of the Spaniards; however, after colonization, some Indigenous groups, such as the

Bruncas, Chorotegas, and Malekus, re-established their mask making traditions and are still producing masks and utilizing them in their cultural practices (25). This is significant because it points to the resilience of Indigenous people and their ability to protect their cultural roots and traditions. According to Kamel González, the mask is a sacred item because the cultural heritage of the Borucas lives inside the mask ("Personal Interview"). The return of the mask after it had been forbidden denotes its role as *surrogate* within a *performance genealogy* (Roach 1996) that refuses to relinquish elements of cohesion and identity in the native culture. This will be further discussed later in this chapter.

Performing Cultural Memory and Resilience

Boruca festivities of a performative nature include representations of Indigenous people from a self-referential perspective. Festivities like *Fiesta de los negritos* and *El juego de los diablitos* include representations of Indigenous men engaged in conflict with representations of white men (Spaniards). In these festivities, Indigenous people represent themselves as strong and resilient and as witty and clever. These traits are important to the narrative of Indigenous identity that they construct and legitimize in daily life, which is in stark contrast to the erasure and marginalization imposed on them by the dominant culture.

Going back to the colonial enterprise, the colonization project that the Spaniards led in Latin America focused on creating a 'new Spain' (Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire* 33), thus erasing any evidence of an existing Indigenous culture. The Catholic Church played an important role in the process

of delegitimizing Indigenous culture, and theatre was one of the tools it used to achieve this purpose. Considering that the language barrier was a tremendous obstacle at the time, theatre became a reliable vehicle through which Spaniards could colonize and convert the natives. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, medieval Spanish dramatic forms and techniques were used to introduce Christian rituals and celebrations to native Indigenous groups, and also to display the authority of European culture.

Moreover, since Western culture has traditionally considered writing the only valid means of preserving culture and history, all paintings, manuscripts, and artifacts that addressed or explained the worldviews of Indigenous cultures were burned or otherwise destroyed by the Spaniards. Nevertheless, as Taylor states, "writing and embodied performance have often worked together to layer the historical memories that constitute community" (*The Archive and the Repertoire* 35); therefore, some embodied practices remained and have been able to survive, even if they have slightly changed over time.

As stated by Roach and Taylor, memory is an intrinsic element of performance. In a colonial context, with its encoded practices of oppression and resistance, trauma also becomes an intrinsic element of performance that is intertwined with memory. According to Ann Kaplan "understanding trauma's overwhelming impact helps us comprehend the mental state of people who were victims of catastrophic cultural contact, and who nevertheless found strength to resist and fight for rights" (105). Moreover, the study of the presence of traumatic memory in Costa Rican masked traditions can help us unpack *transgenerational*

trauma and therefore trace specific sites of oppression and resistance and their embodiment in these festivities.

La Fiesta de los Negritos

This celebration takes place on 8 December and it represents a historical moment in the formation of Boruca's cultural identity. Transmitted orally and through embodied practice passed down through the generations, this celebration commemorates the arrival of Atlantic coast Indians to Boruca, as they fled Spanish persecution during colonization. Escaping the Europeans, these Indigenous groups crossed the mountains and hid with the Boruca people. According to Borucan folk stories, when they met, the Borucas and the Indians from the Atlantic coast—who had darker skinned than the Borucas and therefore were referred to as *negritos*—united to fight against the Spaniards and won the battle. The legend states that the Spaniards crossed the mountain with eleven horses and mules. After winning the battle, Cuasrán—now a guardian of the mountain—took the animals and gave them to his son, Sancrahua, the guardian of animal life (Williams 160).

To commemorate the defiant act of the Atlantic Indigenous groups and the joining of forces of both Indigenous groups against Spanish aggression, the Boruca people celebrate this day with a street performance called *La fiesta de los negritos.* A member of the community is selected to play the character of *La Mura*, which consists of a wooden horse mask and a metal or wooden structure used as the horse's body. The *La Mura* character is supposed to represent the

Spaniards, while other players dressed as the *negritos* represent the Indigenous communities that were displaced from their land and hid in the mountains. As costumes, these characters wear burlap sacks and paint their bodies with a dark paste made of ash and beef tallow (see Image 37). The painting of the skin is meant to separate the Boruca people from the Atlantic coast Indigenous groups to commemorate their shared struggle. It also commemorates Boruca's solidarity and resilience in fighting oppression.

Technically, this festival is very similar to *El juego de los diablitos*. In this case, the *Mura* and the *negritos* take over public spaces and dance in the streets, but there are also differences that set this festival apart. In contrast to the mute bull—which represents the Spaniards in *El juego de los diablitos*—the *Mura* character speaks during this performance. The *Mura* insults people in the street, but the *negritos* do not stay quiet. They always answer back, generating a confrontation (agon) between Spaniards and Indigenous people. As they walk around the town, the *Mura* chases and hits the *negritos* as hard as it possibly can. According to Williams, this is supposed to represent the ferocity of the Spanish colonizers' actions against Indigenous populations. The game ends when the *negritos* finally catch the *Mura* and tie it up with rope. They take it to the center of the town where they symbolically kill and burn the character, thereby signifying their triumph in the battle.

El Juego de los Diablitos **(Kagrú Rójc)**[28]

The rest of this chapter will concentrate on the Boruca New Year

celebration referred to as *El juego de los diablitos.* As mentioned above, the Borucas are a small Indigenous group located in the southeast of the country, far away from the Spanish settlements that gathered in Costa Rica's Central Valley during colonial times.

El juego de los diablitos, which in English translates to 'the dance of the little devils,' is a three-day celebration that starts on 31 December and ends on 2 January. This festival traces its roots to the 17th century and consists of a ritual/game which incorporates masks, costumes, music, and food. The little devils, representing the natives, fight against a bull, symbolizing the Spaniards, for three consecutive days. On the third day, the bull violently kills the *diablitos*, but hours later, they are re-born stronger, and together they capture and defeat the bull.

Alejandro Tosatti states that Costa Rican masked festivals are closer to games than they are to theatre. For him, the spatial and temporal dimensions of the event, along with the set of rules that frame it, allows it to move away from representation and dramatic fiction ("Las mascaradas del Valle Central y el teatro" 13). The word theatre implies mimesis and representation; therefore, it is more appropriately applied to the European staging tradition. Indigenous cultures, however, did not employ theatre as it is understood in European culture—although they did practice a series of communal activities in civil and religious celebrations that employed staging devices and elements like masks, costumes, dance, and music. Although Costa Rican masked traditions are a syncretism of

European and Indigenous cultures, their playful—and sometimes improvisational nature—makes them less theatre than they are performance.

Phelan's conceptualization of performance as representation without reproduction stresses the transgressive and subversive nature of cultural performances emanating out of the popular classes. Phelan stresses that representation "reproduces the Other as the Same" (3), but performance, on the other hand, provides a model where this analogy is broken, and where the unmarked becomes visible. The unmarked is understood as that blind spot of representation, specifically when addressing representations of 'others.' The unmarked is that which is not represented, yet constitutes the real, thereby allowing for a different, more transgressive reading. Focusing on the unmarked allows me to analyze these performances as sites of political resistance and transgression. "Performance becomes itself through disappearance" (Phelan 146). It allows oppressed communities to engage in a political critique and resistance. Its ephemeral nature provides protection against punishment and coercive control. In consideration of this, the word performance is more appropriate as a means of conceptualizing Costa Rican masked festivals.

According to Joseph Roach, performance goes hand-in-hand with memory and history. In his book, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*, he explores examples of American performances that he conceives as surrogating processes: products of the collision of two or more different cultures that mixed during colonization. Surrogation is understood as a replacement, a substitution process that allows the oppressed culture to remember its history; to maintain its

identity, and therefore to keep its cultural roots alive. Because performance allows the transfer of information, history, memory, and even social behaviors, it becomes vital for oppressed cultures that struggle to maintain their identity and stay alive.

Diana Taylor states "Performance functions as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated…behavior" (*The Archive and the Repertoire* 2). Taylor's notion of performance includes the transference of traumatic memories onto younger generations. Similarly, Kaplan conceptualizes *transgenerational trauma* (2005) as a kind of trauma where "subjects are haunted by tragedies affecting their parents, grandparents or ancestors from far back without conscious knowledge" (106). The history of oppression and violence imposed on Indigenous bodies carries with it traumatic memories as well as cultural heritage. A performance studies angle informs the interconnectedness of trauma, memory, and resilience in *El juego de los diablitos*.

Latin American culture is marked by a history of conquest, colonization, and the constant threat of imperialism; therefore, it is characterized by hybridity and mutation. According to Westlake, modern nations in Central America are products of hybridization, not only of the Indigenous and the Spanish cultures that collided during the conquest, but also the European, African, and Asian migrants that settled on the continent during and after colonization (13). Taylor and Towson agree, and argue that the mixing of cultures, often called *mestizaje*, *hybridity*, or *creolization*, is one of the most salient characteristics of colonialism

(*Stages of Conflict* 7), even though colonialism was based on asymmetric power relations where one culture dominated and subordinated the other.

However, hybridity was neither a smooth nor unproblematic process. Scholar Homi Bhabha explains that through colonization, authority is achieved via discrimination, a strategy of disavowal where the traces of that which is disavowed are transformed into something different, constituting a mutation, and creating a hybrid (1174). This means that the subordinated culture is not destroyed completely, but is constantly belittled and denoted as 'inferior.' Bhabha conceptualizes hybridity as "the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal" (1175). But the imposition of authority produces resistance, and therefore, the term hybridity implies the coexistence of two opposing forces: the imposition of authority and resistance.

On the other hand, scholar Mary Louis Pratt has coined the term 'contact zones' to refer to the specific temporal-spatial sites where the collision of cultures occurs. For her, contact zones are "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today" (34). Both these concepts are relevant to the understanding of *El juego de los diablitos* as a site of traumatic memory and political transgression. In the context of colonization, performance became the means by which both cultures maintained or contested social authority. Precisely because of the hybrid nature of these performances, I consider these sites to be contact zones.

According to Constenla, during colonial times the mule route between Costa Rica and Panama passed near Boruca territory. Spaniards considered the Borucas dangerous warriors and it was common for travelers to be attacked by the Borucas when traveling this route because they were defending their territory. Because of this, the Spanish Crown commanded the colonizers to 'domesticate' the Borucas, sending an order of Franciscan monks to educate and civilize them. Guiselle Chang states that the Franciscan order that attempted to convert the Borucas were unable to teach them to fear the Catholic devil, which the Spaniards depicted as half human and half bull (25). Instead, making a very bold statement, the Boruca people took the bullish image of the devil to symbolize the Spaniards, and while doing so, called themselves *diablitos*, referencing the inferior position they were given by the colonizers. The re-signification of the bull and the ironic nature of the title *diablitos* clearly served as an act of cultural resistance.

Constenla states that Boruca adopted Spanish culture with little resistance, which explains why their culture today is highly hybridized (Constenla 33). As has been widely discussed, there is no doubt that these performances are hybrids of the clash and contact between different cultures within an asymmetrical power context. But a closer look into *El juego de los diablitos* contradicts the notion that the Boruca willingly adopted Spanish culture. On the contrary, I have shown that the goal of this performance is to commemorate the constant struggle of the Boruca against the impositions of foreign cultures. By re-enacting their resistance, the Boruca reaffirm their cultural identity and community resilience against the oppression, marginalization, and exploitation they constantly suffer at the hands

of the dominant culture, thereby strengthening their sense of belonging to Boruca's cultural heritage.

El juego de los diablitos functions as a site of traumatic memory and transgression within a complex weave of cultural codes that are circumscribed in a socio-political context. Joseph Roach's concepts of *surrogation* and *performance genealogies* (1996) help unpack the value of this performance for Borucan identity. Surrogation is understood as a replacement or substitute. For Roach, many circum-Atlantic performances are surrogations for minority groups whose cultural roots were erased and destroyed by processes of hegemonic domination. Genealogies of performance, on the other hand, refer to "'counter memories,' or the disparities between history as it is discursively transmitted and memory as it is publicly enacted by the bodies that bear its consequences" (26). Evidently, both surrogation and genealogies of performance feature resistance as a vital force that feeds and strengthens their existence. Therefore, *El juego de los diablitos* is a surrogation of their rituals and part of a performance genealogy meant to make visible and to empower a marginalized culture vis-á-vis the oppressive discursive history of Costa Rica's national identity project that erases Indigenous culture.

The Boruca refer to *El juego de los diablitos* as a game. This sets up a series of behavioral rules to be followed by both the performers and the audience, who are actively engaged throughout the event. This is a hierarchical all-male performance consisting of the following roles: the *diablitos mayores*, the *arrieros*, the *diablitos menores*, *el toro*, and the musicians.

The *diablo mayor* is the highest-ranking *diablo* (this role is assigned to a community leader with a proven record of working on behalf of Boruca culture. Once assigned, the role stays in this family through the generations, unless the family decides to give it up). The *diablo mayor* wears the most elaborate mask and dresses in a black suit that separates him from the rest of the *diablitos*. He oversees and controls all aspects of the ritual/game. He is also in charge of gathering the *diablitos* from the village early in the morning on each day of the festival, using a *caracol* (large seashell) to call them. He has two assistants: the *diablitos mayores*, who are training to one day be the *diablo mayor*. They are in charge of helping him keep control of the game. These players must be from the same family as the *diablo mayor* as they will one day occupy his position.

Next are the *arrieros*. This is a middle rank position; they are responsible for delimiting the boundaries of the performance event. If players drift out of the playing area, *los arrieros* are in charge of bringing them back and marking the limits of the game. The lowest ranking players are the *diablitos*. Any male member of the community over the age of 14 can become a *diablito*. Many participants join the festival as *diablitos* for a year or two, just to try it out, while others perceive this festival as a sacred tradition, and once they participate as *diablitos*, they work their way up to the highest ranks in the game (see Image 38).

Players who are *arriero*s and aspire to become *diablos mayores* must play the role of the bull for at least one year. According to members of the community, this allows them to walk in the shoes of the oppressor, which is a required experience for one who wishes to lead as *diablo mayor*. Finally, the players are

accompanied by musicians playing drums, flutes, and seashells. Musicians are also roles that are passed down within family circles through the generations and they are the only participants in the game that do not wear masks.

All masks are crafted in the community and are a syncretic mixture of anthropomorphous and zoomorphic shapes. After they are called in the morning, they all gather at the center of the village and start a journey through the town, dancing to the tune of the music created by the flutes, whistles, seashells, and drums. The parade passes down every street in the village, and the *diablitos* visit every house in the community, where people feed them authentic Costa Rican food, such as *tamales, tortillas*, and *chicha*—homemade fermented corn liquor. This is repeated every day until the third day, when the bull character confronts the *diablitos* and kills them (see Image 39). The bull carries a carved mask and a body made out of a cardboard box and metal bars covered in fabric. After many confrontations with the *diablitos*, *el toro* overpowers them and kills them. However, at sunset, the *diablitos* are resurrected; this time, they return with more strength than they had before, and together they catch the bull. Once he is caught, they conduct a ritual in the center of the community where they symbolically dismember the bull and burn it in a fire, keeping only the mask to celebrate their victory (Amador 17-34). This marks the end of the festival and the purging of the struggles of the past year, making space for the new year to blossom. During the staging of the bull's dismembering, a narrator symbolically parcels out the bull to members of the community so that every family is made a part of the ritual.

Because the players wear masks to conceal their identities, this allows them the freedom to engage in conduct that would not be socially acceptable outside of this event. It is also an event that invokes parody and irony to represent the 'other.' In this case, the colonizer is reduced to a bull and depicted as bestial, while the natives choose to represent themselves as agile and as cleverer than their counterpart. This event conceals many Indigenous views that, when analyzed, uncover the transgressive reading of the festival.

The shape, design, and materials of the masks symbolically engage the natives with their cosmology and cultural roots. For example, the *diablito* masks usually depict animals that are sacred to the Borucas, such as the jaguar and the tapir. The visibility of these symbols on the masks serves as an invisible cohesive force among the villagers, a force that connects them to their cultural roots and collective memory, thereby strengthening their cosmology while concealing it from the invaders. It also references the belief that the spirit of the deity-animal takes over the body of the player. This spiritual connotation connects the game to a ritual (see Images 40 and 41).

The visit paid to every home in the community is also an act of community cohesiveness. In doing so, the players acknowledge the existence of every member of the tribe and value every person's contribution to their culture. This is a means of contesting the obscurity imposed on them by the colonizers. This action reverses the discriminatory and inferior position in which Indigenous populations are placed. Moreover, depicting the bull as dumb and the *diablitos* as agile and clever reverses the stereotypes that colonization imposed on them, and

in a sense, empowers them to perceive their culture as strong and resilient (see Image 42).

Finally, the capture, killing, and dismembering of the bull works as a surrogate to rites of war and sacrifices practiced by their ancestors. Since sacrificial rites were considered savage by the Europeans, these were one of the first elements of their culture that were banned. When this rite is invoked, every member of the community is made part of this act, generating an invisible force of cohesion among the members of this cultural group (Image 43).

In *El juego de los diablitos*, traumatic memory, cultural heritage, transgression, and resilience feed off each other. None of these elements can be traced individually. The boldness of transgressing the social order by mocking the colonizers and then symbolically killing them is an act of resilience and strength. It is a subversive act that counters the history of violence and trauma they have suffered. The trauma is evoked in the discriminatory and derogatory way in which their native culture is treated, always minimized and judged as savage and inferior, but the most significant element of the festivity is the re-birth of the *diablitos*, symbolizing the strength and resilience of the Borucan culture and the determination of its people to keep their cultural heritage alive.

Chapter 5

The Mask as Material Performance:

Embodying Cultural Heritage and Identity

Borucan artist Kamel González's painting, *El espíritu oculto de la máscara* [*The Hidden Spirit of the Mask*], accurately describes my conclusions regarding the role of the mask as a material performance with the ability to connect us to our cultural heritage and our sense of identity (see Image 44).

In the painting, we see the profile of a Borucan Indian. He wears a white cloth covered in animal fur, a traditional Borucan wrist band on one of his arms, and a headband holding his long black hair away from his face, dripping in sweat. A golden earring is the only trace of gold metal on his body. He is holding a Borucan mask with both of his hands. The mask is a traditional *diablito* mask. It is not painted, and it is decorated with blue, red, and yellow feathers on the top. The Indian deeply contemplates the inside of the mask. His facial expression denotes respect and admiration for what he sees inside of it.

Inside the mask is a Borucan ancestor that stares back at him. He is wearing a traditional loincloth and has many gold pieces around his neck, arms, and head, signifying a time prior to the Spanish exploitation and the looting of Borucan gold. Inside the mask, we also see a traditional Borucan cottage atop a green hill with a bonfire next to it. The cottage is made of straw and banana leaves, and it sits there, undisturbed. There are also three stone spheres of different sizes resting inside the mask (the spheres are considered an

archeological marvel and have been attributed to the Indigenous groups that resided in the South Pacific of Costa Rica), a medium-sized gold sculpture of a frog (a mythical animal in Borucan cosmology), a clay vessel, and a human-shaped mortar made of stone. All are items deeply connected to the Borucan identity and cultural heritage.

Outside of the mask, two carved stone figures are peeking out. They resemble the stone sculptures that the Boruca used to make to represent gods and high-ranking community members. In the background, both the sun and the moon are present, complementing each other. The sun shines in the very center of the frame, tinting the upper half of the background of the painting in shades of orange, like a warm, beautiful beach sunset. The moon—round, white, and shiny—rests in the bottom left corner of the frame and tints the bottom half of the background in shades of blue and gray. Both light and darkness are represented as part of the cultural heritage depicted in the painting.

The painting transmits a sense of peace and tranquility to the viewer. It is as if you are witnessing a private moment between the Indian and his mask—a powerful moment in which, before putting on the mask, the Indian is connecting his material existence to his ancestry, and preparing to embody his cultural heritage.

The mask is revealing 'its hidden spirit,' which is composed of cultural memories and items with deep connections to the Boruca identity. Nonetheless, there is one more figure in the painting. Above the sun, an incomplete silhouette of a bull stares directly at the viewer. The bull, an intruder in this painting, is there

like an omnipresent force; like a scar that cannot be erased. It is a memory that will not be forgotten and that forever changed the course of the Borucas' existence. It is indelible, the clash between Indigenous people and European colonizers will always be a part of Boruca's cultural identity. Instead of ignoring it or pretending to erase it—as dominant cultures tend to do—González includes the bull as part of his identity, a recognition that evokes acceptance of a brutal historical past, but not in the sense of being defeated. If anything, the mask's 'hidden spirit' is a symbol of resilience; a message that says that Boruca's cultural heritage and sense of identity—of belonging—resides inside each member of the community. It is an essence that cannot be destroyed.

In the introduction, I mentioned that my affective responses to the masked traditions of my community are what motivated me to start thinking about this project. I wanted to investigate the connection between these festivities and my identity as a Costa Rican, and interrogate the connection between affective responses and 'the nation.' Although the project did not focus theories of affect—a next stage for this research—my ethnographic visits to mask making communities, attendance at performances, and interviews with mask makers and audience members confirmed what I had long suspected: people who identify as members of the community experience affective responses to these performances because the cultural knowledge that is transmitted via the players' embodiment of masked characters is rooted in a shared history, a collective memory that might not be fully explained with words, but that members of the community can feel and experience viscerally.

In my experience, growing up in San José –specifically in Desamparados and later in neighboring communities– I developed a sense of belonging to the dominant construction of Costa Rican identity. As an upper middle-class Costa Rican, living in the capital city, I was taught to think of myself as a white descendent of Spaniards. Even though I always perceived Costa Rica as a diverse country due to its history and cultural landscape, I never truly question the hegemonic construction of identity that I adopted as my own. However, during my life I have had the privilege of traveling and residing abroad for many years both in Thailand and the US. These experiences confronted me with the reality of being perceived as an outsider, a foreign 'other,' and the necessity to negotiate my identity depending on where I am, and on how people in that culture perceives me. These experiences started to problematize my sense of identity in relation to what I was taught was my identity as a Costa Rican.

On the other hand, I consider myself an outsider to Boruca culture. During my research, I struggled to explain and give meaning to my analysis of Boruca culture precisely because I think of myself as an 'other' and I feared making generalizations and assumptions based on my connections to the dominant hegemonic culture of the country. I recognized these fears and anxieties probably result in gaps between what the Boruca community experiences during a performance of *los diablitos*, and my capacity and positionality to explain what I witnessed. This issue may never be solved, but I believe the awareness of these categories are important to me both as an artist and a scholar of culture.

To close this thought, I would like to state that this dissertation has allowed me to question and problematize my sense of identity, drastically changing my youthful imposed perception of being a white citizen, to the recognition of my Indigenous heritage and the implications of *mestizaje* in my sense of identity. My life experience and academic journey assert that Costa Rica's hegemonic identity construction is exclusive of the Indigenous and African cultures of my country and of other cultural groups that have resided in the Costa Rican territory for centuries, contributing to the social and cultural development of the country and yet invisible in the official versions of Costa Rican history.

For this dissertation I also wanted to investigate if and how these masked performance traditions contributed to the construction of 'the nation,' and whether the performances were compliant with the official narratives of identity constructed by the dominant classes, or if they were defiant. I found that these performances can be both.

When overseen by the popular classes that created them, these festivals mock and satirize the impositions of a dominant culture. These performances embody a history of persecution and punishment, hence, every time they are re-enacted, they function as a ritual that cleanses the participants of such violence, and strengthens the resilience of the community. Having a space in which to mock, ridicule, and satirize the authority imposed on them functions as an escape valve that releases repressed, harsh emotions in an otherwise festive environment.

These practices also develop particular codes and send subtle messages between the participants, generating a sense of cohesion that cannot be infiltrated

by outsiders. Moreover, the ability to subtly subvert authority and 'speak truth to power' without the need for words, all the while avoiding punishment is a subversive cultural practice on its own. Mask makers develop a keen sense of social critique and communicate it in a language that is understood by his/her community, yet foreign to outsiders.

I think this characteristic alone is powerful enough to denote the potential of masked performances to promote social change. They subvert the social order and speak truth to power while appearing to be compliant with the status quo. This is one of the elements I want to continue to explore in the next steps of this research. How are these artistic forms engaging a context marked by inequality, exploitation, and discrimination, and which elements have the potential to promote social change? I believe the interactive nature of masked performances, along with their festive environment and inclusive atmosphere, could potentially be directed to generate dialogue and build community.

On the other hand, as history can attest, dominant groups have a tendency to appropriate elements of popular culture to serve their own interests and legitimize their power and control over the masses. In Costa Rica, the state and the Catholic Church have utilized popular culture to disseminate a construction of national identity that erases marginalized communities and depicts the popular classes as passive and compliant with the hegemonic culture. *Mascaradas* and *los diablitos,* products of the marginalized communities, contradict the hegemonic constructions of Costa Rica as a homogeneous, white, and Catholic country, and instead emphasize resistance against and subversion of the status quo. Therefore,

they are capable of manifesting how the people contest the construction of the 'nation' through performance.

Another finding of this research is that state intervention is usually described as an effort to safeguard, preserve, and promote the practice of such traditions in the country; however, upon closer examination, I have revealed evidence of rules and regulations designed to limit, censor, and repress these traditions. In my opinion, the only positive contribution that state intervention has on the communities that practice these traditions is that it gives them greater visibility; that is, it can expose the art forms to a larger demographic than the communities can reach on their own. Nonetheless, even this contribution is detrimental to the development of the practice because it creates tensions and frictions among artisans, making it difficult for them to stay organized. By forcing *mascaradas* to fit into the organizational value patterns of the hegemonic culture and the state institutions of the country, the people who practice and safeguard these traditions are disenfranchised from their power.

As a response to these tactics, artisans have created independent cultural associations and co-ops. This allows them to organize activities beyond the local government's jurisdiction and to protect their rights as a professional group. Often, local governments and artisan groups clash and disagree with each other's policies. As a result, artisans are faced with the decision to either participate in governmental activities, thereby improving the visibility of their work while being excluded from the artisan community, or staying loyal to the artisan community and the origins of the tradition, but remaining invisible to the general population.

In other words, state intervention tends to divide artisans and communities instead of unifying the people involved.

My investigation concludes that the biggest efforts to preserve the tradition of *mascaradas* and *diablitos* have been made by the communities themselves. Usually led by the mask makers and their families, communities in the provinces of Cartago, San José, and Heredia—known as *pueblos mascareros*—are resistant to putting the practice to bed despite the deliberate decisions of the Catholic Church and the state to limit their resources, impose censorship, and distort the intended nature of the events.

Many of the transformations and mutations experienced by the *mascarada* and *diablito* performances described in this dissertation are the result of multiple contributing factors. On the one hand, these practices adapt to the context in which they are currently performed, and therefore reflect the reality of such contexts. In this regard, it is not surprising that some characters, such as *la copetona* (the housewife who carries her lazy husband on her back), have disappeared, and new characters, such as George Bush and Oscar Arias are now represented in these performances. However, other mutations evident in these traditions are not as innocuous as they may first appear. For example, the suppression of *el macho ratón* and the proliferation of its replacement, 'the idealized peasant,' is not an element that can be attributed to the evolving socio-cultural context of the country but to hegemonic impositions.

Also, agon is a crucial element to masked traditions in Costa Rica. It is an element that can be traced back to ancient agrarian rituals, medieval Spanish

performances brought to the New World (*Moros y Cristianos*), and Indigenous ritual-dance performances found in Mesoamerica, such as *Rabinal Achí* and *El Güegüense.* Its presence in all these different types of cultural manifestations speaks to its importance in society because it represents the clash of two opposing forces. It is a confrontation that has the potential to lead to progress. The replacement of *el macho ratón* with an 'idealized peasant,' combined with the actions directed at limiting these festivities to dancing parades, and the insistent efforts to repress the agonistic nature of these traditions, reveals clearly designed hegemonic strategies of control and censorship

I also wish to call attention to the influence of neoliberalism in contemporary mask making traditions. The growth of a market for items inspired by *mascaradas* and *diablitos* as forms of consumption of national identity has encouraged many artisans to create small businesses. Even though the market has been successful and is providing new sources of income to artisans and mask makers, I believe communities, as well as artists and scholars must remain vigilant to the spread of this trend because it promotes divergence from the oral tradition and embodied knowledge transmitted through these performances, thereby threatening the tradition's survival. What we are currently witnessing is the neoliberal economic and political order's de-contextualization of masked practices, eliminating their social function and reducing them to consumable entertainment. As a scholar/artist committed to popular culture and social change, I believe it is part of my duty to be aware of the demands of the 21st century while ensuring that the practice of *mascaradas* and *diablitos* can continue. This is my

way of helping preserve the intangible heritage transmitted through oral and embodied practice.

Lastly, I want to close my reflection with the idea that most Costa Ricans are unaware of the vast cultural production of the country's Indigenous communities. Their histories, cultural traits, and heritage are rarely discussed in the public education system or made readily accessible to interested audiences. As a result, most Costa Ricans believe that the Indigenous cultures in our territory were eradicated, and that those that survived colonization have been completely assimilated into Western culture. This common belief is far from the truth. As I hope to have shown through the exposition of Borucan cultural life, Costa Rica's Indigenous populations have rich cultural histories and are still practicing centuries-old artistic traditions. The Boruca masked tradition is just one example of the richness that Indigenous cultures offer to Costa Rica's cultural production. Finally, I hope to contribute to the dissemination of knowledge about the Indigenous communities of my country. As this project's next step, I would like to explore the cultural products of other Indigenous communities in Costa Rica such as the Chorotegas, Bribris and the Malekus to discuss their potential for community building, cultural empowerment, and social change.

Images Appendix

Image 1.

Tope de los Santos.

Dolores, Nicaragua. January, 2016.

Photo credit: Gina Sandi-Diaz

Image 2

Masked character *El Güegüense*.

Diriamba, Nicaragua. January, 2016.

Photo credit: Gina Sandi-Diaz

Image 3

El Toro Huaco's masked character

Diriamba, Nicaragua. January, 2016.

Photo credit: Gina Sandi-Diaz

Image 4

La Giganta.

Diriamba, Nicaragua. January, 2016.

Photo credit: Gina Sandi-Diaz

Image 5

Map of Costa Rica delimitating the Central Valley and Boruca land.

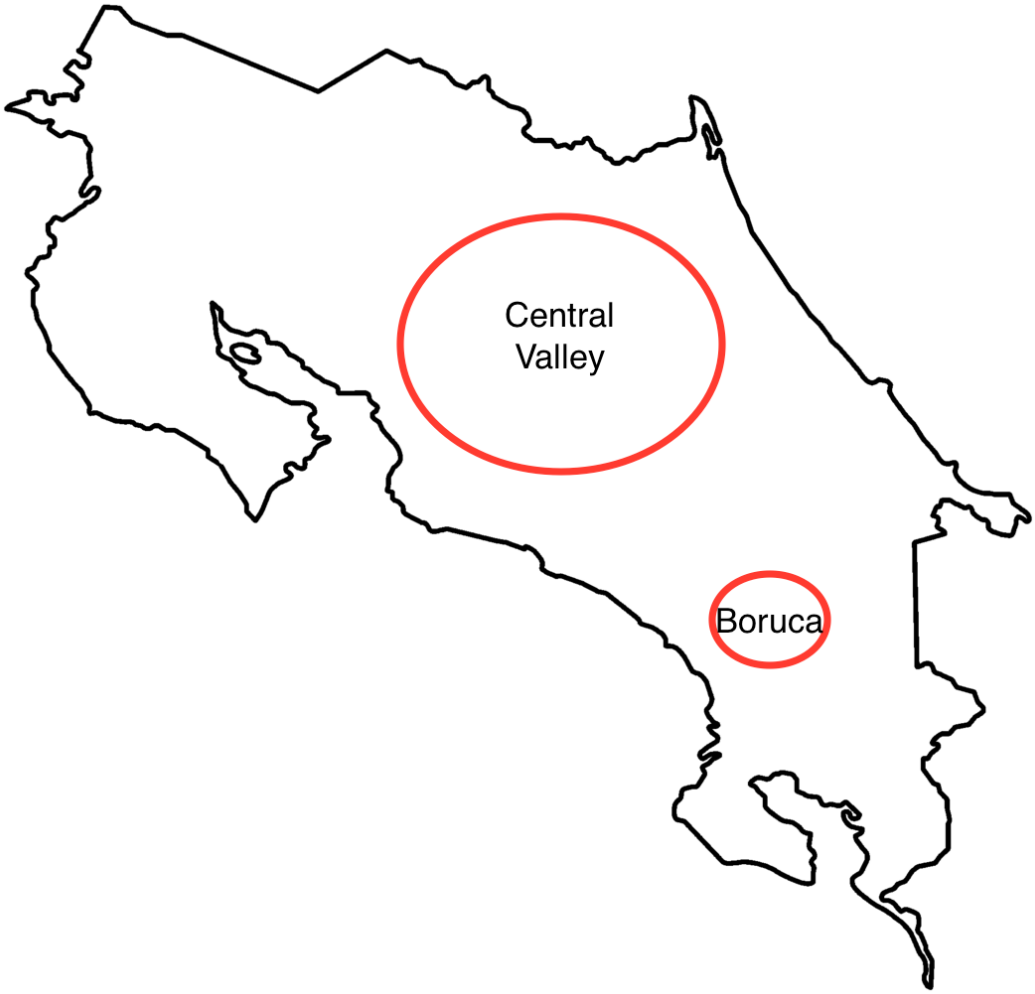

Image 6.

El diablo and *la calavera*.

Museo de Cultura Popular, Heredia. May, 2016.

Photo credit: Gina Sandi-Diaz

Image 7

Early 20th century *careta* mask collection.

Museo de Cultura Popular, Heredia. May, 2016.

Photo credit: Gina Sandi-Diaz

Image 8

Mask making mold. Traditional *papier-mâché* technique.

Gerardo Montoya's shop, San Antonio de Escazú. June, 2016.

Photo credit: Gina Sandi-Diaz

Image 9

Papier-mâché mask collection.

Gerardo Montoya's shop, San Antonio de Escazú. June, 2016.

Photo credit: Gina Sandi-Diaz

Image 10

Mask collection made of fiber glass.

Alex Bermúdez's shop. San Antonio de Desamparados. May, 2016.

Photo credit: Gina Sandi-Diaz

Image 11

Traditional Boruca mask for *Juego de los diablitos*.

May, 2016.

Photo Credit: Gina Sandi-Diaz

Image 12

Crafted Boruca mask.

Mask by Roy Zárate. May, 2016.

Photo credit: Gina Sandi-Diaz

Image 13

Virgen de los Angeles doll. Cartago, Costa Rica.

Photo credit: Axxis10 (Own work)

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via Wikimedia Commons

Image 14

Cropped photo of the mural in Virgen de los Angeles Basilica.

Cartago, Costa Rica.

Photo credit: Rafael Pacheco. Grupo Nacion

Image 15

‘La Negrita’s’ Pilgrimage on 2 August. Cartago, Costa Rica.

Photo is from 2011

Photo credit: ArquiWHAT (Own work)

[CC BY-SA 3.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0)], via Wikimedia Commons

Image 16

Juan Santamaria memorial in Alajuela, Costa Rica.

Photo credit: Erick Chavarría

[CC BY-SA 2.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0)], via Wikimedia Commons

Image 17

Traditional mascarada character ‘la copetona’

Photo credit: Titeresante.es

Image 18

Traditional mascarada character ‘el letrado’ (the doctor)

Museo de Cultura Popular, Heredia. May, 2016.

Photo credit: Gina Sandi-Diaz

Image 19

Folklorist Carmen Granados posing with a bull mask, representative of the bull fights that she entertained and that are part of the end of year festivities in the city of San José.

Photo credit: Grupo Nacion.

Image 20

Folklorists Lencho Salazar and Maria Mayela Padilla.

Salazar's clothing is representative of Costa Rica's 'idealized peasant.'

Image 21

Comedian Mario Chacón interprets Maikol Yordan, a rural peasant from Costa Rica who is naïve and good hearted.

Photo credit: CRhoy.com

Image 22

The ‘idealized peasant’ materialized as a *Mascarada* character.

Masks by Gerardo Montoya. San Antonio de Escazú. June, 2016.

Photo credit: Gina Sandi-Diaz

Image 23

Figurines of the idealized peasants.

By Elena Hernández. Artelena. Cartago. June, 2016.

Photo credit: Gina Sandi-Diaz

Image 24

Monument honoring the abolition of the army in Costa Rica

("Happy is the Costa Rican mother who knows, when giving birth, that her son will never be a soldier")

Image 25

Costa Rica Esencial. Official trade mark of Costa Rica's Ministry of Tourism

Photo Credit:

http://www.ict.go.cr/es/servicios-institucionales/marcas-y-logos.html

Image 26

Young men await masked characters for confrontation.

San Antonio, Desamparados. June, 2016.

Photo credit: Gina Sandi-Diaz

Image 27

A man catches his breath after confrontation with masked characters.

San Antonio, Desamparados. June, 2016.

Photo credit: Gina Sandi-Diaz

Image 28

Politician Leonardo Garnier poses next to a masked character representing him. Article published in *La Nacion*, Oct. 31, 2015. "Mascaradas en Costa Rica: Rostros conocidos bailan al son del 'farafarachin'. See work cited list.

Photo credit: Grupo Nacion

Image 29

Marcelo Castro poses next to masked character representing him.

Published in *La Nacion*, Oct. 31, 2015. "Mascaradas en Costa Rica: Rostros conocidos bailan al son del 'farafarachin'. See work cited list.

Photo credit: Grupo Nacion

Image 30

Masked characters of former presidents Oscar Arias and George W. Bush joined protests of TLC, (free trade with the USA) in 2007.

Photo credit: Grupo Nacion

Image 31

A masked character of president Luis Guillermo Solís joined an educators' protests against the government's budget cuts in June, 2016.

Photo credit: laprensalibre.cr

Image 32

A mask representing former Mayor of Barva, Mercedes Hernández await players for a masked performance.

Photo credit: Aldia.cr

Image 33

Mascarada merchandise by *Los Mantudos* company.

Photo credit: Los Mantudos ®

Image 34

Set of collectable figurines based on *mascarada* characters.

Made by Elena Hernández. Cartago, Costa Rica. June, 2016.

Photo Credit: Gina Sandi-Diaz

Image 35

A photograph taken from the main road to Boruca shows the beauty of the mountain and the river *Grande de Térraba*. This is Boruca land. January, 2017.

Photo Credit: Gina Sandi-Diaz

Image 36

Boruca women weaving natural dyed textiles.

Photo Credit: Glenda Arias and Karina González

http://plataformadescaruanda.blogspot.com/2014/06/expresiones-culturales-del-pueblo.html

Image 37

El baile de los negritos.

Image 38

A Boruca *Diablito* poses for a picture. January, 2017.

Photo credit: Gina Sandi-Diaz

Image 39

Boruca *Diablitos* walk to the next location to confront the bull. January, 2017.

Photo credit: Gina Sandi-Diaz

Image 40

Diablitos with zoomorphic and anthropomorphic masks. January, 2017.

Photo credit: Gina Sandi-Diaz

Image 41

Diablito masked character. January, 2017.

Photo credit: Gina Sandi-Diaz

Image 42

Diablitos and community members walk to the center of town to start the ritual of dismembering and burning of the bull. January, 2017.

Photo Credit: Gina Sandi-Diaz

Image 43

The bull character fights and violently crashes the *diablitos*. January, 2017.

Photo credit: Gina Sandi-Diaz

Image 44

El espíritu oculto de la máscara.

Painting by Kamel González (2016). Kurandenk Art. All rights reserved.

Photo credit: Kamel González

Notes

[1] Transculturation will be understood as a process through which a culture receives information from a foreign culture, assimilates it, and transforms it into something locally relevant. In Taylor's words: "...one cultural system receives and ultimately transforms material from another" (Taylor "Brecht and Latin America's "Theatre of Revolution"" 176).

[2] See Solano Laclé et al. (2005), Puppets, Masks and Performing Objects. Ed. Bell, John (2001) and Chang (2007).

[3] A *copla* is a short, improvised verse of a comedic nature created to entertain audiences. It is common in Central American folklore and popular culture.

[4] The *Gigantes y Cabezudos* parade is a Spanish tradition that dates to medieval times. It consists of two types of masks: the 'giants' who represent kings and royal personalities, and the 'big heads' who represent the people. Roberto Le Franc speculates that the Spanish brought this tradition to Costa Rica during the conquest (1). Brenes Tencio agrees, and argues that after three centuries of colonialism, the population had gained respect for and devotion to not only the Catholic Church, but also the Spanish kings (121).

[5] *Turnos* are community gatherings where food, drinks, and live music are made available for people to consume in a festive, inclusive environment.

[6] Mikhail Bakhtin describes medieval European carnivals as products of folk humor in the context of the marketplace, and a response to the official, ecclesiastic rituals and ceremonies: "A boundless world of humorous forms and manifestations [that] opposed the official and serious tone of medieval ecclesiastical and feudal culture" (4).

[7] In Costa Rica's popular culture, 'vestimenta de retazos' refers to clothing made out of scraps of different types of fabric, usually with printed patterns.

[8] *Papier-mâché* is a technique used to sculpt masks and other objects primarily out of pieces of paper—although it might include other materials—pasted together with an adhesive, such as glue.

[9] Traditionally, each participant in the game/ritual was in charge of crafting their own mask. The making of the mask was considered part of the ritual process. Since the mask is considered an object that connects the player with the spiritual world, the Borucan people believed that spirits intervened in the mask making process, choosing to manifest their essence through the player's performance. However, the economic demands of today's society have forced many Borucas to take full-time jobs outside of their community, leaving little time for mask making and festival preparations. Because of this, many players are unable to make their own masks and must rent or purchase them from other community artisans.

[10] The idealized peasant, or 'el campesino idealizado,' is a term used by historian Rafael Cuevas Molina to refer to the idealized figure of the Costa Rican peasant. This figure was instrumental to the national literature project carried out by the intellectual community of the time and supported by the state (*Tendencias de la Dinámica Cultural* 8).

[11] Calderón differentiates between the citizens of Cartago as follows: "Pardo: color que resulta de la mezcla del negro con el blanco en la que predomina el negro. Mulato: Nacido de la mezcla de la raza blanca con la negra. Mestizo: Hijo de español e india o de española e indio. Zambo: Nacido de la mezcla de la raza negra con la raza india o también de la raza negra con la mulata" (23, note 6).

[12] The rock on display resembles the stone spheres famously carved by Costa Rican indigenous people. Archeologists have found over three hundred stone spheres buried in the South Pacific territory of the country. The spheres, which vary in size and weight, are believed to belong to the Diquís culture. For more information, see the work of Doris Stone.

[13] *Turnos*, as community-organized food and beverage services operated during patron saint community festivities. Although services are now provided by vendors hired by the Church, during the early 20th century, *turnos* were run by Catholic devotees. The food was donated by families of the community and the money raised usually went to the local Catholic temple.

[14] Alajuela is a province of Costa Rica located on the north-west side of the Central Valley.

[15] This event is recorded in Plenary Session number 75's minutes from 3 October, 2012. The motion reads: "Para que el Plenario guarde un minuto de silencio en memoria del general José María Cañas, héroe de la Guerra

Patria 1856–1857, al cumplirse hoy 152 años de su asesinato en Puntarenas, víctima de un crimen de Estado dos días después del asesinato del Don Juan Rafael Mora, Libertador y Héroe Nacional, víctima también de un crimen de estado. Y para que se incluya en el acta de esta sesión el texto de las palabras leídas por el periodista e historiador Armando Vargas Araya en el acto solemne realizado esta mañana en el Cementerio General de esta ciudad capital" (Asamblea Legislativa de la República de Costa Rica 7).

[16] Many giant Costa Rican masks of the 19th and early 20th centuries were inspired by *Gigantes y Cabezudos* Spanish masks.

[17] Text in quotation marks denotes phrases included in Costa Rica's national anthem.

[18] Maikol Yordan is a character found in *La Media Docena*, a TV comedy show produced by Channel 7 (the largest broadcasting company in the country) that features sketches and archetypal characters. Mocking the rural Costa Rican population that appropriates names from American popular culture, such as Michael Jordan (misspelled in poor English as Maikol Yordan), this character is described by its own Wikipedia entry as "Es un campesino humilde de buen corazón y algo ingenuo, que solo desea encontrar trabajo para salvar la finca de su familia." https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maikol_Yordan_de_viaje_perdido

[19] 'Pura vida' (pure life) is a popular expression used to greet others, assert that all is good, or state one's approval of something. For many years, this expression has served as a slogan for the Costa Rican people and is widely exploited in tourist merchandise and in international marketing.

[20] The data appeared in *Costa Rica, Datos e Indicadores Básicos*, published by INICEM in 1996.

[21] Cuevas Molina states that due to their need to escape the harsh economic conditions of their home country, by the end of the 1990s, the Nicaraguan immigrant community constituted 10% of Costa Rica's population (*Tendencias de la Dinámica Cultural* 33).

[22] On 11 September, 1996, the government approved decree number 25724-C making 31 October National Traditional Mask Day. The decree states that the government will provide support to organize and run activities that promote and celebrate this tradition in the country. To consult the statute, visit https://www.msj.go.cr/informacion_ciudadana/SiteAssets/noticias/cul_decretodiamascarada.pdf

[23] *Leyendas* are stories passed on through oral tradition; a fictional tale meant to explain a natural phenomenon ("Mitos y Leyendas"). According to Tellez, in Central America, the stories or tales called *leyendas* "reflect the influence…of the European God brought by the Spaniards to the Americas. Their God punishes wrongdoers, but rewards good people or believers" (Tellez 3).

[24] The *Festival de la Luz* is a night parade held at the end of the year that is sponsored by the city of San José. The parade consists of floats decorated with extravagant, colorful props, which are usually paid for by private companies (which they also advertise).

[25] García Canclini, based on Bordieu, further explains the term 'reconvert' as one used to explain the strategies through which a painter becomes a designer, or national bourgeoisies acquire the languages and other competencies to reinvent their economic and symbolic capital into transnational circuits (*Culturas Híbridas* IV).

[26] Today's eight indigenous groups are Guatuso (Maleku), Cabécar, Bribri, Brunca (Boruca), Térraba, Guaymí (Ngöbe), Nicoya (Chorotegas) and Quitirrisí (Williams ix)

[27] The communities of the Brunca ethnic group include Boruca, Cañablancal, Rey Curré, Cajón, Mano de Tigre, Bijagual, Lagarto, Chñanguena, Puerto Nuevo, El Maíz, Buenos Aires, and Mamey (Williams ix). For more information, see *Boruca*, by Ayra Rod Williams (2015).

[28] José Luis Amador translates *El juego de los diablitos* to Kabrú Rójc in Boruca language (38).

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