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# Soil and Struggle: Civil Conflict and State Formation in El Salvador and Costa Rica

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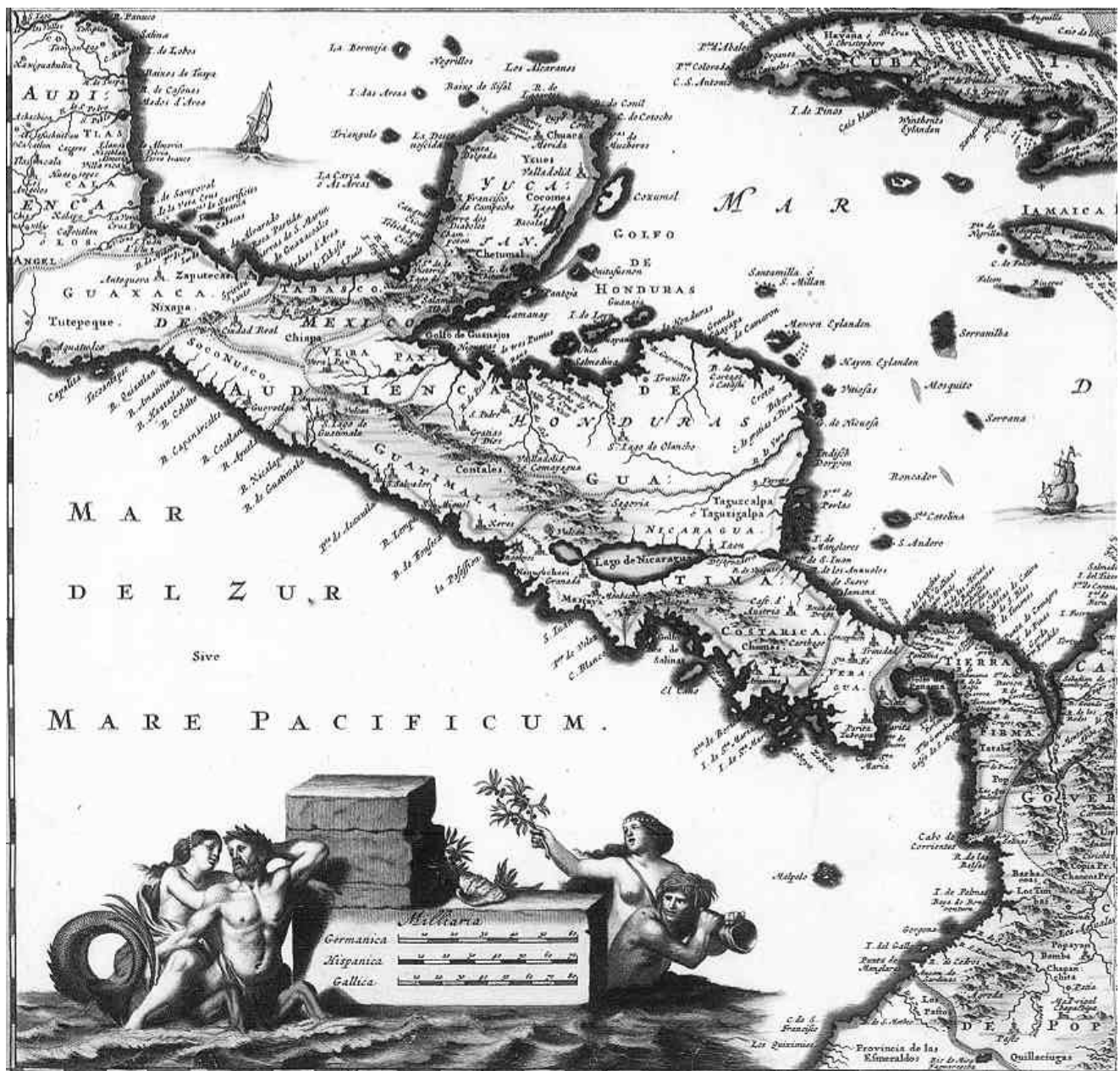
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# WAR AND THE STATE: INTRODUCTION AND THEORY

*The decisive means for politics is  
violence... anyone who fails to see  
this is, indeed, a political infant*  
—Max Weber

*Force and fear comprise one arm of political  
intercourse. But the great events of history—  
even those ostensibly driven by violence— have  
most frequently been decided by legitimacy and  
the collective spirit*  
—J. Robert Prescott III

Over the past several decades, the notion that ‘war makes states’ has become virtual academic folklore.<sup>1</sup> Drawing upon European history, a number of scholars have uncovered compelling linkages between the institutional demands of warfare, the political and economic policies generated to satiate them, and the rise of the integrated nation-state.<sup>2</sup> Additional research has revealed connections between the political maneuvers executed by rulers to secure resources for warfare, and the progressive historical oscillation from autocracy to democracy.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the importance of these insights, the relationship between warfare and institutional development within post-colonial countries remains less understood. Much attention has been focused on how the European pattern of war and statemaking has been disrupted in the post-colonial world,<sup>4</sup> but relatively less emphasis has been placed upon how war *has* shaped institutional evolution in developing nations.

### *THE IRON TRIANGLE*

Many analysts of European history argue that the modern state developed from a crucible of economic transformation and near-constant conflict.<sup>5</sup> Beginning in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries,<sup>6</sup> the growth of large towns, combined with higher-surplus agriculture and the rise of more complex economic organizations, led to greater social wealth, and concomitant political conflict over control of population and resources.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Leander (2003),

<sup>2</sup> Primarily Tilly (1990), Porter (1994), Finer (1975), Bates (2001), Bean (1973), and Cohen (1974); see also Lattimore (1940), Otterbein (1970), Service (1975). In a related analysis, Moore (1994)

<sup>3</sup> Bates (1985, 2001),

<sup>4</sup> See Bates (2001), Sørensen (2001), and Leander (2003)

<sup>5</sup> See Lane (1958), Bean (1973), and Tilly, Porter, Finer, Bates (cited above)

<sup>6</sup> Bates (2001), pp. 51-56

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*

In this time, the monarchs who ruled over European proto-states did so under conditions of profound insecurity.<sup>8</sup> No overarching authority existed to impose peace,<sup>9</sup> and rulers who coveted rivals' territory and wealth<sup>10</sup> constantly vied to expand their control over new populations and resources (*warmaking*).<sup>11</sup> Rulers were additionally pressed to defend against internal threats from rival elites.<sup>12</sup>

As conflict intensified, states tended towards the conglomeration of territory and military strength.<sup>13</sup> Military forces gave significant returns to centralization and scale: large, coherent armies were not only more successful on the battlefield, but could be fielded more economically (per unit).<sup>14</sup> Such armies were also powerful tools for subjugating domestic rivals (*statemaking*).<sup>15</sup> Aggressive monarchs set the pace of militarization and centralization, as other rulers were forced to invest heavily in armed forces to successfully ward them off.<sup>16</sup> Those who failed to do so faced annihilation:<sup>17</sup> in the 14<sup>th</sup> century Europe comprised over 1,000 'political entities.' By 1900, 25 remained.<sup>18</sup>

Spiraling military costs throughout the 14<sup>th</sup>—18<sup>th</sup> centuries forced rulers to locate new sources of capital.<sup>19</sup> Monarchs could try to simply accrue wealth through enforced taxation (*extraction*), but subjects resisted such pressure,<sup>20</sup> and squeezing too hard risked generating support for domestic rivals. Successful rulers employed a mixture of force and seduction: tax revolts were crushed, assets seized, and cautionary punishments meted out to

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<sup>8</sup> Herz (1957), p.473-7, Sørensen (2001), p.345

<sup>9</sup> Herz, *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Tilly (1990), pp.14-5

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Tilly (1990), pp.96-7

<sup>13</sup> Cohen (1981), pp.901-2, Herz (1957), pp.476-7

<sup>14</sup> Lane (1958)

<sup>15</sup> Bates (2001), pp.62-66, Leander (2003), p.4

<sup>16</sup> Sørensen (2001), p.345

<sup>17</sup> Porter (1994), p.12

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Bates (2001), p.51,53-7, Porter (1994), p.14,31-6

<sup>20</sup> Bates (2001), pp.57-8

ringleaders,<sup>21</sup> but monarchs also sold rights and immunities to towns and guilds,<sup>22</sup> ceded power to elite assemblies (parliaments) in return for tax levies,<sup>23</sup> and thus carefully circumscribed their own power (creating, in the process, nascent democratic institutions and rights of citizenship) in order to extract the wealth needed to sustain their rule.<sup>24</sup> New forms of taxation on trade and ‘movable’ assets<sup>25</sup> were difficult to administer,<sup>26</sup> and required the penetration of society by more powerful state bureaucratic systems.

Thus, in Europe, three major tasks— warmaking, statemaking, and extraction— formed the ‘iron triangle’ upon which the modern state was erected: warmaking and statemaking required robust militaries, which in turn required sophisticated bureaucracies to manage armed forces and the taxes which sustained them. By necessity, rulers bargained with citizens and elites to secure capital. The result was an increasingly potent and coherent state apparatus, which became progressively beholden to citizens’ interests. In Europe, war made states, and in the process lay the groundwork for democracy.<sup>27</sup>

#### *ELITE POLITICS AND THE HOLLOW STATE*

The analysis sketched above largely treats the state as an active, unified, rational agent. This stems both from analytical preference (in Bates’ work, methodological individualism distilled from rational-choice economics<sup>28</sup>) and historical study (in Tilly’s

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<sup>21</sup> Tilly (1990), p.101

<sup>22</sup> Bates (2001), pp.60-2, Tilly (1990), p.101-2

<sup>23</sup> Tilly (1990), p.101-3, Bates (2001), p.102

<sup>24</sup> Bates (1985), 53-7, Bates (2001), Tilly (1990) p.15,25,101-2

<sup>25</sup> Typically, non-land taxes (sales, liquor, salt, etc.)

<sup>26</sup> Bates (1985), p.55

<sup>27</sup> Bates (1985), Bates (2001), to a lesser extent Tilly (1990)

<sup>28</sup> Bates (2001)

argument, the capacity of monarchs, whether absolute or qualified, to impose their will upon embryonic state systems.<sup>29)</sup>

While powerful, these analyses encounter problems when applied to the post-colonial world.<sup>30</sup> The notion of an abstracted ruler “summing up” the state’s decision-making powers,<sup>31</sup> and negotiating forms of rule with allied elites, political rivals, and a large subject population, unduly ascribes bureaucratic unity and impermeability to what is frequently a porous, immature, and violently contested state structure.<sup>32</sup> In early-modern Europe, armies faced outward,<sup>33</sup> warding off rival monarchs, but in many former colonies, armies face *inward*,<sup>34</sup> vying for control over the state.<sup>35</sup> Conflict in former colonies is not necessarily, as Cohen (1981) would have it, primarily between the state and those it seeks to subjugate and extort,<sup>36</sup> but often between rival groups over the fount of wealth and political authority represented by the state itself. As Centeno (1997) notes, “states are not actors in and of themselves... they are shells— potentially powerful shells— but nevertheless hollow at the core.”<sup>37</sup> This hollowness, the frequent inability of the state to behave as a discrete actor counterposed against society,<sup>38</sup> renders *statemaking* the critical activity in many former colonies. As a result, war may generate institutional outcomes wholly at odds with the

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<sup>29</sup> Tilly (1990)

<sup>30</sup> Bates, Tilly, Sørensen, and Leander all note the inapplicability of the European pattern in former colonies, harmoniously arguing that the military and fiscal imperatives which impelled state expansion, the extractive penetration of society, and the progressive circumscription of rulers’ power by political bargaining, have been disrupted by international military assistance which removes rulers’ need to bargain with society over resource extraction (thus decoupling *statemaking* and *extraction*), as well as by an international system which rarely permits states to be consumed from without. However, these arguments still problematically treat the state as a unified actor, rather than an object of political competition (see above).

Bates (2001) chpt.4, Tilly (1990), chpt.7, Sørensen (2001), Leander (2003). See also Moore (2000)

<sup>31</sup> Tilly (1990), pp.34-5

<sup>32</sup> Migdal (1994), pp.11-5

<sup>33</sup> Herz (1957), Sørensen (2001), pp.345

<sup>34</sup> Sørensen (2001), p.346

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p.347

<sup>36</sup> Cohen (1981), p.902

<sup>37</sup> Centeno (1997), p.1599

<sup>38</sup> Mitchell (1991), p.95

bureaucratic integrity, progressive democratization, and ‘relative non-violence of civil life’<sup>39</sup> wrought by European conflict.

#### *PATTERNS OF CONFLICT AND POLITICAL DIVERGENCE*

In the post-colonial world, the critical question is not necessarily whether war makes states, but rather *what kinds of wars make what kinds of states?* In order to examine this issue, I intend to closely scrutinize patterns of statemaking in two post-colonial societies, focusing in particular upon differences in elite conflict over the machinery of state. In doing so, I hope to unpack the stylized assertion that ‘war makes states’, and to examine how differing forms of intra-state conflict generate divergent regime and institutional legacies.

Following Bates (2001), I will be more concerned with the institutional and regime trajectories created by forms of conflict than with the specific systems of extraction created by the state. Unlike Centeno (1997), I will not focus upon war’s discrete impact upon patterns of taxation, but rather upon its structuring of coercive and political systems.

To this end, I will offer two archetypal case studies— El Salvador and Costa Rica— drawn from Central America. I have selected these countries because of their shared colonial pasts, historically similar position in the world economy, and vastly divergent histories of internal conflict and institutional development.<sup>40</sup> Framed against broad similarities, the critical factors influencing divergent state formation and political development should stand in sharp relief, facilitating comparative analysis.

Since its independence, El Salvador has been wracked by conflict between powerful agrarian elites and a restive indigenous population, and has, until recently, been typified by dictatorial rule. Contrary to its reputation, Costa Rica endured a similarly violent past, but its

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<sup>39</sup> Tilly (1990)

<sup>40</sup> Williams (1994), p.10

conflict essentially pivoted upon intra-elite strife. Costa Rica began a slow ascent to representative rule in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and emerged as a full democracy in 1949.

While many prior analyses have emphasized the primacy of productive structures in determining El Salvador and Costa Rica's political evolution,<sup>41</sup> I intend to demonstrate the critical role of intra-state conflict in catalyzing divergent forms of state development. In doing so, I hope to add to the understanding of both countries, and to the broader debate over the relationship between war and rise of states.

#### *METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS*

As the object of this research is historical patterns of intra-state conflict, the primary indicator I will be examining is political violence—battles, insurrections, coups, outbreaks of violence, and assassinations.

Within the constraints of accurate data collection in Central America (enumerated below), historically-driven qualitative analysis is more revealing than a predominantly quantitative approach. Firstly, many historical compendiums of conflict contain little information on Central America, or have significant gaps.<sup>42</sup> Secondly, given the diminutive size of Central American nations, many conflicts fail to reach an arbitrary threshold often established for war (typically 1,000 battle fatalities), resulting in an under-representation of violent conflict.<sup>43</sup> Thirdly, significant “background noise” renders counting battle-events or even battle-intensity impractical: as nominal periods of peace have often been quite violent, focusing on “peaks” in violence may render an inaccurate picture of overall conflict. Lastly,

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<sup>41</sup> For example, Stone (1983), Winson (1978), Seligson (1980), and Montgomery (1982)

<sup>42</sup> See Small (1981), Richardon (1960), Wright (1965)

<sup>43</sup> Small (1981)

there is simply a dearth of research on the early Central American national period,<sup>44</sup> and many historical accounts vary widely.

Given these constraints, I have attempted to approach the analysis of political violence as a discriminating historian: where possible, I have triangulated events of political violence using both historical sources and statistical compendiums of war, selected sources based upon data quality and analytical depth, and have culled historical records to assemble an understanding of both “peaks” and “valleys” in intra-state violence.

I have additionally integrated economic analysis into my historical approach, as a complex and nuanced understanding of war and institutional evolution requires critical engagement with the political, economic, and social factors animating and shaping conflict. As such, I have worked with several indicators— primarily land distribution, as well as the components and scale of international trade. Similar problems afflict these indicators: historical almanacs suffer from gaps in data,<sup>45</sup> while accounts of land distribution are not always in harmony. In such cases, I have attempted to piece together a nuanced historical analysis from multiple sources, or have acknowledged imprecision in data.

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<sup>44</sup> Email correspondence with Professor Ralph Lee Woodward

<sup>45</sup> Mitchell (1998), Oxford Latin American History Database

# BLOOD AND SOIL: THE EVOLUTION OF DICTATORSHIP IN EL SALVADOR

*The social problem is a police problem*  
—Anonymous, 19<sup>th</sup> century

*... el sangre del estado es el café*  
*(coffee is the blood of the state)*  
—Heitor Quiróz dao Fuentes

## INTRODUCTION

From its birth in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century through the end of the Cold War, El Salvador has been wracked by strife and civil conflict. While most analysts of Salvadoran history trace this conflict to the poverty and inequality created by the elite-led dissolution of Indian communal lands (*ejidos*),<sup>46</sup> others argue that the brutal dictatorships of the 20<sup>th</sup> century developed from the 1931 coup which first brought the Salvadoran military to power.<sup>47</sup>

However, the roots of Salvadoran dictatorship extend much deeper than is generally acknowledged by either interpretation. As early as the colonial period, antagonism between export-oriented agriculturalists and powerful indigenous communities shaped political evolution in El Salvador. Although Indian poverty exacerbated civil conflict in El Salvador, it did not precede it: agrarian elites sundered Indian communal lands in order to cement their economic control, and, critically, to break the ability of Indian communities to rally, organize and rebel. As early as 1848, the Salvadoran state was developed into an apparatus of elite military and economic supremacy. The price of this control would be 144 years of civil conflict which would progressively expand the machinery of dictatorial rule.

## CONQUEST, COLONIZATION, AND EARLY SOCIO-ECONOMIC STRUCTURE

El Salvador was first invaded by Spain in 1524, and brought under full Spanish control by 1539.<sup>48</sup> Colonists were initially drawn to the region by rumors of precious metals, but found little mineral wealth and turned instead to agriculture as a source of income.<sup>49</sup>

The unintended importation of infectious diseases, as well as the continuing military pacification of remaining Indians,<sup>50</sup> greatly reduced El Salvador's native population.<sup>51</sup> In

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<sup>46</sup> For example, see Montgomery (1982), and Burns (1984)

<sup>47</sup> See Martínez (1986) and Licata (1988)

<sup>48</sup> Montgomery (1982) p.33

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

order to facilitate the rooting of a colony, the Spanish crown issued labor grants which consolidated residual Indians under the control of favored vassals.<sup>52</sup> These settlers used Indian labor to produce export-oriented cash crops, initially cacao,<sup>53</sup> by expropriating agricultural tribute from Indian communities.<sup>54</sup> Such labor grants, called *encomiendas*, existed alongside a patchwork of small farms and large agrarian estates (*haciendas*). Export agriculture became colonists' primary source of income.<sup>55</sup> Indian unrest posed a continual threat, and the young colony maintained extensive militias.

The decline of the cacao market at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century caused the collapse of many small farms, most of which were absorbed by larger agricultural estates.<sup>56</sup> *Hacienda* production shifted to indigo and steadily expanded, and indigenous farmers were increasingly pressured by influential planters to labor on plantations.<sup>57</sup>

By the end of the colonial period, Indian communal (*ejidal*) territory accounted for around two-thirds of El Salvador's land,<sup>58</sup> with *haciendas* accounting for the remaining territory.<sup>59</sup> The *hacienda* sector was heavily concentrated, with "between 300 and 400 families (controlling) the political and economic life of the colony."<sup>60</sup> In the remaining two-thirds of the country, "(El Salvador) bore a (close) resemblance to its Indian past."<sup>61</sup>

The early economic structure of El Salvador had two important legacies: firstly, the early establishment of the *encomienda* preserved Indian communities largely intact. Tribute was exacted, but Indian customs— most importantly, communal landholdings (*ejidos*),

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<sup>50</sup> Weaver (1994), p.12

<sup>51</sup> Barry (1986), pp.198-9

<sup>52</sup> Weaver (1994), pp.15-17

<sup>53</sup> Macleod (1973), pp.88-92

<sup>54</sup> Weaver (1994), pp.14-18

<sup>55</sup> Macleod (1973), pp.88-92

<sup>56</sup> Montgomery (1982), p.35

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, p. 36

<sup>58</sup> Nugent (2001), p.22

<sup>59</sup> Burns (1984), p.297

<sup>60</sup> Montgomery (1982), p.37

<sup>61</sup> Burns (1984), p.295

endured. Secondly, the cacao and indigo export booms made the Salvadoran economy heavily dependent upon exports. The existence of subsistence/low-surplus Indian communal landholdings<sup>62</sup> parallel to commercial *haciendas* would greatly shape political and economic conflict in El Salvador.

#### INDEPENDENCE AND CIVIL STRIFE

El Salvador achieved independence in January 1822, as Central America declared its autonomy from Spain.<sup>63</sup> The end of Spanish rule left little centralized authority, and though national and federal institutions were nominally established, municipal councils called *ayunamientos* quickly became the “most significant political institutions”<sup>64</sup> in Central America.<sup>65</sup> El Salvador was quickly brought under the sway of the *ayuntamiento* of San Salvador,<sup>66</sup> which was ruled by a “homogenous (liberal) elite.”<sup>67</sup> However, intense competition among Salvadoran elites for political supremacy<sup>68</sup> created significant political instability,<sup>69</sup> leading to a rapid succession of short-lived regimes.

A decade after independence, intra-elite competition in El Salvador was decisively dampened by an eruption of Indian revolts.<sup>70</sup> The collapse of centralized authority had led to the widespread abuse of Indian communities (many of which suffered confiscation or forced sale of their land<sup>71</sup>), but had also eroded the coercive institutions which might have kept Indian backlash in check.

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<sup>62</sup> Nugent (2001), p.22

<sup>63</sup> Booth (1993), p.20

<sup>64</sup> By virtue of their superior leverage over local manpower and taxation

<sup>65</sup> Williams (1994), pp.199-201

<sup>66</sup> Williams (1994), pp.199-201

<sup>67</sup> Gudmundson (1995), p.82, Williams (1994), 203

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* p.86

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Lindo-Fuentes (1990), p.132

<sup>71</sup> Montgomery (1982), p.39

1832 saw significant riots in Indian areas of San Salvador,<sup>72</sup> followed by major revolts across the whole of the nation.<sup>73</sup> Indian attacks focused upon local political figures and large landowners, provoking broad repression by government forces, which triggered larger uprisings.<sup>74</sup> Further revolts followed in January and February of 1833.<sup>75</sup> These struggles far outstripped prior conflicts in El Salvador: the 1833 insurrection, for instance, was waged by 3,000—5,000 Indians, against some 8,000 government soldiers<sup>76</sup> Indian peasants were consistently defeated, but rose again in 1835 and 1837.<sup>77</sup>

Throughout the early independence period, Indian communities' capacity to rapidly organize and field significant military forces proved a serious challenge for Salvadoran elites.<sup>78</sup> In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, agrarian elites would attempt to break the military and economic power of Indian communities by dismantling the collective system of land tenure which bound the indigenous population together.

#### *"REGENERATING THE NATION": COFFEE AND THE TRIUMPH OF ELITE STATEBUILDING*

Following a lull in major inter- and intra-state conflict in the early 1840s, the Salvadoran state slowly began to cohere. Although nominally a republican democracy,<sup>79</sup> El Salvador was ruled by a series of elite-backed dictators throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>80</sup> Under the stewardship of a powerful agrarian oligarchy,<sup>81</sup> the Salvadoran state would respond to shifts in economic and military conditions by radically reshaping the country's agrarian

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<sup>72</sup> Lauria-Santiago (1990), p.105

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p.106

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.106-7

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Lauria-Santiago (1990), pp.110-2

<sup>78</sup> Lauria-Santiago (1990), chpt. 5

<sup>79</sup> The constitution of 1841 provided for indirect elections through highly restricted suffrage USLC (1988), p.16-18

<sup>80</sup> Booth (1993), p.36, Burns (1984), p.296, Lentner (1993), pp.42-3

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

structure, touching off extended civil strife and a countervailing process of statebuilding and military expansion.

The decline of the world indigo market in the mid-1800s<sup>82</sup> profoundly impacted Salvadoran society. Indigo accounted for nearly all Salvadoran exports throughout the mid-1800s,<sup>83</sup> and elites saw in its stagnation the possibility of their own economic decline and loss of political supremacy. Some wealthy *hacienda* owners in Southwest El Salvador had experimented with coffee cultivation in the early 1800s, and agrarian elites across the country now anxiously embraced it as a source of income.<sup>84</sup>

Coffee cultivation differed from indigo production in several crucial respects. Firstly, it was far more labor-intensive: coffee trees required continual pruning and care, and the harvesting and processing of the crop was extremely laborious.<sup>85</sup> Secondly, coffee plants could not be harvested for three to five years after they were planted.<sup>86</sup> Growers needed capital reserves to weather the waiting period. Lastly, coffee required rich volcanic soil and specific microclimates, which were largely concentrated in Indian *ejidal* territories.<sup>87</sup>

Capital shortfalls essentially barred small farmers from coffee cultivation: the severe conflicts of 1824-1837 “...drained... credit market(s) through forced loans to sustain destructive wars.”<sup>88</sup> Elite *hacienda* owners, however, lacked sufficient labor and proper land to produce coffee. Exploiting their dominance over the fledgling Salvadoran state, agrarian

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<sup>82</sup> Owing to the European development of an inexpensive synthetic dye Booth (1993), p.36

<sup>83</sup> Lindo-Fuentes (1990), pp.112-4

<sup>84</sup> Montgomery (1982) p.40

<sup>85</sup> Burns (1984), p.299

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Lindo-Fuentes (1990), p.25, Williams (1994), p.74, Booth (1993), p.36

<sup>88</sup> Lindo-Fuentes (1990), pp.51-2

elites located a common solution to these problems and their developing security dilemma: the elimination of the *ejidos*.

By the early-mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, communal lands still accounted for approximately  $\frac{2}{3}$  of El Salvador's territory.<sup>89</sup> *Ejidal* soil was typically extremely rich, and high crop yields as well as powerful communal bonds<sup>90</sup> made it difficult to entice Indians to leave their lands for plantation work.<sup>91</sup> Agrarian elites accordingly pressured Indian communities at both the national and local level. From the 1850s onward, *haciendas* increasingly encroached on *ejidos* and other communal lands, sparking numerous localized conflicts with Indian peasants.<sup>92</sup> Simultaneously, elites employed their control over the national government<sup>93</sup> to enact a series of sweeping agrarian policies aimed at the dissolution of communal Indian lands. These reforms were aimed at securing additional access to prime coffee lands, as well as breaking the communal structures which facilitated Indian military and political organization.

In 1856, all *ejidos* that did not devote at least two-thirds to coffee cultivation were declared forfeit to the state,<sup>94</sup> which in turn sold forfeited plots to large landowners. Many peasants, unable to marshal capital to cultivate coffee, fled their farms to work as wage-laborers or share-croppers on *haciendas*.<sup>95</sup> By 1879, *ejidos* had eroded to 25% of El Salvador's land,<sup>96</sup> and in 1882 the state abruptly dissolved all remaining communal lands.<sup>97</sup> In order to receive parcels of former *ejidal* land, peasants had to petition at the municipal level,<sup>98</sup> pay a

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<sup>89</sup> Nugent (2001), p.22, Burns (1984), p.297

<sup>90</sup> Williams (1994), p.232

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p.123

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p.71

<sup>93</sup> Lentner (1993), p.42, Booth (1993), p.36, Lindo-Fuentes (1990), p.80

<sup>94</sup> Montgomery (1982) p.40

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.40-1

<sup>96</sup> Burns (1984), p.299, Williams (1994), p.74

<sup>97</sup> Montgomery (1982) p.42

<sup>98</sup> Williams (1994), p.74

registration fee, and submit to six years of land taxation.<sup>99</sup> If a peasant did not claim the land within six months, it was auctioned.<sup>100</sup>

The dismantling of *ejidal* territory was accompanied by the formation of a national land bank which loaned money to planters. Powerful agrarian elites were frequently able to secure substantial loans from the bank for land purchases,<sup>101</sup> while Indian peasants with little collateral or political influence were unable to tap into public funds. Furthermore the privatization of communal lands “disoriented” Indian farmers unused to private ownership, and agrarian elites found it easier to “...befuddle and buy out the new, small landowner than the well-entrenched and tradition-oriented (Indian) community.”<sup>102</sup> Caught between the millstones of national agrarian policy and local elite pressure, Indian communal lands simply disintegrated, and were largely re-absorbed by large *haciendas*.

The dissolution of the *ejidos* created enormous inequality. Many peasants could not pay the land registration fee, or the ensuing taxes. Moreover, wealth and political influence enabled elites to improperly gain title to land by bribing or manipulating land surveyors and judges.<sup>103</sup> By and large, Indians lacked such political tools, and were in a poor position to fend off challenges to their land rights, save with violent resistance.

The mass expropriations of Indian lands freed up large amounts of labor, solving the shortfall that had previously bedeviled agrarian elites.<sup>104</sup> Now unable to rely upon subsistence agriculture, many landless Indian peasants turned to the *haciendas* for survival.<sup>105</sup> Peasant farmers became a rural proletariat,<sup>106</sup> bound to *haciendas* as debt-peons<sup>107</sup> or wage-laborers.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Williams (1994), p.75

<sup>102</sup> Burns (1984), p.300, Montgomery (1982), p. 42, Lauria-Santiago (1990), pp.119-122

<sup>103</sup> Williams (1994), p.75

<sup>104</sup> Williams (1994), p.245

<sup>105</sup> Williams (1994), p.124

<sup>106</sup> Paige, cited in Nugent (2001), p.23

The rapid increase in the labor supply, coupled with peasants' lack of alternatives, reduced the bargaining power of peasant laborers.<sup>109</sup> The results were ruinously poor wages, widespread abuse,<sup>110</sup> and seething rebellion.

#### UNREST AND COERCION

Indian opposition to the dismantling of the *ejidos* was extremely fierce, but ultimately futile.<sup>111</sup> Many Indian communities rejected outright the dissolution of their communal lands, and responded to territorial incursions with "strong and violent acts of resistance."<sup>112</sup> Significant Indian uprisings occurred in 1870, 1872, 1873, 1875, 1880, 1885, 1889, and 1898,<sup>113</sup> resulting in the deaths of numerous *hacienda* owners and local officials. However, the dissolution of the *ejidos* had at least partially achieved its military function: Indian communities were now too weak and fragmented<sup>114</sup> to organize coherent military forces. Although civil strife radically increased following the final dissolution of the *ejidos*, organized Indian rebellions quickly degenerated to atomized acts of violence: dispossessed Indians sabotaged coffee *haciendas* and "unemployed and underemployed" rural laborers violently "protested their deteriorating situation."<sup>115</sup> But by the closing years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, large-scale Indian insurrection had faded to more manageable, diffuse acts of resistance.

Agrarian elites turned to the state to contain Indian unrest. As early as 1848, the state began to craft a nation-wide rural police force;<sup>116</sup> in 1868, as pressure was increasingly

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<sup>107</sup> A form of indentured-servitude

<sup>108</sup> Baloyra-Herp (1983), p.299, Booth (1993), p.37, Burns (1984), p.300-2

<sup>109</sup> Lindo-Fuentes (1990), p.97

<sup>110</sup> Burns (1984), p.302

<sup>111</sup> Booth (1993), p.37

<sup>112</sup> Williams (1994), p.245

<sup>113</sup> Burns (1984), p.302

<sup>114</sup> Lauria-Santiago (1990), pp.218-221

<sup>115</sup> Burns (1984), p.302, Williams (1994), p.124

<sup>116</sup> Lindo-Fuentes (1990), p.64

placed on *ejidos* and peasant unrest began to smolder, the rural police was greatly expanded, and its units stationed in restive areas. Local units of the national military were also used to suppress dissent. In addition to expanding the state's network of social control and violently repressing Indian unrest, rural police and military units developed a relationship with local agrarian elites that would presage future political arrangements in El Salvador: following the dissolution of the *ejidos* in 1881, *hacienda* owners essentially financed the rural police through a coffee tax,<sup>117</sup> and frequently hired off-duty police and military units to guard their properties. Although nominally retained to suppress crime and peasant revolts, the rural units increasingly became an instrument of elite politics, and were used to eject squatters, harass or jail peasant agitators,<sup>118</sup> crush attempts to unionize,<sup>119</sup> and ensure a steady labor supply by impressing vagrants or landless farmers into *hacienda* labor.<sup>120</sup>

The transformations sketched above were profound. At the end of the colonial period, Salvadoran elites faced a restive Indian population, but one which was firmly rooted in traditional communities and livelihoods. The collapse of the indigo market, followed by rapid coffee expansion and the atomization of Indian communal lands, dramatically raised the stakes of inter-class struggle: the agrarian elite now faced an economically disenfranchised and mutinous rural proletariat, held at bay by an expansive security apparatus. The relationship between agrarian elites and the Salvadoran military would deepen in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, yielding a sixty-year institutionalized military dictatorship, and a slow-burning civil conflict.

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<sup>117</sup> Williams (1994), p.124

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.124,245

<sup>119</sup> Brockett (1988), p.145

<sup>120</sup> World Bank (2000) p.17, Burns (1984), p.302

The dissolution of communal lands in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century commenced a century-long period of nearly ceaseless violence between displaced Indian peasants and the state security system erected by agrarian elites. This “background noise” of violence would periodically spike, as during the uprisings of 1870-1898, yielding further expansions of security forces.<sup>121</sup> Institutional military rule developed out of this crucible, as agrarian elites and an increasingly coffee-dependent state apparatus forged a ‘division of labor,’ with military officials controlling the executive branch, and elites dominating economic and foreign policy.<sup>122</sup>

The agrarian transformations of the 19<sup>th</sup> century resulted in the successful creation of an economy devoted almost solely to coffee cultivation. In 1856, the year of the first national policies promulgated against *ejidos*, coffee accounted for 0.84% of Salvadoran exports.<sup>123</sup> By 1881, after all *ejidos* were formally abolished, coffee expanded to 59% of exports.<sup>124</sup> By 1931, coffee thoroughly dominated the Salvadoran economy, accounting for 96% of all exports.<sup>125</sup>

The Salvadoran state rapidly became as reliant upon coffee production as the agrarian elite whose livelihood it sustained.<sup>126</sup> Despite the sophistication of its rural military apparatus, the state generally lacked the capacity to extract taxes from the Salvadoran populace.<sup>127</sup> The agrarian elite barred both income and land taxes, save for a small tax upon coffee which supported the rural police, and the peasantry simply had few if any assets to

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<sup>121</sup> USLC (1988), pp.19,21-2, Williams (1994), p.124

<sup>122</sup> Williams (1994), p.223

<sup>123</sup> Lindo-Fuentes (1990), p.112

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> World Bank (2000), p.17

<sup>126</sup> USLC (1988), pp.14,24-5

<sup>127</sup> Williams (1994), p.220

tax. As a result, the Salvadoran state obtained the bulk of its revenue from import taxes.<sup>128</sup> With virtually all foreign currency earnings flowing from coffee exports, the stream of imports (and thus government revenue) essentially expanded or contracted in tandem with coffee export earnings.<sup>129</sup> Revenues from import duties constituted an average of nearly 60% of government revenue between 1870 and 1914,<sup>130</sup> and as coffee increasingly became the sole fount of export earnings “it (became) suicidal (for the government) to endanger the coffee sector.”<sup>131</sup>

El Salvador’s agrarian elites successfully guided state policy from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>132</sup> Sometimes ruling directly, though frequently through both military and civilian proxies,<sup>133</sup> the coffee elite generally maintained “overwhelming influence” over the Salvadoran government through a combination of electoral fraud, intimidation, and direct rule through force.<sup>134</sup> However, in 1930, an otherwise unremarkable Salvadoran president named Pío Romero Bosque decided, over the strong protests of his cabinet and leading members of the agrarian elite, to hold open, free, and fair elections.<sup>135</sup> Despite significant violence and fraud, the subsequent election was won by Arturo Araujo, a wealthy reformer<sup>136</sup> who promised land reforms, expanded social services, and further democratization.<sup>137</sup> Such reforms sat poorly with agrarian elites, who in December of 1931 extended their blessing to

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<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> See Williams (1994), p.220-2, Lindo-Fuentes (1990)

<sup>130</sup> Montgomery (1982), p. 42

<sup>131</sup> Williams (1994), p.220

<sup>132</sup> Burns (1984), pp.302-5

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> USLC (1988), p.18, Burns (1984), pp.302-5

<sup>135</sup> Brockett (1988), pp.144-5, Burns (1984), p.308

<sup>136</sup> Brockett (1988), p.144

<sup>137</sup> Burns (1984), p.309

a military coup that replaced President Araujo with General Hernandez Martínez.<sup>138</sup> Martínez soon faced a peasant insurrection in western El Salvador, where several thousand Indians attacked local elites and police forces.<sup>139</sup> Martínez responded with an orgy of bloodletting in which rural military forces were loosed against any suspect Indians and peasants.<sup>140</sup> As many as 30,000 civilians were killed in what came to be known as *la matanza* (the slaughter).<sup>141</sup>

Martínez' victory in suppressing the peasant revolt convinced agrarian elites to entrust formal rule to the military,<sup>142</sup> lessening the possibility of untoward reforms or successful peasant uprisings. Thus from 1931 onward, "...the coffee elite discreetly monopolized power...military dictatorship became the norm, with the (oligarchy) calling the shots..."<sup>143</sup> Although some authors, notably Mahoney (2001A), have argued that the military ruled with relative autonomy,<sup>144</sup> the relationship between elites and the military does not bear this out: although the military controlled the executive branch, elites nearly always controlled economic and foreign policy,<sup>145</sup> and frequently dismissed 'disobedient' military officers. This military and agrarian elite 'division of labor' would persist until the mid-1980s, with state repression and Indian unrest growing steadily more violent.<sup>146</sup>

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

From the colonial period until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, elite attempts to secure political and economic dominance in El Salvador shaped institutional evolution. The dissolution of

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<sup>138</sup> Montgomery (1982), p.50

<sup>139</sup> Stanley (1996), p.41

<sup>140</sup> Wood (2000), 31-35, Stanley (1996), p.42,

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>142</sup> Walter (1993), pp.43-4

<sup>143</sup> Woodward (1984), pp.296-7

<sup>144</sup> Mahoney (2001A), p.199

<sup>145</sup> Williams (1994), p.223, USLC (1988), pp.25-6,28

<sup>146</sup> See Stanley (1996)

the *ejidos* shattered Indian communal systems, cementing elite political and economic dominance, but additionally created enduring rural inequality and unrest which manifested in pervasive violence against *hacienda* elites. Elites launched a countervailing program of rural militarization and state expansion, laying the foundations for institutionalized dictatorship, and locking El Salvador into a deepening spiral of intra-state conflict.

# THE PRICE OF POWER: DEMOCRATIZATION IN COSTA RICA

*The purpose of all war is peace*  
—Saint Augustine

*Government... is synonymous with  
neither State nor Nation. (it) is the  
idea of the State put into practical  
operation in the hands of definite,  
concrete, fallible men.*  
—Randolph Bourne

## INTRODUCTION

Costa Rica is popularly known as a “Central American Switzerland,”<sup>147</sup> an oasis of democracy and stability in a turbulent corner of the world. A number of explanations have been put forth regarding this apparent exceptionalism, ranging from the widespread “white myth of Costa Rica”,<sup>148</sup> which argues that a “classless democracy of... white farmers”<sup>149</sup> avoided the political strife endemic to the rest of the isthmus, to the rhetorically-appealing “yeoman farmer” hypothesis,<sup>150</sup> which sees Costa Rica’s democracy as the product of a successful, largely non-violent, struggle between numerous small farmers and a weak and venal agrarian aristocracy.

Such theories fail to capture the conflicts and confluences which gradually generated Costa Rican democracy, and largely ignore the texture and often even the presence of political struggle in Costa Rica’s development. Costa Rican political evolution was conditioned by ceaseless intra-elite strife, as regional, personal, and familial struggle split what, in other Central American nations, more often became a self-conscious and unified political elite. Elites in Costa Rica depended upon inter-class alliances to contend for power, and were obliged to mortgage both economic and political strength to generate support. Thus in Costa Rica, intra-state conflict profoundly shaped political development, and lay the foundations for democratic rule.

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<sup>147</sup> Martz (1959), p.210

<sup>148</sup> Creedman (1977), p.x.

<sup>149</sup> Biesanz (1999), p.13

<sup>150</sup> See Seligson (1980)

CONQUEST, COLONIZATION, AND EARLY SOCIO-ECONOMIC STRUCTURE

The Spanish settlement of Costa Rica commenced in 1562, well after the conquest of Central America.<sup>151</sup> The colony's late birth was largely due to its isolation from existing population centers and its forbidding terrain. Spanish immigration to the region was limited by distance and the scarcity of readily exploitable precious metals and indigenous labor.<sup>152</sup> Nobles who settled in the region were of lower social standing than the grandees who made their home in the colonial capital of Guatemala,<sup>153</sup> and lived much like other inhabitants of the colony.<sup>154</sup>

Owing to the lack of indigenous labor and the relative penury of the social elite, agrarian production did not cohere into *haciendas* (large estates) as in more populous regions of the isthmus.<sup>155</sup> The colony was too impoverished to import African slaves, and the small Indian population was rapidly eroded by disease.<sup>156</sup> Without the threat of Indian or slave revolts, Costa Rica was essentially un-militarized,<sup>157</sup> lacking the organized militias common to its more volatile neighbors.

The majority of Spanish settlers became farmers, working plots small enough to be tilled by familial labor alone.<sup>158</sup> Subsistence or low-surplus agriculture<sup>159</sup> was the predominant economic activity,<sup>160</sup> and elites were forced to labor on their own soil.<sup>161</sup> Although the population of colonial Costa Rica is frequently described as a diffuse cloud of

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<sup>151</sup> Stanger (1932), p.19

<sup>152</sup> Booth (1993), p. 17

<sup>153</sup> Stone (1990), p.17

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>155</sup> Seligson (1977), p.203-4

<sup>156</sup> Stanger (1932), pp.19-20

<sup>157</sup> Ameringer (1982), p.10

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, p.9

<sup>159</sup> Primarily the cultivation of foodstuffs, to be sold in urban regions

<sup>160</sup> Woodward (1985), p.45

<sup>161</sup> Ameringer (1982), p.9

essentially homogenous small farms,<sup>162</sup> Gudmundson has more aptly characterized the colonial inhabitants as dispersed in a web of 'nucleated settlements'<sup>163</sup>: small, dense towns girded by cropland and governed by powerful local councils (*ayunamientos*).

By the mid-seventeenth century, some wealthier Costa Rican farmers began to cultivate cacao for export,<sup>164</sup> which the colonial government encouraged through extensive land grants.<sup>165</sup> However, stiff export taxes enacted by the regional capital in Guatemala and insufficient labor<sup>166</sup> restricted cultivation.

The production of cacao had two lasting impacts: firstly, it initiated some economic differentiation in what had been a uniformly impoverished population,<sup>167</sup> in large part providing the financial foundation for later coffee cultivation. Secondly, the activism of local government in promoting cacao would be echoed by later policies promoting coffee. These subsequent agrarian policies would strongly influence Costa Rica's political development, guided as they were by deeply embedded, predominantly local, networks of patronage and power.

#### *INDEPENDENCE AND EARLY POLITICAL CONFLICT*

In January of 1822, six months after Mexico revolted against Spanish rule, Central America declared its independence.<sup>168</sup> Although groups of elites<sup>169</sup> attempted to re-assert centralized authority, power quickly devolved to local councils (*ayunamientos*)<sup>170</sup> which had

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<sup>162</sup> The earliest exponent of this view is Facio Brenes (reprinted 1972). See also Vega Carballo (1981), and Seligson (1980)

<sup>163</sup> Gudmundson (1986), p.25-29

<sup>164</sup> Seligson (1977), pp.204-5

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, p.205

<sup>166</sup> Hytrek and Shin (2002), p.468

<sup>167</sup> Seligson, p.205-6

<sup>168</sup> Booth (1993), p.20

<sup>169</sup> Primarily nobility, former colonial officials, and leading citizens and merchants

<sup>170</sup> Williams (1994), pp.200-1

transited intact through independence. Conflict flared throughout Central America as townships cohered into liberal and conservative factions, warring sporadically through a porous skein of national borders. Liberals generally favored privatization of public lands, the abolition of trade restrictions, and the removal of church influence from education and state policy, all of which conservatives opposed.

Regional conflict was mirrored by an early struggle for political authority between Costa Rica's major municipalities. In 1823, war erupted between the colonial capital of Cartago, the seat of landed conservative power, and the liberal enclave of San José.

San José triumphed, and attempted to harness the local militias which had proliferated during the strife surrounding independence.<sup>171</sup> Sporadic internecine conflict continued, building to a crescendo in 1835, when the towns of Alajuela, Heredia, and Cartago joined to attack San José. San José again triumphed, largely because of its superior ability to marshal its subordinate population: González Pacheco (1992) has estimated that San José was able to mobilize six thousand men, over 7½ percent of the population of Costa Rica, to engage its beleaguered opponents.<sup>172</sup> This victory secured San José's position as the locus of political authority in Costa Rica.<sup>173</sup>

Costa Rica's first constitution provided for a unicameral legislature,<sup>174</sup> populated through indirect, restricted suffrage: eligible voters selected local representatives, who chose regional electors, who in turn elected "chief executives (and) deputies."<sup>175</sup> The indirect system of elections rendered local elites the 'gatekeepers' of political power, which was projected upward by electors on the basis of grassroots strength.

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<sup>171</sup> Lentner (1990), p.39

<sup>172</sup> González Pacheco (1992), p.39

<sup>173</sup> Williams (1994), pp.206,226

<sup>174</sup> Lentner (1993), p.36

<sup>175</sup> Busey (1961), p.56

## LOCAL POWER AND AGRARIAN DEVELOPMENT

In the power vacuum which followed independence, the *ayunamientos* which governed Costa Rica's towns were free to develop distinctive public policies. San José, home to a dynamic group of planters and merchants, experimented with coffee cultivation as early as 1810. By early 1822, the city commenced an agrarian program to swell its population and stimulate coffee production.<sup>176</sup> Unoccupied public lands were offered discounted or free to any person willing to plant coffee, and saplings were provided at no cost.<sup>177</sup> The city additionally undertook agricultural surveys of fallow lands.<sup>178</sup>

San José's program attracted many small farmers and casual laborers from across the nation. Although little data on subsequent internal migration exists, San José's rapid defeat of Cartago in 1823, as well as repeated triumphs over other population centers during the mid-1820s, attests to a shift in population and power. Unsurprisingly, Cartago, Alajuela, and Heredia soon began similar policies.<sup>179</sup> From 1822—1839, approximately 70,000 hectares of public land were distributed to private individuals.<sup>180</sup> By comparison, over nearly 250 years of Spanish rule (1584-1821), only some 90,000 hectares were distributed.<sup>181</sup> There emerged "... an absolute predominance of small farms... both (in) numbers and... the total area of land occupied."<sup>182</sup>

Early agrarian policy, then, "...involved... an attempt to attract both labor and political support by offering rights to land."<sup>183</sup> The emerging pattern of contestation, in which "...local elites (first) attempted to... establish their credentials to be the central

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<sup>176</sup> Seligson (1977), p.208

<sup>177</sup> Williams (1994), p.44, Mahoney (2001A), p.143-4,

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>179</sup> Mahoney (2001A), p.144

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>182</sup> Cardoso (1977), p.172

<sup>183</sup> Nugent (2001), p.20

government, and after the dominance of San José was established, to gain control over that,”<sup>184</sup> played a critical role in shaping Costa Rica’s subsequent agrarian structure and institutional development.

Despite the availability of fertile coffee lands, Costa Rica’s economic environment stifled the *haciendas* which prevailed elsewhere on the isthmus. Although the significant start-up costs for coffee farms challenged smallholders,<sup>185</sup> elites faced a greater problem in the high labor costs occasioned by low population and the ease with which “...potential labor (might opt out and) settle new land.”<sup>186</sup> Wealthy elites found it difficult to consolidate profitable *haciendas*, and instead carved out a powerful and lucrative niche in the provision of credit, and the processing and export-marketing of coffee crops.<sup>187</sup>

Here, along with the political structure described above, we find a vital clue to the pattern of statemaking in Costa Rica. Within a bottom-heavy political structure that transposed local power to the national arena, the pattern of smallholding cultivated by earlier municipal policy drew small farmers into the orbits of local elites, endowing them with valuable land, but rendering them beholden to those elite interests which controlled access to the credit markets, processing facilities, and export-marketing mechanisms which made coffee cultivation a viable enterprise.<sup>188</sup> For elites, this relationship generated wealth, a reservoir of semi-compulsory electoral support, and, critically, the foundations for military action against rival elites. For the peasantry, such relationships secured access to credit and

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<sup>184</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>185</sup> Williams (1994), p.147-8

<sup>186</sup> Lindo-Fuentes, (1995), p.48

<sup>187</sup> Williams (1994), p.152, Mahoney (2001A), p.146, Nugent (2001), p.20-1

<sup>188</sup> Nugent (2001), pp.20-1

marketing facilities, as well as increased local subsidies and access to public land reserves when patrons were in power.

#### *INTRA-ELITE CONFLICT AND INSTITUTIONAL EVOLUTION*

The volatile intra-elite strife initiated at independence endured for much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although early battle-lines were regional, the divisions between elites were complex and contingent, involving regional, familial, personal, as well as transitory and instrumental elements.<sup>189</sup> But they were not ideological: in Costa Rica “both liberal and conservative elite factions consistently carried out... essentially liberal policies.”<sup>190</sup> Paradoxically, the elites’ relative homogeneity of political ideology and interests, coupled with the significant absence of an antagonized peasant class, weakened their cohesion.<sup>191</sup> Even beset by internal divisions, elites did not fear the loss of their political and economic power, only the triumph of their rivals.

Costa Rican statebuilding began with the rule of Braulio Carrillo.<sup>192</sup> Elected indirectly in 1835, Carrillo lost to Manuel Aguilar in the election of 1837, only to overthrow Aguilar in a coup the following year.<sup>193</sup> In his second, dictatorial incarnation, Carrillo rationalized state agencies and administrative structures, creating a “centralized, vertically integrated state bureaucracy.”<sup>194</sup> However, his enduring achievement was the restructuring of the military.

Early in his tenure, Carrillo circumscribed and centralized state coercive power in Costa Rica. Military units outside of San José were disbanded,<sup>195</sup> and rural police forces were

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<sup>189</sup> González Pacheco (1992), pp.38-9, Stone (1990)

<sup>190</sup> Gudmundson (1986), p.4

<sup>191</sup> Mahoney (2001B), pp.243-4

<sup>192</sup> González Pacheco (1992), p.40, Mahoney (2001A), p.147

<sup>193</sup> Busey, James L. (1961), pp.64-5

<sup>194</sup> Mahoney (2001A), p.147

<sup>195</sup> González Pacheco (1992), p.47-8

placed in a tighter chain of command.<sup>196</sup> Yet Carrillo pointedly avoided professionalizing the military, fearing that potentially disloyal officers might pose a threat to his regime. The army remained small, with a negligible officer corps and significant personnel turnover. These factors delayed the rise of an autonomous military entity in Costa Rica, although the military retained sufficient coercive capacity to defend against (or prosecute) coups d'état.

Following the dissolution of rural military units, the disparate elites vying for power primarily relied upon personal or familial<sup>197</sup> militias,<sup>198</sup> as well as alliances with military officers, in order to compete for power.<sup>199</sup> In the grassroots elections which determined the composition of the legislature, elites coerced votes from farmers and citizens within their spheres of influence. The lack of a secret ballot, coupled with smallholders' reliance upon the credit markets, processing facilities, and export marketing dominated by elites, exposed rural voters to terrific pressures to support their patrons.

Elite conflict rapidly led to significant political instability. Carrillo was toppled in 1842, and from 1842 to 1870, eight of the fourteen Presidents who ruled Costa Rica reached power through military pressure or coups.<sup>200</sup> Of the remaining six power transfers, four were indirect elections with no permitted opposition,<sup>201</sup> and two were voluntary transfers of rule unsanctified by elections.<sup>202</sup> Militia violence and minor uprisings flared continuously,<sup>203</sup> as virtually all presidents attempted to consolidate power and silence adversaries through military force. Elites in power stripped landholdings from rivals and forced opponents into

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<sup>196</sup> Mahoney (2001A), p.147

<sup>197</sup> Usually composed of tenants and dependents

<sup>198</sup> González Pacheco (1992), p.48

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>200</sup> Busey (1961) pp.65-66

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, p.60

exile, all the while aggressively using their temporary control over the state to amass personal wealth.<sup>204</sup>

Aside from one period of extended rule,<sup>205</sup> no elite faction was able to secure lasting access to the state. As a result, elites preferred to rely upon the support of personal or familial militias, maintaining Carrillo's policy of a weak state military apparatus. The ceaseless contestation of the state by rival elites prevented a single group from securing political control, but mired Costa Rica in volatile and violent autocracy.

#### *IMPERMEABLE DICTATORSHIP AND AGRARIAN CONSOLIDATION*

The roiling instability of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century was brought to a halt by the rise of Tomás Guardia in 1870. Initially an ally of the powerful Montealegre family,<sup>206</sup> Guardia assisted the Montealegres in toppling Bruno Carranza before cleverly seizing power himself.<sup>207</sup> A career military officer, Guardia quickly consolidated rule through the vicious repression of restive groups, and kept his enemies divided through adroit manipulation of longstanding elite rivalries. However, Guardia's primary tactic for sustaining his rule—the professionalization of the military<sup>208</sup>—proved pivotal in the evolution of Costa Rican democracy.

Shortly after seizing office, Guardia began an ambitious series of military reforms, notably the rationalization of military command structures, the homogenization and improvement of pay,<sup>209</sup> the promulgation of military codes,<sup>210</sup> and the creation of rigorous

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<sup>204</sup> Ameringer (1982) p.17

<sup>205</sup> The presidency of Manuel Porras (1849-59)

Busey (1961) p.66

<sup>206</sup> A venerable clan of agrarian elites

<sup>207</sup> Mahoney (2001A), p.154

<sup>208</sup> González Pacheco (1992) pp.65-71

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.71-5

<sup>210</sup> Mahoney (2001A), p.154

military academies.<sup>211</sup> These reforms, combined with selective purges of disloyal officers, led to the creation of a politically-insulated, professional military.<sup>212</sup> Guardia also greatly increased military spending,<sup>213</sup> augmenting the size, weaponry, and capacity of the state to respond to internal military challenges challenges.

In his twelve year rule (1870-81), Guardia effectively inoculated the military against the machinations of rival elites and improved the state's capacity to contain challenges to the standing political order. Guardia's successors carefully reduced the military budget "... to... constrain the ability of the military to intervene in national politics."<sup>214</sup> Within approximately fifteen years, political competition in Costa Rica had been dramatically altered: the military was now strong enough to dissuade elites from using private force to seize power, but not so powerful that it might monopolize control over the state.

Bereft of traditional coercive mechanisms, elites first turned to their remaining tool to contest for political power: electoral support generated from agrarian clients and dependents. However, the economic conditions which underpinned this system had altered from the mid-late 19<sup>th</sup> century: where once a population of smallholders had produced coffee under the patronage of wealthy agrarian elites, economic transformation and agrarian consolidation had occurred.

Coffee was both the blessing and the bane of Costa Rican smallholders. The crop had made small farms viable, and brought some measure of wealth to many peasants. However, smallholders' near-total dependence upon coffee— the crop accounted for 80%

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<sup>211</sup> González Pacheco (1992) pp.82-4

<sup>212</sup> Mahoney (2001A), p.154

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>214</sup> Mahoney (2001A), p.155

of exports by 1840,<sup>215</sup> and represented nearly all monetary income for most small farmers—subjected them to price fluctuations in world markets. The most severe of these, such as the demand crash caused by the pan-European revolutions of 1848,<sup>216</sup> drastically reduced coffee prices and forced many smallholders (who lacked the capital reserves to weather such shocks) to sell their land. Prime growing land, deemed essentially worthless when first parceled out,<sup>217</sup> was a valuable commodity by mid-century,<sup>218</sup> but its value compressed during periods of slack demand for coffee, allowing wealthy elites to inexpensively expand their landholdings. While rural smallholding had once been virtually ubiquitous,<sup>219</sup> the 1864 census listed 49 percent of the rural workforce as landless wage laborers.<sup>220</sup> By 1883, the number had swelled to 70 percent.<sup>221</sup>

The creation of a large class of wage laborers eroded the political and economic power of what had amounted to a rural middle class, but it had the additional effect of rupturing the economic dependency of small coffee planters upon the credit and marketing mechanisms of agrarian elites. Elites, however, now required the electoral mobilization of rural and semi-urban voters to compete for political power. Such support could not be coerced, as chronic labor shortages leavened what power differentials might have emerged from local labor monopsonies. Finally, the development of smallholders had stimulated the growth of urban and semi-urban “merchants, professionals, and petty commodity traders”,<sup>222</sup> who largely survived the periodic economic shocks. This nascent urban upper-middle class

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<sup>215</sup> Nugent (2001), p.20

<sup>216</sup> Seligson (1977), p.216

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, p.212

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, p.213

<sup>219</sup> Barry (1986), p.186

<sup>220</sup> Seligson, p.213

<sup>221</sup> Ameringer (1981), p.16

<sup>222</sup> Williams (1994), pp.230-1

remained beyond the coercion of political elites, but represented a significant reservoir of potential support.<sup>223</sup>

The institutional and economic transformations sketched above profoundly altered political contestation in Costa Rica. Just at the point when agrarian elites were able to employ their local control over smallholders to generate politically meaningful electoral support, the system of production which provided such opportunities ruptured under a hail of price shocks and agrarian consolidations. Many elites profited from this,<sup>224</sup> amassing larger estates and agricultural largesse, but at the same time were forced to turn to another method of securing power: popular mobilization and electoral inducement.

#### *MASS POLITICS, CIVIL WAR, AND DEMOCRATIC TRANSCENDENCE*

The end of the Guardia regime by no means represented the beginning of a wholly democratic or peaceful Costa Rica. The institutional and economic reforms of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century represented a crucial advance, but Costa Rican democracy remained qualified by limited suffrage as well as significant electoral fraud and outbreaks of intense violence.<sup>225</sup> Yet as it had in the past, intra-elite conflict would again provide the impetus for institutional transformation.

The age of mass politics began in 1889, amidst a major political crisis. Bernardo Soto had been elected president in 1888, but quickly resigned the post in a bid to

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<sup>223</sup> Hoivik (1981), p.339

<sup>224</sup> Barry (1986), p.186

<sup>225</sup> Lehoucq (1996)

illegitimately transfer power to Ascensión Esquivel.<sup>226</sup> Elites opposed to Soto and Esquivel were outraged, but owing to Guardia's military reforms, were unable to topple Esquivel through military pressure against the state.<sup>227</sup> Instead, elites "looked to popular mobilization as an alternative means to resolve the conflict."<sup>228</sup>

José Rodríguez' Democratic Constitutional Party, the primary elite faction opposing Soto and Esquivel, launched a powerful public appeal, taking particular care to mobilize segments of the public aligned with Rodríguez' conservative (in Costa Rican terms) ideology. The appeal to the masses succeeded: large demonstrations broke out across the country, forcing the resignation of Esquivel.<sup>229</sup> Elections were held shortly thereafter, and, amidst an intense and sporadically violent campaign season, Rodríguez triumphed.<sup>230</sup> Rodríguez' success in dislodging Esquivel through popular mobilization did not go unnoticed, and elites and their attendant political parties<sup>231</sup> thereafter began to court voters more ambitiously, especially rural workers and the budding urban middle class.

In 1909, Ricardo Jimenez courted middle-class rural voters by offering to institute the direct electoral appointment of municipal officials,<sup>232</sup> which bolstered his flagging candidacy, eventually securing him the presidency. Eager to tap the support of small farmers and the urban middle class, Jimenez introduced the secret ballot, oversaw the expansion of the electorate, and instituted direct elections.<sup>233</sup> The electorate "expanded continuously",<sup>234</sup> as did elite competition for new founts of support.

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<sup>226</sup> Busey (1961), pp.58,66-7

<sup>227</sup> Mahoney (2001A), p.157

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>229</sup> Busey (1961), p.67

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>231</sup> Ameringer (1981), p.19

<sup>232</sup> Winson (1989) p.26

<sup>233</sup> Ameringer (1981), p.21

<sup>234</sup> Booth (1993), pp.30-1

In the 1920s and 30s, labor unions, ‘pressure groups’, and a variety of political organizations representing the lower classes began to appear on the Costa Rican political landscape.<sup>235</sup> Having expanded the electorate in a bid to attract voting blocs, political elites now found “... their potential support irresistible in the context of intense electoral competition.”<sup>236</sup> Political violence quickly reached a new pitch. The integration of previously disenfranchised groups into broad alliances raised the stakes of elections, as swings in control could now generate broad shifts in political and social policy.<sup>237</sup> Partisans for various elite-led factions harassed rival political parties, subverted electoral systems, and intimidated voters. Electoral violence and fraud finally germinated in a political crisis and civil war in 1948.

From 1940-1944, Costa Rica was ruled by Rafael Calderón, a reform-minded member of the elite who gained political power through alliance with the communist party, and by dint of electoral fraud and violence. In 1948, Calderón’s hand-picked successor, Teodoro Picado, was defeated by Otilio Ulate, despite Picado’s use of ballot-stuffing, violence, and voter intimidation.<sup>238</sup> Picado quickly tried to invalidate the electoral results,<sup>239</sup> and war erupted as Ulate’s faction, under the wartime command of José Figueres, attempted to topple the government.<sup>240</sup> After a brief but extremely bloody struggle, Figueres wrested power from Picado,<sup>241</sup> formed a limited-term *junta*, and convened a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Winson (1989) p.27

<sup>236</sup> Mahoney (2001A), p.217

<sup>237</sup> Mahoney (2001B), p.246

<sup>238</sup> Lehoucq (1991), p.37, Busey (1961), p.69

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>240</sup> Busey (1961), p.69

<sup>241</sup> Martz (1959), pp.222-3

<sup>242</sup> Cerdas (1991), pp.291,294-9

The 1948 civil war demonstrated the dangers of intra-state conflict in an age of mass political mobilization, as violent political gyrations now threatened the stability of the nation. The elite-dominated constituent assembly defused the situation by reducing presidential powers, establishing a politically-autonomous electoral commission, declaring universal suffrage, and abolishing the armed forces in favor of a national police force<sup>243</sup>— in short, by crafting a new democratic framework to contain the political forces unleashed by elite-led mass mobilization.

#### *CONCLUDING REMARKS*

From independence until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Costa Rican institutional development was shaped by intense intra-elite conflict. Elite attempts to secure military and electoral support through economic inducements, relationships of patronage, and eventually political bargaining and inter-class alliances, created the foundations for democratic rule.

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<sup>243</sup> Mahoney, (2001B), p.246, Cerdas (1991), pp.298-9

# ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS: POLITICAL DIVERGENCE IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

*... differences can be small, but they can lead  
to radically different consequences; like a  
railroad's switch points.  
—Primo Levi*

War indeed made states in El Salvador and Costa Rica: the military imperatives faced by elites in both nations helped to impel the development of coherent state institutions, but differing patterns of intrastate conflict led to radically divergent instruments of coercion and political control. Statemaking—the suppression of rivals for domestic power—took form according to the demographic, economic, and political patterns established during colonial rule, but evolved in tandem with changes in these factors. Thus in El Salvador and Costa Rica, war proved to be a powerful and responsive catalyst for institutional development. As such, the experiences of both nations provide critical lessons for the study of civil war and state formation, as well as new insights into a body of theory largely derived from European history.

#### *INTRA-STATE CONFLICT IN EL SALVADOR AND COSTA RICA: OVERVIEW AND COMPARISON*

Although El Salvador and Costa Rica developed from the same colonial enterprise, early social and economic differences initiated divergent developmental paths. In El Salvador, a large indigenous population was harnessed for export-production, leading to the early formation of an agrarian elite and an antagonized Indian peasantry. Costa Rica lacked a significant indigenous population, which contributed to its sparse settlement and prevented the rise of a *hacienda*-dominated economy. A social elite arose, but inequality between elites and other colonists was relatively minimal.

Independence and the ensuing chaos of political reorganization promoted widespread conflict. In El Salvador, Indian communities attempted to forge greater autonomy through a series of insurrections, while in Costa Rica, regional elites struggled over political control. These early paroxysms gave shape to nascent political and economic institutions. Costa Rican elites attempted to secure political dominance through the

distribution of lands and credit to farmers, creating dense webs of local patronage which provided both coercive and electoral support, and sowed the seeds of a small-farmer economy. For much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, rival elites struggled for control of the central government, which remained atrophied because of elite fears of an unassailable centralized military. In El Salvador, agrarian elites responded to Indian insurrections by closing ranks and creating strong local coercive forces to extinguish rural unrest. Elites inaugurated a series of land 'reforms' which served the dual function of disrupting Indian social structures (theoretically impeding their ability to organize and rebel), and securing prime coffee lands for large scale agro-export. Indian unrest endured, necessitating the creation of steadily stronger and more intrusive coercive forces.

Political and economic changes in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century altered political contestation in Costa Rica. Tomás Guardia, the first ruler to emerge from within the military, created a strong professional army, while economic instability and periodic collapses in world coffee prices led to the decline of the smallholder economy. These changes disrupted prior patterns of statemaking: the new national army prevented elites from securing rule through force alone, and the decrease in smallholding broke earlier patterns of elite patronage and political influence. In order to vie for power, elites resorted to mass politics, courting voters with greater civic and electoral rights. Rival elite-led coalitions clashed, and political violence escalated until the bloody civil war of 1948 convinced the competing parties that the damaging effects of political violence had become too great to bear.

By contrast, political violence in El Salvador remained within its historical trajectory: the late 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the expansion of rural coercive forces, and the growing reliance of the state on agrarian export production. A maverick elite's attempt at political reform in 1931, coupled with rural unrest generated by the great Depression, led to an elite-sanctioned

military coup. This event commenced a fifty-year period of military governance, during which elites retained ultimate political and economic control, and the military received a relatively free rein to govern over an increasingly violent and divided country.

#### *POLITICAL STRUGGLES AND INSTITUTIONAL TRAJECTORIES*

Institutional divergence in El Salvador and Costa Rica was catalyzed by differing patterns of civil strife. Intra-elite conflict in Costa Rica generated political bargains and institutional outcomes similar to those which emerged in Europe, while enduring conflict between elites and Indian peasants in El Salvador fused elite interests with a dictatorial, militarized state.

In Costa Rica, elites first offered peasants and small farmers expansive land rights in order to garner military and electoral support. Given the military weakness of the national government, early Costa Rica was akin to a patchwork of warring principalities, with local elites extracting manpower and capital from dependents in an effort to maintain power. As conflict intensified over the 19<sup>th</sup> century, smallholders were able to secure greater financial and territorial concessions from elites. Elites focused on nourishing local power bases, ensuring their economic and infrastructural strength, rather than strengthening a central government which might be turned against them. With local power the critical ingredient for national influence, elites and their dependents became accustomed to reciprocity and inter-class alliance.

Following Guardia's reforms, the Costa Rican military developed into a discrete social actor, but one which lacked the strength to dominate domestic affairs. Instead, the military dampened direct violent competition for the state, thus channeling elite strife through the national electoral mechanism. The democratic and electoral reforms of the early

20<sup>th</sup> century mimicked earlier interclass political bargains. Political contenders such as Jimenez offered blocs of voters substantial political concessions, from direct election of rural officials to an expanded electorate, in order to mobilize support. Political violence did not abate, but was channeled through party apparatuses which reflected regional, personalistic, and ideological interests. Just as in Europe, elites bargained in return for mass support against rivals. Thus, from independence through the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, statemaking in Costa Rica pivoted on the reliance of elite actors on other social classes for political muscle. This reliance facilitated and shaped political and economic bargaining, powering a progressive oscillation from autocracy to democracy.

Institutional evolution in El Salvador took a different course. The early threat of Indian revolts rendered intra-elite competition unacceptably risky, leading to the creation of a relatively unified elite which ruled through dictatorship. Elite attempts to secure economic and political dominance through *ejidal* privatization necessitated the creation of a powerful, decentralized security apparatus. Yet while nominally agents of the state, rural police and military units were frequently hired or supported by local *hacienda* owners, blurring the line between public and private provision of violence. Elites relied upon such units to create a large and inexpensive labor force through the enforcement of vagrancy laws (which impressed the unemployed into *hacienda* service) and debt-peonage, creating further rural discontent. As Indian unrest deepened in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, elites began to “fill-in” the national state by professionalizing the army and creating a robust military bureaucracy. At the local and national level, the state and its coercive forces became an appendage of the *hacienda* elite.

In 1930, Pío Romero Bosque’s unlikely decision to pursue competitive elections threatened the elite system of power and production, leading to a military coup. The

military, long-tempered by Indian uprisings and heavily reliant on agricultural exports for its budget, shared elite interests in the perpetuation of the agrarian system. Thus, in El Salvador, elite statemaking rested upon the political and economic suppression of the Indian peasantry. In order to sustain their rule, elites required the perpetuation of the *hacienda* system, and sufficient coercive force to muffle challenges to their rule. Political accommodation was inimical to elite political and economic hegemony.

Given the conditions of statemaking in Costa Rica, relationships between elites and their dependents constituted a positive-sum game: elites were better equipped to contend for national power if their clients were numerous and economically successful, and smallholders were better able to access state resources (such as land distributions, subsidies, and infrastructural development) if their patrons achieved power. In El Salvador, relations between elites and Indian peasants were zero-sum: the political and economic strength of both groups depended upon access to prime agricultural lands and the ability to deploy dominant coercive forces.

This critical distinction accounts, in large part, for the divergent forms of state penetration in each society. El Salvador's polarized political landscape required the *coercive* penetration of society, embodied by sophisticated rural systems of labor control, surveillance, and the systematic coercion and domination of the peasantry. The rural military was leading edge of the state. By contrast, Costa Rica's volatile intra-elite strife generated the *political* penetration of society, embodied first by the complex webs of local patronage linking elites and smallholders, and subsequently by mass-political movements predicated on the bargaining of elite power in return for political and electoral support.

## EXTENSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Now, drawing upon the divergent histories of El Salvador and Costa Rica, we may draw out several broader theoretical implications and speculations. Firstly, although *warmaking* (checking external challengers to the state) was decisive in European history, *statemaking* (checking internal challengers) may exert an equally powerful force on institutional development, especially when the state is porous or weak. However, while warmaking has been demonstrated to generally exert an integrative effect upon state and society,<sup>244</sup> statemaking may create or exacerbate deep social cleavages. This may promote or deepen democracy, should those who seek power require popular backing to achieve it, and, as in Costa Rica, lack the coercive capacity to compel support. Yet social cleavages may also lead to entrenched dictatorship, if those who seek power not require popular support, or, as in El Salvador, instead require the suppression of much of the populace. In the former condition, power may be slowly leached from elite actors to the masses, while in the latter, elites or a dominant class may jealously and violently guard their authority.

Secondly, intra-elite relations are decisive. A unified elite may, irrespective of its particular economic or political orientation, define itself in opposition to other classes or social groups, impeding the inter-class dependencies which often precede democratic rule.<sup>245</sup> A divided elite is likelier to seek support in other groups, creating a space for political accommodation and inter-class alliance.

Thirdly, warfare does not always result in the creation of powerful state coercive instruments. Political competitors may find private military resources more reliable or effective, and may have a strong interest in keeping state coercive forces weak or atomized, lest they ‘fall into the wrong hands.’

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<sup>244</sup> See “introduction and theory”

<sup>245</sup> Ganshof (1996)

Lastly, one may not assume the state to be a unified social actor. State capacity and impermeability is neither ‘natural’ nor legislated, but rather a function of time, professionalization, and chance. As in Costa Rica, the state may simply serve as a vessel for intra-state conflict until it develops a bureaucratic “critical mass.” However, if the state does develop sufficiently to articulate its own political interests, these may not always be autonomous. As in El Salvador, the state may find that its vitality or survival depends upon a particular social or economic configuration.

#### *CONCLUDING REMARKS*

The stylized and oft-quoted assertion that ‘war makes states’ is powerful, but imprecise. War is but a catalyst, albeit a powerful one, and its transformative influence varies according to the social and political conflicts and relationships which animate it. Violent conflict may indeed foster centralized political and coercive institutions, or even democratic rule, but it may just as easily yield social fragmentation and dictatorship. In the foregoing analysis, I have attempted to unpack the notion that ‘war makes states’, and explore how differing political and social contexts and conflicts generate diverse institutional and regime outcomes. Fundamentally, it is these factors, shaped and articulated through organized violence, which guide national destinies.

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