

PULP FRICTION: NATURE, POLITICS AND
PLANTATION FORESTRY IN SORIANO,
URUGUAY

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Abstract

Based on 14 months of fieldwork carried out in the capital of Montevideo and interior department of Soriano, Uruguay, this dissertation analyzes the growing tension between supporters and resisters of the country's expanding pulp and exotic tree plantation industry. Since the creation of the Forestry Law in 1987, monoculture plantation forestry has grown, currently covering 1 million hectares of land. The ruling left-wing coalition, the Frente Amplio, has continued to support the large-scale, foreign-owned pulp/plantation industry despite its founding principles of carrying out agrarian reform and supporting the rural worker.

Drawing from the theoretical work on boundary objects in science and technology studies (STS) as well as writings on the dialectical relationship between the state and civil society, this dissertation is broadly framed by three thematic concerns: 1) How do processes of state formation and market logics rearrange the "natural" environment? 2) How do such processes impact the relationships between local populations, their physical environment, and the state? 3) What does neo-extractivism do? Is neo-extractivism under the direction of a progressive state different from the kinds of extractivist projects that dominated in Latin America during the 20th century? Exploring how and why local populations respond to these entanglements in the ways that they do, I note that anti-industry activists make logical arguments based on their particular interpretations of economic development, natural production, and progressive politics, which clash with the state's technical and reformed approach. As such, my research contributes to our understanding of the ways that social and political relationships and state formation projects form within in the context of large-scale neo-extractivist projects.

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List of Spanish Terms

Asentamiento: Squatter settlement

Blancos: Also referred to as the “Partido Nacional” this term refers to one of the traditional political parties. It has particularly strong support in the rural areas, and this party currently leads Soriano’s government.

Campo: The countryside; can also refer to a farmer’s field.

Chacra: A small farm.

Chacrero: A small-scale farmer. The term is sometimes written as “chacarero.”

Colorados: The other traditional political party in Uruguay. The Colorados held national power before and after the military dictatorship.

Compañero: A term that can be used to denote one’s friend, colleague, comrade, companion, or partner.

Estancia: A large ranch.

Frente Amplio: “Broad Front” in English, this is the name of the leftist coalition founded in 1971. Since 2005, the Frente Amplio has held national power.

Gaicho: A cattle herder, the gaicho is Southern Cone equivalent of a cowboy. Particularly in Uruguay and Argentina, the cowboy has become a romanticized national symbol and the subject of much 19th and 20th century folklore and literature.

Intendente: The elected political leader of a department, such as Soriano

Latifundización: The process of increasing the number of large-landholdings, such as *estancias* (see below) or plantations in the rural areas.

Minifundización: The process of reducing farm sizes to small, subsistence plots.

Mugre: Filthy. A term I often heard used to describe Montevideo, where litter and dog waste on the streets have become concerns for many residents.

Piquetero: A term from Argentina referring to people who stage a protest or demonstration (usually political in nature) by blocking a road or street.

Quilombero: A shit-disturber

Tambo: A small dairy farm

Tupamaros: Another name for the *Movimiento de Liberación Nacional – Tupamaros* (MLN-T), a Marxist guerrilla movement founded in the early 1960s. José Mujica was a member of the Tupamaros, and belongs to the movement's political party, the *Movimiento de Participación Popular* (MPP).

Yerba Mate: Also referred to simply as “mate” this is a strong, bitter infusion made with the leaves of a South American shrub. It is drunk from a gourd through a metal straw that is passed around and shared amongst the group.

List of Acronyms

ACAG: *Asamblea Ciudadana Ambiental de Gualeguaychú* / Citizens' Environmental Assembly of Gualeguaychú

ANT: Actor Network Theory

ASODERN: *Asociación Soriano para la Defensa de los Recursos Naturales* / Soriano's Association for the Defence of Natural Resources

BAT: Best available techniques

CARU: *Comisión Administradora del Río Uruguay* / Administrative Commission of the Uruguay River.

CIDE: *Comite Comisión de Inversiones y Desarrollo Económico* / Committee for Research and Economic Development

CIS: Cumulative impact study

DINAMA: *Director Nacional de Medio Ambiente* / National Director of the Environment

EIA: Environmental impact assessment

ENCE: *Energía y celulosa* / Energy and cellulose (Spanish pulp company)

FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization

FDI: Foreign direct investment

FSC: Forest Stewardship Council

GDP: Gross domestic product

ICJ: International Court of Justice

IFC: International Finance Corporation

IMF: International Monetary Fund

ISI: Import substitution industrialization

LATU: *Laboratorio Tecnológico del Uruguay* / Uruguay's Technology Laboratory

MdP: Montes del Plata

MGAP: *Ministerio de Ganadería, Agricultura, y Piscadería* / Ministry of Livestock, Agriculture, and Fisheries

MIDES: *Ministerio de Desarrollo Social* / Ministry of Social Development

MIGA: Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency

MLN: *Movimiento de Liberación Nacional – Tupamaros* / National Liberation Movement – Tupamaros

MOVITDES: *Movimiento por la Vida, el Trabajo y Desarrollo Sustentable* / Movement for Life, Work, and Sustainable Development

MPP: *Movimiento de Participación Popular* / Popular Participation Movement

MVOTMA: *Ministerio de Viviendas, Ordenamiento Territorial y Medio Ambiente* / Ministry of Housing, Land, and Environment

NGO: Non-governmental organization

PPM: Parts per million

SNAP: *Sistema Nacional de Áreas Protegidas de Uruguay* / Uruguay's National System of Protected Areas

STS: Science and technology studies

UdelaR: *Universidad de la República* / University of the Republic

UPM: United Papers Mills (full name is United Paper Mills – Kymmene)

Map 1: Topographical Map of Uruguay



Part One:
History and Politics

Chapter 1

Introduction: Locating Resistance to Uruguay's Pulp and Timber Industry in Theoretical and Methodological Context

The World's Poorest President

In November 2012, a story appeared in the BBC that quickly made its way into various international news sources. The subject of the article was Uruguayan President, José “Pepe” Mujica, whom it declared as the “World’s Poorest President,” later leading *The Guardian* and *The Economist* to publish similar articles on the president’s lifestyle in 2014. Mujica was given the title of the poorest president because of his decision to donate 90 per cent of his monthly salary of \$12,000 to charity, putting his “austere” lifestyle in stark contrast to that of many elected leaders, who are far removed from those of their electorate. A self-declared left-wing libertarian, proponent of social justice and leader of the Frente Amplio (Broad Front)¹ coalition, who dreams of a “future utopia,” Mujica has been recognized as a world leader who actually practices what he preaches (Tremlett 2014). “I’m called ‘the poorest president’, but I don’t feel poor. Poor people are those who only work to try to keep an expensive lifestyle, and always want more and more,” he told Hernandez of the BBC in 2012. “I can live well with what I have.”

Upon taking office in 2010 at the age of 74, following his five years as the Minister of Livestock, Agriculture, and Fisheries, he refused to live in the presidential home located

¹ The party was established on February 5, 1971, when a dozen different left-wing parties came together to form a coalition of 12 political parties, including Communists, Socialists, and Christian Democrats, stating that the "fundamental objective of the Frente Amplio is permanent political action and not electoral competition" (Fox 2007). It has held national power since 2005.

in the upscale Prado neighbourhood of Montevideo, choosing instead to remain in the house he shares with his wife, Senator Lucía Toplansky, on her flower farm in the rural outskirts of Montevideo. A modest house that has been humorously referred to in Uruguay as the *Casa Blanca* (White House) because of its colour, it has been much talked about and described in detail in the press. Referred to in one report as a “ramshackle farm” (Hernandez 2012), the house is a three-bedroom, one-storey structure made of “concrete, reached down a [dirt] track on a featureless plain” (Bello 2014). Mujica has eschewed formality in other ways, as well, giving interviews from his home whilst sitting on old, battered chairs, and usually dressed in his signature attire of “a beige fleece, brown tracksuit bottoms, leather sandals and black socks” (Hernandez 2012). This wardrobe was purportedly an improvement in his dress style before his political leadership, which had typically been finished off with a threadbare sweatshirt in lieu of the fleece until his 2009 campaign team stepped in (Tremlett 2014).

As for the rundown furniture, it only served to propel Mujica’s position as a strong opponent of needless consumerism, another trait that has earned him international praise. The president is quoted as lamenting that most of the world leaders have a “blind obsession to achieve growth with consumption, as if the contrary would mean the end of the world” (Hernandez 2012). He made a similar point in regards to over-consumption at the Rio +20 Summit in June of that year, a speech that was reproduced numerous times and shared far and wide, in both the Uruguayan and foreign press as well as various left-leaning blogs, positioning himself as a green leader on the world stage. After thanking the organizers and the people of Brazil, he began his speech:

We've been talking all afternoon about sustainable development. To get the masses out of poverty. But what are we thinking? Do we want the model of

development and consumption of the rich countries? I ask you now: what would happen to this planet if Indians would have the same proportion of cars per household as Germans? How much oxygen would we have left? (Mujica 2012; translation by Hernandez 2012).



**Figure 1: “Pepe” Mujica with his dog, Manuela, in front of his home, May 2014.
Photo Credit: Associated Press/ Matilde Campodonica**

And many more of his atypical habits have become worthy of attention: He flies economy. He eats at the local bars in Montevideo. His manner of speech is gruff and perhaps a bit crude, often described as the language of someone lacking education, a habit making some, such as one friend’s mother, cringe from embarrassment. While he grew up in a poor working-class neighbourhood in Montevideo (his father, a small-scale farmer, went bankrupt just before his death when Mujica was only five years old) and did not complete his preparatory studies for law, some have argued that his use of a very colloquial Spanish is also a deliberate tactic to separate himself from other politicians. He

has been repeatedly and erroneously praised for being a vegetarian² in the English speaking press, despite being the elected leader of the country with the highest beef consumption per capita worldwide, adding to his mystique. His only asset in 2010, the year he took office, was a blue 1987 Volkswagen beetle, valued at approximately \$1800 USD³, which he used to get himself to and from work. Almost every television news interview I saw with the president in Uruguay took place at his car, as he was either arriving or leaving from his day of work at the Presidential Office. This was made possible because Mujica never seemed to travel with security around him, allowing the press to approach him without difficulty.

All of this has made the former guerrilla fighter cum respected politician a symbol for the Left, a kind of folk hero who has brought real socialist governance to a country in the region used as the testing ground for free market capitalism during the Cold War, a period when US-backed dictatorships dominated its political landscape. He spent 13 years in prison for his role with the Tupamaro urban guerrilla movement⁴, during which time he was held under conditions meant to psychologically torture him. Kept in solitary confinement in a tiny cell during his imprisonment, Mujica recalled how he was nearly driven mad⁵. His recovery and successful transition into the world of party politics and then country president makes for an impressive narrative. All of these factors, in short, have made Mujica nearly larger than life, so much so that, in 2012, Argentinean

² Following his victory in the 2009 election, Mujica told the press that he was a “wildcat who has turned vegetarian” (Dangl 2010), referring to his move from Marxist guerrilla fighter to elected politician. I assume that the claim that he is vegetarian is a result of the second half of this phrase being taken too literally.

³ His personal wealth increased between 2010 and 2012, when he added half of his wife’s assets (land, tractors, and their house) to his list of possessions. The additions brought his personal wealth up to \$215,000 USD (Hernandez 2012).

⁴ Mujica belongs to the *Movimiento de Participación Popular* (Popular Participation Movement, or MPP), the political wing of the former guerrilla movement.

⁵ Mujica’s mental health during his imprisonment is often included in the narrative of his journey from guerrilla to president. For a few examples, see Bonilla 2015, Pernas 2014 and Brum 2014.

environmental philosopher, Eduardo Sanguinetti, even went so far as to suggest that his could be the recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize for his example of “austerity, dignity, and honesty.” This suggestion came one step closer to reality when the Dutch NGO, Drug Free Institute, put his name forward as a candidate in 2014, arguing that he provided an alternative to the “war” on drugs through Uruguay’s legalization of marijuana (Lissardy 2014).

While Mujica has perhaps been responsible for bringing Uruguay and the Frente Amplio to international attention, he was not the first president from the Frente Amplio coalition. That honour went to Tabaré Vázquez, a practicing oncologist affiliated with the socialist party. Vázquez took a moderate approach to social democracy in an attempt to avoid partisan politics, making him one of the most popular presidents in Uruguay’s history. However, election rules in Uruguay prevent any individual from serving as president for two consecutive terms and Mujica was elected by the coalition to be his successor. In fact, prior to being voted in as the coalition’s presidential candidate for the 2009 elections, there was worry amongst some coalition members that he was not the right choice to succeed Vázquez, being a bit too rough around the edges, with some members trying to distance themselves from him. One incident just prior to the elections that year demonstrated as much, as members of the Frente, were quick to criticize Mujica for comments appearing in a then-recently published book called *Pepe’s Colloquialisms*, in which he criticized Argentina’s political system and leaders⁶.

⁶ Mujica found himself in a similar situation in 2013 when, during a press conference, he told another Uruguayan politician, “The old lady is worse than the one-eyed man” (“*esta vieja es peor que el tuerto*”), without realizing that his microphone was still on. He was referring to Argentina’s president, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner and her later husband, Argentina’s former president, Néstor Kirchner.

There was also worry that he would be more polarizing than Vázquez and in some ways he was, passing progressive bills that his predecessor had not, including his decisions to accept prisoners from Guantanamo, to legalize cannabis (a decision which ran counter to the majority of public opinion) and gay marriage, and to decriminalize abortion, the latter of which Vázquez prevented from passing into law during his term in office by invoking his presidential veto. During his tenure as president, he often clashed with his vice-president, the more fiscally conservative Danilo Astori, who had been the Minister of Economy Finance under Vázquez and the latter's preferred choice as successor.

Yet, despite all of the praise abroad and the radical lifestyle choices he has made, some of the Frente Amplio's long-time supporters have criticized him for abandoning his party's original promises of radical change, particularly those against the expansion of foreign-owned extractive industries taking place at present in Uruguay. Delia Villalba, a retired school teacher and well-known environmental activist from the city of Fray Bentos where the controversial Botnia (now UPM) pulp mill is located, made this clear when she bluntly told me that "Mujica has "disowned his role in Uruguay's revolution" even as he is "honoured as a guerrilla when he travels outside of the country." Perhaps ironically, this decision to expand large-scale industry, which has turned some of the coalition's supporters is also part of the reason why Mujica is so popular as the model of a progressive leader, even within North America and Europe: While he embodies the characteristics of a leftist president, in essence challenging other progressive world leaders to demonstrate their commitment to greater equality and social justice, he has done so

without attacking global capitalism, making him what Jorge Casteñada (2006) has called a “good leftist.”⁷

Mujica has not denied that his approach is less than radical, and he acknowledged that this made him unpopular with some *compañeros* from his days with the Tupamaro guerrillas. However, he has argued that doing so has been necessary for bringing about long term social justice. “I need capitalism to work, because I have to levy taxes to attend to the serious problems we have,” he told Giles Tremlett of *The Guardian*. “Trying to overcome it all too abruptly condemns the people you are fighting for to suffering, so that instead of more bread, you have less bread” (Tremlett 2014). This “taming” of Mujica, while earning him praise from capitalist countries in the North, has left him open to critique from both coalition supporters and detractors who say that neo-extractivism (defined below), in the form of agribusiness, the pulp/plantation forestry complex, and a potential open pit nickel mine – all of which are almost exclusively foreign-owned – has been at the expense of the coalition’s core beliefs and the country’s rural agriculturalists and ranchers.

It was this apparent contradiction between the rise of the Frente Amplio as an alternative to traditional neoliberal economics and the expansion of neo-extractivism and foreign investment in the country’s interior regions that first caught my interest as a researcher. I arrived in Uruguay in January 2011 to begin my 14 months of fieldwork and turned my attention specifically to the eucalyptus plantations whose presence increased dramatically in Uruguay over the last two decades. Highlighted as an area of major concern by environmental groups and independent researchers at the national university,

⁷ In contrast, leaders such as Chávez in Venezuela or Morales in Bolivia, in contrast, would be considered “bad leftists” because of their lack of desire to break away from past radical errors and instead continue to draw on Latin America’s tradition of populism (2006).

the plantation industry is nonetheless promoted by the government for its success in diversifying rural production and leading to substantial economic growth. Much international attention has been given to a three-year blockade along the Argentina-Uruguay border crossing that resulted from the building of the Orion pulp mill, owned by the Finnish company, Botnia, on the Uruguay River near the city of Fray Bentos, but less has been said about the disputes within Uruguay emerging over the plantation forestry that supplies the mill. Studying the large-scale planting of trees in a country known for its expansive grasslands thus seemed a logical place to begin an investigation into the links between nature and politics. Through a focus on this conflict in my dissertation, I hope to understand how “nature” emerged as a site of conflict in an otherwise pro-party political context and how rural residents and the state conceptualize the environment.

As I pursued my research, I came to realize that in order to answer these questions, I needed to expand my focus and attend to the processes of state formation under the Frente Amplio and explore how they were enmeshed with the emerging struggles over nature and understand what these struggles looked like. While many people I met during my time in Uruguay were certainly troubled by the physical changes taking place to the land as a result of the presence of eucalypti and the ways it was altering the “natural” environment, those actively working against the plantation industry also talked about issues of taxation, land reform, crumbling social networks, the increased foreign presence in agricultural pursuits, and the “failure” of the Frente Amplio government. They also discussed how these were affecting everyday practices in rural agricultural and ranching communities. In short, it seemed apparent that the local people very clearly understood nature as entangled with the social and political context, not separate from it.

Recognizing that the impacts of the plantation forestry spoke not only to changes to the physical landscape, but also the social, political, and economic ones, I approached this dissertation with three thematic concerns in mind: 1) How do processes of state formation and market logics rearrange the “natural” environment? 2) How do such processes impact the relationships between local populations, their physical environment, and the state? 3) What does neo-extractivism do? Is neo-extractivism under the direction of a progressive state different from the kinds of extractivist projects that dominated in Latin America during the 20th century?

Neo-extractivism is often framed as a means to an end for leftist governments, and not an integral part of the leftist project itself. Whereas the extractivist projects of the mid-20th century in South America were about modernizing the countries through aggressive capitalism, including the privatization of state companies and selling off of publicly-owned shares (most famously in Chile under Pinochet), neo-extractivism is supposed to be about bringing state control “back in” as a way to generate wealth for the country as a whole. The current literature on the state and neo-extractivism (cited below), particularly in Latin America, notes the ways that progressive states have used extractivism to further radical agendas through increasing state ownership in extractive industries and redistribution of profits for social programming, what Gudynas has described as a “new style” of extractivism with a “progressive stamp” (2011:79). The further nationalization (or renationalization) of the hydrocarbon industry under Presidents Chávez (and now Maduro) in Venezuela, Morales in Bolivia, and Fernández de Kirchner in Argentina has been key to generating the wealth for these governments’ social programs. In all three countries, the increase in social spending translated into lower rates of poverty nationally (Weisbrot et. al. 2009; Riggirozzi 2010; CEPR 2014). However, the sustainability of such

an approach has been questioned, with predictions that the countries' financial (Riggiozzi 2010; Lustig and Pessino 2014) and environmental (Acosta 2013; Cáceres 2015) resources are at risk of being depleted.

Nonetheless, Mujica, and the Frente Amplio coalition more generally, have taken a similar approach to meeting their goals of social development, continuing to generate wealth through the national petroleum company, ANCAP⁸, and encouraging the expansion of privately-owned pulp production, plantation forestry and soy production to generate wealth in the country. It is clear that there has been notable social and economic benefits to the government's approach: between 2005 and 2009, the economy grew by 6.9 per cent, while increasing spending on social programs targeting low-income sectors of the population (Hulse Najenson 2011). Through the government's *Plan de Equidad* (Equity Plan), which included a series of redistributive interventions such as improvements to the child allowances scheme; creation of an emergency plan; an increase in minimum wages; and a new income tax scheme, inequality began to decline across the country in 2008 (Amaranti et. al 2011:4). Greater foreign direct investment and increased demand and prices for primary goods, including soy and plantation forestry, are the cited sources for the increases in economic growth and money for social programming. As Soriano's elected Senator⁹ from the Frente Amplio coalition, Roque Arregui, told me, "to get past the economic crisis [of the early 2000s] we initiated a program of long-term productive development, with great results helping resolve the social crisis, generating

⁸ Uruguay has no known sources of oil and gas, although offshore exploration is underway. ANCAP refines oil purchased from other countries, including Venezuela. In addition to petroleum refinement, ANCAP is also involved in the production of cement and alcoholic beverages.

⁹ Soriano has three senators in the national government. At the time of my research, there was a senator from each party elected.

greater equality.” He later stated that environmental preservation must be taken in the context of also promoting “productive and human development.”

However, I argue that the neo-extractivist projects in Uruguay are not just about generating wealth in order to further the creation a socialist state. Somewhat paradoxically, the push for large-scale neo-extractivism under the Frente Amplio is also an attempt on behalf of the Frente Amplio coalition to demonstrate that it is a legitimate state power that can successfully govern a country within the confines of both the state and global capitalist systems. Thus the expansion of the pulp and plantation forestry industry is as much a part of the current state formation project of the Frente Amplio coalition as it is incidental to it: The left-wing coalition government in Uruguay has turned to resource extraction and foreign investment in order to consolidate its position as a moderate political party, rather than solely as a means to support its radical or revolutionary movement. It is this reconfiguring of the Frente Amplio’s state project since its victory in 2005 that has led a small but vocal group of coalition supporters to demonstrate strong resistance to neo-extractivist projects. Through an ethnographic account of the plantation economy in Soriano and the movement against them, I demonstrate the material effects of the Frente’s state formation projects, including the reconfiguration of traditional relationships.

Uruguayan scholar Eduardo Gudynas in particular has acknowledged that there are continuities from previous extractive projects that are not particularly “progressive”, such as a heavy dependence by these states on primary products, continued territorial fragmentation, negative social and environmental impacts, and an assumption that economic growth is equivalent to development (Gudynas 2009; Gudynas 2010b; Gudynas 2013). As he notes, neo-extractivism “conditions and impedes plans for land use, the

designation of protected areas, and even agrarian reform or redistribution of lands,” reproducing similar productive processes, relationships of global power and social and environmental impacts as previous governments. However, a discussion as to how these consequences are remaking traditional alliances and social relationships and the consequences of these changes is underdeveloped in the literature.

My research takes up this line of inquiry and my analysis has led me to three main observations, which I will demonstrate in the following chapters. First, that neo-extractivism on a large scale reassembles place, space, and land, changing relationships between people as well as between people and the physical environment in which they live and work. Through an ethnographic exploration of the impacts of plantation forestry on small-scale farmers in rural Soriano, I will show how the material and affective landscapes are re-arranged. Secondly, non-human actors have played an equally important material role in processes of state formation examined in this dissertation, and thus need to be explored along with the relationships between people. And lastly, neo-extractivist projects under leftist government are also state formation projects, and, as Klubock (2006) has shown, forestry in particular has functioned as an important state project in the Southern Cone. This does not mean, however, that there are not unintended consequences of such forestry projects, as I will discuss more thoroughly in Chapter Five. Yet, as I will show, the Frente government has positioned the state as taking a “common sense” approach through the use of technical reporting and the historical reputation of the state in Uruguay as the means to bringing about social and economic development. Using a theoretical approach that draws from writings on political ecology, state formation, and science and technology studies (STS) allows me to explore this constellation of issues.

Boundaries, Actors, and Politics in Uruguay's Pulp and Timber Dispute

Political Ecology and Actor-Network Theory

In *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993), Latour argues that a key feature of modern society is the attempt to separate, or 'purify' in his terminology, nature (non-humans) from culture (humans), denying the "seamless fabric of nature-culture" in any analysis of the world in which we live. Such processes of purification have been particularly visible within nationally protected areas, whose nature aesthetic - the idealized vision of a vast wilderness untouched by humans – is a historically and culturally contingent representation, creating landscapes of consumption that very clearly mark the boundary between human and the natural world.¹⁰

Purification, however, is a futile process, he argues, as this separation can never be complete. Acknowledging the hybrid characteristic of the "natural world," anthropologists, sociologists and other social scientists working in the field of political ecology have, over the last few decades, approached environmental crises by drawing attention to the mutual composition of social forms and the physical environment (Harvey 1996; Cronon 1996; Ingold 1993). Some of these scholars (David Harvey 1996, Neil Smith 1990; and Cindi Katz 1998, for example) have drawn from Marx's assertion that "the history of nature and the history of men are mutually conditioned" because "by acting on the external world and changing it, [we] at the same time change [our] own nature" (Dawson 2009:119). They have theorized social forms and the environment using a dialectical lens that "captures the constant interplay and friction between ecological and social relations"

¹⁰ See Neumann, 1998; Descola and Pálsson 1996; Kosek 2006; Sundberg 2007; Harvey 1996; Braun 1997; McCarthy 2001; Fall 2005; Nash 1982; Cronon 1996; Spence 1999; Slater 2001; Neumann 2001; Merchant 2007.

(Dawson 2009:119). Their writing builds on that of earlier scholars, such as Wolf who is credited with coining the term “political ecology” in his 1972 article, “Ownership and Political Ecology,” (see Walker 2005) as a way to address the social dimensions of environmental issues. Through the lens of political economy, early studies focused on unequal power relations and ‘modernization’ as a force of maladaptation and instability that had an impact on interactions between humans and their natural environment. The incorporation of third-world land users into global markets, it was argued, forced them to abandon traditional land management practices, creating a “‘situational rationality’ that could potentially force land users to degrade their environment” (Walker 2005:74; see Hecht and Cockburn 1989; Blaikie and Brookfield 1987; Watts 1983; Gadgil and Guha 1995).

By the 1990s, this more ‘structuralist’ approach informed by a political economy of the environment shifted to take a greater focus on both the material and symbolic aspects of environmental politics, particularly the day-to-day struggles over resources and their contested meaning. Within this latter approach, social scientists in the field of ecology began to acknowledge the entangled, rather than dichotomous, existence of humans and their environment that the sort of works like those mentioned above exemplified¹¹. Yet, while social constructivism avoids the kind of purification created within modern society, it is still unable to escape the dichotomy of nature and culture. As Castree and MacMillan point out, “bringing nature within the domain of the social simply shifts the causal and ontological arrows from one ‘side’ of the social-natural dichotomy to the other. The dichotomy itself remains intact” (2001:210). The quote from

¹¹ For further reading on the trajectory of political ecology research in anthropology and the social sciences more broadly, see Orr, Lansing and Dove 2015; Rademacher 2015; Little 1999; Escobar 1999.

Dawson shared earlier provides a telling example: In his view, humans and the external environment are taken as categories that already exist prior to their interactions with one another, with nature positioned as “external” to humans. Thus, while ecology and society impact on one another, their origins are separate. Furthermore, nature is understood as capable of changing “our nature” only after humans have taken action on the natural world in order to change it. A more nuanced and nondichotomous approach, which sees nature as relational and resulting from both the practices of people and the “agency” of the environment, is required (Barney 2009:147; see also Latour 2005).

One way scholars have overcome such a pitfall is to turn to science and technology studies, namely actor-network theory, or ANT, drawing from the work of Latour, Callon and Law. ANT explores the associations or networks produced when heterogeneous actors come together and the traces they left behind when they are formed. Rather than providing a category or classification, ANT describes a “movement, a displacement, a transformation, a translation, and enrolment” (Latour 2005:64). These actions lead to the creation of what Latour calls the social, a momentary association in which various elements or actors in a network come together to create a new and particular form, with no one actor (humans, for example) being privileged over others. In ANT, networks become the area of focus because the elements within them are not inherently social; rather, it is the relations between these elements that create the social. These ties are not a permanent and durable social force; they become social in the brief moment that a transaction, or “reshuffling,” brings these elements together (Latour 2005:65). And these elements can be brought together in different ways at different times.

Focusing on these moments of transaction is an attempt to move away from an analysis that relies on privileged social categories such as gender, race, class and so forth;

macro-level analysis; or contextualization (Ferry 2013:382). This is necessary because terminology and categories like “social”, Latour argues, have become diluted over time, shrinking to include only humans and modern societies (2005:6). Furthermore, a non-network approach to social studies takes the existence of perceived structures or aggregates, such as state or society, as a starting point for its analysis, rather than trying to understand what associations between ‘actants’ form to produce these social aggregates (Latour 2005:5).

ANT has proven useful for scholars interested in studying environmental politics and for challenging the separation of nature and culture. It also forces researchers to unpack a priori categories like “neoliberalism” and “civil society,” rather than taking them as an already assumed filter through which to analyze research findings. Yet, like others (Amsterdamska 1999; Ausch 2000; Haraway 1992; Fujimura 2005; McAllister 2014), I find myself uneasy with ANT’s refusal to acknowledge a larger context that influences connections between actors (or actants) and overlooking the sedimented relations of power by taking a politically “neutral” position. As Star notes, which actors and networks are included within an ANT analysis is the result of particular relationships of power, with so-called executive members being prioritized over more marginal ones. For example, when work or knowledge production is examined using an ANT approach, it usually gets attributed back to the central figure (Star uses the example of Pasteur) while “erasing the work of secretaries, wives, laboratory technicians, and all sorts of associates” (Star 1990:29). The assumption in ANT that all actants and networks are symmetrical, placing no actor in the foreground whilst using others as context (Ferry 2013:386), therefore seems problematic as it denies the existence of these very power relations, as well as the importance of context or place (Pribilsky 2013:317). Thus, while ANT is

correct in its insistence on that the science-society dichotomy is constructed, the “consequences of that construction are important,” and can provide insight into why “some human perspectives win over others in the construction of technologies and truth, why and how some actors will go along with the will of other actors, and why and how some actors resist being enrolled” (Fujimura 1991:222). ANT, in its rejection of the value of macro categories such as society, the economy, gender, neoliberalism and so forth, removes the possibility for critique of such categories and their effects with very tangible consequences and downplays the power dynamics that emerge when marginalized groups of people confront other powerful groups.

Taking my fieldwork as a case in point, I argue that, in fact, some connections, networks or actors exert more influence than others, such as those connected to the state or other groups of influence like investors in soy or plantations production. As such, I find a political economy approach productive to analyze the changing frontiers of extraction, state formation, and environmental activism. This is not to say that I take the state to be a monolith, as I discuss further below. However, it is to say that the networks it creates have repercussions with a particularly far reach. I therefore find Marcus and Saka’s discussion of assemblages more relevant. For them, an assemblage approach allows research on social process to focus on the “ephemeral, emergent, decentered and heterogeneous, all the while not giving up on a long-established commitment to account for the structured and systemic in social life” (2006:101). This means recognizing that state processes, government policies, and global economic forces have a powerful role and influence in the expansion of the pulp and plantation industry and certain individuals’ decision to resist it, without seeing their roles as the sole determining factors. Contingent factors specific to Uruguay, such as the composition and condition of the soil and trees, the

complicated relationship between Soriano and Montevideo, affective ties, internal party politics, community relationships, and so forth, must also be taken seriously. Thus, while I continue to use macro categorizations, such as the state or neoliberalism, I situate them within the context of micro level interactions between heterogeneous groups of actors.

This is similar to Akera's focus on "ecologies of knowledge" which builds on the work of Charles Rosenberg. Rosenberg (1997[1976]) argued that there is a complex relationship between ideas (or knowledge) and the societal context in which they are formed, and thus the former could not be understood outside of the context of the latter. An 'ecology of knowledge' examines the integration of context and cognition, rather than seeing them in opposition. Using this concept, Akera works to explain how relationships are built between different sociotechnical entities within an existing social institution like science, in order to create a cohesive body of practice. Like Star (1995), he sees "ecology of knowledge" as a metaphor for describing society, providing a way to think about "the complex interactions that characterize human action" (2007:416), acknowledging that science is a social practice.

However, where he differs from Star is that his analysis can be expanded to various scales, rather than a focus on the local aspects of scientific practice as represented through her specific subjects. Furthermore, by focusing on metonymic (part-whole) relationships, he provides a larger context for understanding how ecologies of knowledge form, allowing for a generalized (or macro) notion of the development of practice and process within "existing dialogues of the relationship between science, technology, and the social context" (Akera 2007:420). To illustrate his point he takes as an example the profession of bookkeeping, pointing out that bookkeepers would not exist as a profession without having the skills, knowledge, or tools needed to conduct their trade. Nor can their

profession exist “apart from the financial institutions and the historical development of mercantile and industrial capitalism. At all levels there can be no wood without trees (and vice versa)” (Aker 2007:418).

This “layered” approach, in which historical events, social institutions, disciplines, organizations, knowledge, artefacts, and actors are considered, allows for the existence of a priori categories without giving agency to any one exclusive object within the structure (Aker 2007:419). The representation that results from this analysis creates a ‘boundary object’, pushing social theory into “a more historically grounded direction” (Aker 2007:433). Working from the same critique of ANT that Aker and Marcus and Saka put forward, boundary objects acknowledge the role of the non-human while acknowledging that “the social,” - including groupings such as civil society, government, the state - acts as an important analytical category. Thus, boundary objects provide a strategy for extending my analysis beyond the limits of ANT.

Boundary Objects

One way that boundaries are built and reinforced is through what Star and Griesemer refer to as a boundary object (1989). The boundary object concept builds from Callon’s work on *interessement* (1985) and Latour’s discussion of translation (1988), which examine the transformation of non-scientists’ concerns into those of scientists. More specifically, *interessement* refers to the confining of different actors into the particular roles assigned to them, while translation refers to creation of a central network that all actors agree is worth constructing and protecting. As Star and Griesemer explain, “in order to create scientific authority, entrepreneurs gradually enlist participants (or in Latour’s word, ‘allies’) from a range of locations, re-interpret their concerns to fit their

own programmatic goals and then establish themselves as gatekeepers” (1989:389). The concept of boundary objects goes a step further, expanding the field of translation: Such a process does not just take place between scientists and non-scientists, but between various “social worlds.” Thus, the challenge that these intersecting positions pose to the process of translation needs to be understood from multiple viewpoints, paying attention to the flow of concepts and objects through a network of participants and social worlds (Star and Griesemer 1989:389).

“Boundary,” as it is used in the boundary object concept, refers to a shared ideological space where the separation between groups is fuzzy (Star 2010:603), while “object” is understood as something people act toward or with. A key characteristic of such an object is its interpretive flexibility. Having diverse meanings for different actors, a boundary object works to create a dividing line between concerned social worlds (Sjölander-Lindqvist 2005:226). This is because, while the object in question maintains a particular identity across sites, it is flexible insofar as it adapts to the “local needs and constraints of the several parties employing [it]” (Star and Griesemer 1989:393), taking on different meaning in each social world while maintaining a structure that it is recognizable by all worlds. Each of these social worlds brings knowledge and experience from a particular point of view, be it from a local, political, industrial, or technological viewpoint (Sjölander-Lindqvist 2005:226). To illustrate her point, Star provides the example of a map: For one group, the map may lead to a site of recreation, such as a campground. For another group, that “same” map may outline a series of important geological features that are valuable for scientists. Such maps “may resemble each other, overlap, and even seem indistinguishable to an outsider’s eye. Their difference depends on the use and interpretation of the object” (2010:602).

The material structure of various boundary objects and the question of scale or granularity are thus also important to defining a boundary object (Star 2010:602). Boundary objects are an arrangement that allows different groups to work together without first achieving consensus in a way dictated by informational needs and work requirements (Star 2010:602), with work being broadly defined to include serious play. When vaguely defined (as is a map), boundary objects can be central to maintaining coherence and to mediating across intersecting social worlds, (Star and Griesemer 1989:393) acting as a bridge between groups and creating a level of stability. However, when those in the various social worlds understand the boundary object differently at an interpretive level, it can lead to conflict and disagreement. Paul Nadasdy noted such challenges in cases where Canadian First Nations communities and the state negotiated working out a system of natural resource co-management and land claims. The bureaucratic language of wildlife biology and resource management used by the state runs counter to First Nations' assumption about nature and animals and human-animal relationships (Nadasdy 2003:6). In order to be taken seriously and to fully participate in processes of co-management, First Nations were required to restructure their societies as well as their cultural meanings and practices to allow the process of translation to occur. Those who could not adapt to the language of co-management were left out of the process.

Thus, in some cases, the arguments of the various social worlds may always run parallel to each other, never meeting (Sjölander-Lindqvist 2005:226). When this happens, resolution becomes nearly impossible. Anthropologist Benjamin Orlove, working on Lake Titicaca in the Peruvian Andes, documented a similar situation to that studied by Nadasdy, in his piece "Mapping Reeds" (1991). Whereas the Peruvian government read

the reed beds as an ecological reserve in need of regulation in order to conserve it, the local peasant communities valued the reeds as an important resource to be used and harvested in their daily lives and saw them as under their control. Both sides made their argument by drawing off of a set of maps produced over a six year period, each one interpreting the territorial boundaries shown on the maps differently so that the reed beds were understood by each side to be included within their area of control. The result was a complete lack of a shared understanding of the situation in which they were involved, in which both the peasants and the state saw themselves as having authority over the area, ignoring the possibility that the other side might feel differently.

I find this concept of boundary objects productive for my own work; within this dissertation, I consider the boundary objects that have arisen throughout the debate over the value and impacts of the pulp and timber industry in Uruguay. As such, I analyze the following as boundary objects: the image of national hero José Artigas, land, the pulp mill, technical reports, and the eucalyptus tree. I suggest that many of the conflicts arising in Soriano around the pulp and timber industry are the result of competing views of distinct social worlds, and the boundary objects are the terrain on which these worlds express their position. As such, each side is invested in defending their interpretation of the boundary object. The result is the further reinforcement of symbolic and territorial boundaries, making consensus among the different social worlds increasingly difficult.

While I am interested in how boundary objects function within the dispute over tree plantation expansion and build off of the above literature throughout my dissertation, the aim of my research is to also understand how these social worlds have been formed historically, particularly that of the small-scale anti-industry farmers in Soriano. This is an area underexplored in the boundary object literature, which often begins from a moment

in which the social worlds already exist and/or are taken for granted as categories (Star and Griesemer 1989; Star 1996; Guston 2001; Star 2010; Akkerman and Bakker 2011). Thus, as noted in Akera's critique earlier, *how* these social worlds form, and the larger social context in which this formation takes place, is missing. When social worlds have been explored in this literature, it is in the context of seeing how a boundary object influences their development, composing a world of otherwise heterogeneous actors (Guichard 2012). Like Guichard, I am curious as to the role boundary objects play in building social worlds, but rather as a source of contention rather than connection. Moreover, I situate this curiosity into a greater exploration of the existing social, historical and political conditions leading the boundary objects to become flashpoints for conflict with the expansion of the pulp and timber industry, thereby creating a divide between actors who might otherwise be allies. In this dissertation, I thus turn to the concept of boundary objects in order to explore how political subjectivities, contested meanings and territories are constituted, taking seriously both the affective responses of my informants and the structural realities that influence such responses.

By using literature from both political economy and science and technology studies (STS), I hope to contribute to this growing body of literature on boundary objects, as well as to an emerging body of literature on Latin American anthropology which incorporates STS approaches into its analysis (Raffles 2002; Hayden 2003; Goldman, Nadasdy and Turner 2011; Pribilsky 2013; Ferry 2013; Roberts 2013; Latta and Whittman 2012; McAllister 2014; Mitchell 2013; Kingsley Scott 2013) in order to produce a more robust examination of the growing tensions over timber production in rural Uruguay. To begin this discussion of how different social worlds have formed as a result of the expanding pulp and plantation industry in Uruguay, it is important to first

understand the relationship between the state and civil society in Uruguay. This will provide insight as to why such tension has emerged between anti-plantation activists and the state.

Moreover, the state itself acts as a crucial boundary object within this story; much of the conflict that has emerged over the expansion of the pulp and timber industry can be directly linked to different groups' understanding of what the role of the state should be in Uruguay, particularly with the victory of the Frente Amplio. Positioning itself as an alternative (or perhaps a return) to state politics as they were historically carried out, the coalition was expected to restore and build upon Uruguay's position as a bastion of liberal thought and economic stability, as its foundational myths (discussed below) claimed. Yet, as Rial has pointed out, there has always been a contradiction in Uruguay between "the performance of the state and the expectations of society" (1992:91). How this contradiction is currently playing out is explored throughout this dissertation.

The State and Civil Society

Over the last twenty-five years, social scientists have begun to critique writings that either treat the state as an autonomous, singular entity or as a self-explanatory category requiring no further explanation. The foundational text to this analytical approach was Philip Abrams's essay, "Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State" (1988), which was a call to social scientists to demystify the state, taking it seriously as an object of examination. As Abrams pointed out, members of civil society are often urged to "respect the state, or smash the state or study the state" on a regular basis (1988:59), yet what is meant by "the state" is often unclear. Part of the problem, he argued, came from how the state had been interpreted in Marxist scholarship, which saw the existence of the

state as a necessary precondition for capitalism (Marx and Engels 2008[1848]; Althusser 1971; Krohn-Hansen and Nustad 2005:3). For both Marx and Weber, state formation was linked to the development of subjects in the abstract that the state could dominate and exploit. In such an analysis, the state was taken as an *a priori* object, positioned as a commanding political entity that sat above, and separate from, the rest of society (Ferguson and Gupta 2002:982). For Marxists, the state is understood as a repressive apparatus and it is against its power, and of those classes that hold state power, which the proletariat must struggle.

This perspective was apparent in anthropological analysis of Latin American politics in the mid-to-late 20th century, where the workings of the state, and struggle against it, defined much of the contemporary scholarship. For example, Wolf, writing at the end of the 1960s in the shadow of the Cuban Revolution and Vietnam War, framed this subject in Marxist terms, albeit removed from its traditional European context, suggesting that capitalism naturally produces a revolution on its own (1969:278). The capitalist economic system views land, labour and wealth as commodities to which most peasants are denied access, leaving many with little option except to initiate defensive reactions, which were coupled with a search for a more humane social order (Wolf 1969:282). It is from this perspective that he examined the Mexican and Cuban Revolutions. Wolf's approach was fairly typical of Latin American scholarship of the 1960s and 70s, meaning that, rather than focusing primarily on the violence of revolution, he examined it as a by-product of social transformation (Grandin 2010:5). Other examples include Friedrich's work on agrarian reform, socio-economic change and revolution in Naranja, Mexico (1970) and Powell's study of urban-rural alliances that played a key role in peasant rebellion and governmental reform in Venezuela (1971).

In response to this tendency in social science research, Abrams suggested seeing the state as a historically constructed entity, not separate from the social sphere but rather embedded within it. This does not mean abandoning studies of the state altogether. Unlike Radcliffe-Brown, who previously asserted that the state was a mystification, “a fiction of philosophers,” (1940[1987]:xxiii) and therefore not a valid object of study, Abrams argued that it was the job of the social scientist to understand how the idea of the state gains legitimacy through a study of political practices and processes. Anthropologists, along with social scientists more generally, have done just that over the last two decades, unpacking what the state is, how it works, and the ways in which it is entangled with, rather than separated from, civil society within a Latin American context (Gilbert and Nugent 1994; Nelson 1999; Paley 2001; Valencia Ramírez 2005; Gustafson 2010; Mathews 2011) and elsewhere (Mitchell 1999; Trouillot 2001; Nadasdy 2003; Kosek 2006; Gupta 2012).

This revised approach to the state, which began to take hold in the late 1980s, was strongly influenced by the work of Michel Foucault. Rather than seeing power as being concentrated in the hands of the state or sovereign authority, Foucault argued that it was diffuse, embodied or enacted, productive, and located at all levels. Akhil Gupta’s approach to studying the Indian state builds from this notion of diffuse power. Examining the way that India’s poor navigate state bureaucracy in order to access its welfare programs, he argues that the state as an object of inquiry is impossible. Recognizing that the state is, in the words of Schild, an “abstraction that refers to ensembles of institutions and practices with powerful cultural consequences” (Schild 1998:97), Gupta insists that the only way to understand the state is to disaggregate it (2012; see also Trouillot 2001).

In short, state power is not concentrated in one particular site of power; it is diffuse and spread out. Nonetheless, the presence of state power may be made visible through material structures and objects, even in areas considered peripheral or on the margins of its control. Furthermore, these objects are often integral to the conduct of politics (see Barry 2013). Penelope Harvey, for example, has noted the way that concrete has been used to transform public space in Peru, becoming closely associated with “modern industry and state power” (2012:30) even in the marginal areas. The appearance of new concrete structures to house the municipal governments in small highland towns of the provincial Ayacucho region index “changing modes of governance and a radical move away from regimes of control” (2012:30). Similarly, Gordillo’s recent ethnography based in the north of Argentina shows how state power and capitalist expansion left traces in the form of ruins and rubble such as old steamboat engines and crumbling railways stations in places that otherwise appear forgotten by the state (2014).

In Uruguay, the plantations and the pulp mill function in much the same way, making state power visible even in the interior. Both the plantation trees and the pulp mill are, in a very concrete way, acting as agents of the state, demonstrating that the latter can manifest control even beyond the capital of Montevideo. They also become the objects against which anti-plantation activists struggle. As I will show in this dissertation, my interlocutors were just as likely to make accusations against the actions of the eucalyptus trees and pulp mill as they were against the Frente Amplio or the state.

Yet, even when the daily functions of the state are disaggregated, the idea of the personified state still holds power. Diane Nelson, for one, acknowledges the way in which the state functions as a fetish, appearing to be a unitary entity with its own will and reified as a thing that acts, speaks and can be broken, even though it is actually composed

of many bureaucratic institutions, individuals, interest groups, laws, rituals and so forth (1999:75). Rather than treating these two understandings of the state in dichotomous terms, she demonstrates how the state simultaneously exists as a material force and an ideological construct. Even as power relations become internalized within the disciplined subject, they simultaneously take on the appearance of an external structure, allowing an institution to appear greater than the sum of its parts. Taking the military methods of developed in the 18th century as a case in point, Timothy Mitchell shows how such methods produced both the disciplined individuals and the effect of an armed unit that appeared as an “artificial machine” (1999:89).

Looking at the modern state, mundane practices and arrangements - which include the partitioning of space, coordination of institutional functions into hierarchical formations, scheduling particular times for programs and schedules, organizing supervision and surveillance among others – create state effects, giving the appearance of a binary order rather than a complex of social practices. The two are co-produced and, as such, the real cannot be understood as separate from the illusory (Mitchell 1999:77). Understanding how people think and talk about “the state,” is therefore just as important recognizing and examining the daily bureaucratic practices that comprise it.

This approach also opens up space to examine how processes of state formation in turn produce state subjects. Once again following Foucault, he argued that ‘government’ referred not just the management of state; it also denoted the management of the self, down to the level of the family, the household, the soul, and so forth. Put another way, state power is concerned with “the management of men and things” and produced through the routine operations of state institutions at a variety of scales. He referred to

this as governmentality, or the “conduct of conduct” (Foucault 1994:237), arguing that the constitution of the subject and the formation of the state were linked.

In examining the efforts of feminist activists and professionals in post-dictatorship Chile, Schild, for example, highlights how they are being “transformed into resources through which the state defines both the appropriate behaviours of citizens and the spaces for the practice of citizenship” (1998:95). As links were being established between civil society organizations and political institutions in the period of re-democratization, the aims of the former were transformed. Challenging the notion that the state is set against the sphere of action that lies outside of it, Schild shows how the state transformed the work of feminist organizations. In order to secure funding, organizations were forced to see the beneficiaries of their work as potential economic subjects who just needed to gain access to the markets, rather than setting their own, more radical, agendas.

Similarly, Nelson, taking Guatemala at the time of the Columbus Quincentennial (1992) as her case study, demonstrates how Maya and Ladino populations alike understand the boundary division between state and civil society as porous, making the state a site for making demands, as these struggles paradoxically “legitimate the state as both the site of demand and the stake of the struggle” (1999:76). The state and civil society, then, are mutually constitutive. While the struggles of civil society “articulate the state, modify its identity, and penetrate the apparent boundaries” between these two social worlds, the state still retains its power and aura (Nelson 1999:77), serving as the medium through which to make claims or the site to fight against. Therefore, while the state/civil society dichotomy continues to provide a useful framework for understanding political mobilization in Latin America, as my use of the terminology below and

throughout the rest of this dissertation illustrates, contemporary ethnographers have become acutely aware that the dividing line is a blurry one.

This blurring of lines becomes even clearer in the context of Latin America's "pink tide"¹² as, to use Gustafson's turn of phrase, states have started to act like movements (2010). Rather than states withering away in a period of greater globalization and international trade, they have actually begun reasserting themselves in many Latin American countries, and in the process bringing traditionally excluded actors into the sphere of state power. Upon winning his first election in Bolivia, for example, Evo Morales, himself indigenous, brought historically disenfranchised groups, including female peasants, coca growers, and indigenous people, into the domain of state politics, with social movements constituting the base of Morales's MAS government, a method the government has referred to as *el basismo* (Gustafson 2010; Postero 2010). The Chavistas in Venezuela functioned in a similar manner. Mischaracterized as the "poor and popular masses," preoccupied with little more than ensuring that Chávez stays in power they, in fact, played an important and active role in furthering the government's mandate, organizing at a variety of social and economic levels and carrying out important social work themselves (Valencia Ramírez 2005:80).

However, while exploration of this political moment in Latin America has added to our understanding of the kinds of new alliances that have emerged between government and non-government actors, with a particular focus on Venezuela under Chávez (Valencia Ramírez 2005; Ellner 2005; Gibbs 2006; Hawkins and Hansen 2006) and Bolivia under Morales (Albro 2006; Postero 2010; Gustafson 2010), less academic

¹² "Pink tide" refers to the swing to the left of many governments within Latin America. Softer than red and its associations with communism, the pink tide governments are more characteristic of social democracies than revolutionary movements.

writing has focused on the new *divisions* that have emerged between progressive parties and grassroots activists as the Left gains political power, with perhaps the exception of work examining Ecuador under Correa (Becker 2010; Becker 2013; Appe 2015), Webber's analysis of Bolivia (2010) and Reyes's regional critique (2012). I aim to add to this emerging body of scholarship by examining the growing tensions between the Frente Amplio government and some of its historical supporters, specifically anti-plantation small-scale farmers (*chacrerros*) in rural Soriano and their activist allies in the movement. Cultural struggles provide insight into what the state means to its citizens while focusing on boundary objects provide a material focus for exploring these contestations. Open to interpretation, the latter function as affective assemblages produced through mundane material practices that work to explain the anti-industry activists' relationship with the abstract state.

My focus on Uruguay is also strategic beyond the broader political context in contemporary Latin America. While Uruguayan scholars have produced an important and vast body of work on their country, it is a place that is often overlooked in North American and European scholarship. Uruguay's historically strong state-civil society relationship, predating the region's swing to the Left and embodied in the founding myths that I outline below, make it a particularly interesting case study. That a rift between the Frente Amplio and the anti-plantation movement has grown since the coalition came to power not only raises the need to look at processes of state formation, but also the changing relationship of civil society and the state. What happens, for example, when the party or state is no longer understood as the most effective filter for social change? What alternatives emerge? How do long-term supporters of the Frente Amplio understand their changing relationship with the coalition, the government, and the state? These were

questions that my interlocutors were struggling to answer for themselves at the time of my fieldwork.

Gupta (2012) notes how violence and caring can co-exist within the state bureaucracy (2012:33), reiterating Nadasdy's observation that the complex constellation of government institutions and processes have, "many different (and contradictory) agendas and interests" (2003:4). This inherent paradox is embodied in neo-extractivist practices. The Uruguayan state agenda as conceived by the Frente Amplio, is concerned with raising the standards of living for the country's most vulnerable populations and bringing greater equality among its constituents through its social development program. Yet, simultaneously, there have been environmental and economic consequences that were unforeseen (or perhaps disregarded) resulting from the pulp and plantation industry that run contradictory to the coalition's promises. Exploring how this paradox impacts on the traditional relationships between the state and civil society, as well as the Frente Amplio and its supporters, is at the core of my research.

The Uruguayan State and its Foundational Myths

When Uruguay became a republic in 1828 it did so without bringing an end to the kind of violence that had characterized the revolutionary years that led to its foundation. After gaining its independence, Uruguay suffered through a period of extreme violence as the two main political parties, the *Nacional* (National), also known as the *Blanco* (White), and the *Colorado* (Red) found themselves frequently at war with each other. This political conflict continued until 1870. By 1907, following several decades of greater political stability, a victory by the Colorado party ushered Uruguay into a period of secularization, known as *batllismo* (named for the head of the party, José Batlle y

Ordóñez), leading Uruguay to become one of the most stable democracies in Latin America (Weinstein 1988). The Colorado party under Batlle passed a number of progressive and secularist laws regarding labour rights and women's rights and developed a strong welfare state. Education levels were high and access to healthcare was universal. As a result, the country became one of the most prosperous and democratic in the region, and established Uruguay's image as "the Switzerland of South America" or, to use the catchphrase that became popular in Uruguay at the time, "*Como el Uruguay no hay*" (There's no place like Uruguay).

It has been argued that *batllismo* represented a cultural phenomenon as much as a political one, expressing a particular ideological and philosophical point of view. In the early 20th century, Uruguay was "imagined as an extended *urban* and cultured 'middle class'" (Ravecca 2010:3; emphasis mine). Renfrew notes that the foundational myths of the Uruguayan nation as a democratic and "hyper-integrated" nation include *averageness* (the state ensures security and the preservation of the cultural values of the middle class); *differentiation* (Uruguay is unlike other Latin American countries because of its cosmopolitan European roots and political stability); *consensus* (there is order and respect for the law which guarantees a country that is truly democratic); and *cultured* (the Uruguayan population is educated and "civilized") (2007:66). These myths have informed Uruguayans' self-image as a country without extremes, clearly disguising the realities of inequality and isolation that characterize parts of the country's rural areas and marginalized urban communities. They also obscure the shift to neoliberal and (post)neoliberal¹³ economic strategies (discussed in more detail further below) in Uruguay

¹³ I choose to put the "post" in parentheses for reasons that will be made apparent below. However, there isn't a consensus on the spelling; the articles I reference on the topic tend not to include the parentheses.

over the last 20 years, a transition that is characteristic of, rather than distinguished from, much of Latin America.

What all of this points to, however, is a strong tradition of viewing the state as a provider and the political system as the primary vehicle for negotiating social change. As Ravecca writes, “[c]onsidering our understanding of Uruguay as a state politics-centred society, it is difficult to imagine an emancipatory project not ‘filtered’ or enacted by institutional actors” (2010:5) or, as one friend called it, through “*papa estado*” (father state). This does not mean that people see the state as far removed from the rest of society; daily interactions with the institution make it clear that this is not the case. The sometimes inefficient and heavily bureaucratic structure of the public sector, which some considered bloated, was a topic of conversation with many (non public sector) friends. Furthermore, the ability to meet with government officials, even those in the political realm, helped to remove the illusion of the state as “sitting above.”

Yet, despite this understanding of the state as complex and disjointed, discussions of politics in Uruguay almost always revolve around party politics, with individuals less likely to identify as being on the left or the right, and more likely to refer to themselves as a *frenteamplista* (a Frente Amplio supporter) or as a Blanco or Colorado. It may also explain the lack of spontaneous or regular street protest or blockades in Uruguay in comparison to its neighbours, such as Argentina, where marches and blockades take place on a regular basis in the capital and across the country. In fact, I can remember only three protest marches during my time in Uruguay, including an initial visit to the country in 2009, all of which were calm and well organized in advance. I never saw a spontaneous and independent demonstration in Montevideo’s core. While one march was organized by the environmental NGOs to protest the expansion of extractive industries, it was not

their usual approach. Their strategy was more commonly to produce documentation of their findings (books, pamphlets, reports and so on), which they have presented through formal political channels, such as presentations to the senate.

This reverence for state politics and democratic practices in Uruguay was visible even as it moved towards a period of state repression in the 1960s. Unlike the rest of the Southern Cone (Chile, Argentina, Brazil), Uruguay's military dictatorship did not come to power with a swift and dramatic coup that overthrew the government virtually overnight. Rather, the military government developed through "a gradual process of increasing governmental authoritarianism and with at least partial backing of a legitimately constituted civil government" (Servicio Paz y Justicia 1992:6)¹⁴. The urban guerrilla movement, known as the National Liberation Movement (MLN), or the Tupamaros, arose in the 1960s in response to the decrease in the standard of living resulting from a sharp decrease in meat and wool exports and corruption within the state bureaucracy. However, the Tupamaros failed to bring about any social change in part because of a "procedural disagreement" with the legal left and the vast majority of its supporters who, while sympathetic to the beliefs of the guerrillas, showed little support for their extralegal methods (González 1991:38).

Mass incarcerations *without* the death penalty, as well as the scrupulous attention given to legal forms by the military while carrying out imprisonments, reflected the armed forces' understanding of Uruguayan traditions of respect for human life and democratic rule and demonstrated the military's need to achieve legitimation of their political process so that they could claim to be the genuine inheritors of liberal Uruguay (Servicio Paz y

¹⁴ The regime has also been referred to as a civil-military dictatorship (Falek 2007) because of the way that power was handed over from the elected state to the military.

Justicia 1992:64). Nonetheless, the period of repression was one that witnessed immense violations of human rights. The military worked to create a climate of fear. Political imprisonment and torture of anyone expressing opposition to the government became rampant, giving Uruguay the highest rate per capita of political prisoners in the world at one point and bestowing the country with the nickname “the torture chamber of Latin America” (BBC 2010). The dictatorship was also responsible for forced disappearances and the deaths of approximately 150 people¹⁵.

While the foundational myths began unravelling with the dictatorship they nonetheless still retained some relevancy in the minds of many as Uruguay re-entered a period of democracy; it is the belief in Uruguay’s exceptionalism and strong opposition to unfettered neoliberalism that allowed the country to mostly resist the “shock” therapies employed across the region in the 1980s, even as a second wave of neoliberal reforms (the first wave took place during the dictatorship) began under the Lacalle administration (Blanco party 1989 – 1994) via its plan for broad privatization and the incorporation of Uruguay into the MERCOSUR trade bloc (Renfrew 2007:64). In fact, the Lacalle administration was met with successful resistance to a number of its policies. His plans to privatize the state-owned telephone company, for example, were strongly rejected in a referendum.

Yet as the last decade has ushered in a period of (post)neoliberalism, the policies that dominated Latin American development in the post-dictatorship period, such as opening up the country to foreign investment and depending on large-scale extractive

¹⁵ Although this is not an insignificant number of people killed or disappeared, it is small in comparison to the thirty thousand in Argentina and over three thousand in Chile. Uruguay’s dictatorship relied less on direct violence and more on psychological warfare in order to instill fear and discipline amongst the population.

projects to bring economic development to the region, are becoming more commonplace. This is ironic since it was the financial crisis of 2002 in Uruguay that gave the Frente the momentum it needed to come to power. The 2002 financial crisis in Uruguay followed on 2001 economic collapse in Argentina the previous year that had resulted from neoliberal policies, including free-market reforms like open trade and fixing the Argentinean peso at par to the US dollar.¹⁶ As a result of the crisis, real GDP in Uruguay fell by 12 per cent and unemployment rose by five per cent, the latter reaching 19 per cent that same year and spurring Uruguayans to reject both of the traditional parties' presidential candidates for the first time in the country's history. The fact that (post)neoliberal rule has not been the major shift away from previous economic strategies that might have been expected has led to a dissonance between leftist civil society movements and the current government, a separation that has some roots in the early post-dictatorship period.

A Return to Democracy and the (Post)neoliberalist Shift

Numerous scholars have examined the post-dictatorship period in Latin America, including the reactions to the failure of various states to bring about an alternative to neoliberalism and economic difficulties following a return to democracy. Latin America of the 1980s and 1990s witnessed the signing of Peace Accords and the publishing of truth commissions across the region, but these events did not bring an end to political struggles against state power and its policies. If anything, civil society organizations became increasingly important in the post-dictatorship period and the rebuilding of democratic

¹⁶ Argentines began rapidly withdrawing money from their Uruguayan accounts at the time of the 2001 crash, since Argentina's government prohibited free access to Argentinean accounts. This led to a serious problem with Uruguayan reserves, leaving the country with insufficient funds to pay its external debts and eventually leading to a 57 per cent devaluation in the peso as the banks attempted to increase liquidity (de la Plaza and Sirtaine 2005).

politics (Oxhorn 1994; Paley 2001; Hite 2000), as new challenges emerged. Beginning in the 1980s, Latin America possibly saw its “worst crisis of the twentieth century,” in the form of the “debt crisis”, structural readjustment and, as Escobar and Alvarez have referred to it, the resulting “reversal of development” (1992:1), exacerbated by the region’s long-history of imperialism and colonialism (Stavenhagen 1981:20). No longer were groups struggling against repressive undemocratic regimes; instead, protest against neoliberal economics and structural adjustment emerged (Nash 1992; Edelman 1998; Walton 1989; Eckstein 2002; Shefner et al. 2006; Almeida 2007). These economic policies became the norm in conjunction with a form of democracy defined in terms of personal freedom rather than social security - which Grandin argues was the product of, not alternative to, the years of terror (2004) - proving the transition to true political freedom is incomplete.

Within this new economic and political climate, a paradoxical relationship formed between governments and civil society. On the one hand, the state now viewed civil society activists as allies, relying on them to provide social services that were once the responsibility of the state, as neoliberal structural adjustments cut government spending on social services. This left many organizations in a difficult position, trying to balance the urgency of immediate survival needs while also pushing for long-term structural change. Paley (2001) illustrates precisely this kind of balancing act in her study of the members of the Chilean women’s health group, *Llaretas*, as they found themselves torn between providing immediate basic needs of the community, such as vaccinations and nutritional information (once the responsibility of the state), with their desire to commit themselves to the struggle for long-term change via full democratic participation in decision-making (see also Escobar and Alvarez 1992:9). On the other hand, as the oppositional elite of the

1970s and 80s tried to gain footing in the arena of electoral politics of the post-dictatorship period, they began to abandon their popular base in an attempt to secure middle class support, as Oxhorn's study of Chile's transition to democracy after Pinochet (1994) illustrates.

My research will add to this scholarship by examining these changing dialectical relationships and power dynamics between the state and civil society within what has been labelled as a (post)neoliberal context. Drawing from Brand and Sekler (2009), I understand (post)neoliberalism broadly as an attempt to tackle the negative consequences of neoliberalism and its failure to address current economic crises. In Latin America, it has been generally characterized by the state increasing its share in the economy through the nationalization of extractive industries and services, an increase in social spending, and foreign policy focused on regional integration. As such, neo-extractive projects are often a key part of the (post)neoliberal agenda. In Uruguay, the financial crisis of 2002 revealed the weaknesses of neoliberal¹⁷ state interventions - which saw states become "more repressive in social, labour market and military policies, and less interventionist in the movement of different forms of capital" (Brand and Sekler 2009:7) - that had been slowly incorporated into Uruguay and Latin America's policies beginning in the 1970s. (Post)neoliberalism arose as a useful tool for building solidarity and counter-hegemonic struggle, demonstrating the weaknesses of the neoliberal policies in bringing about social development and greater economic power and equality (Sader 2009; Sekler and Brand 2009; Gago and Sztulwark 2009; Kennemore and Weeks 2011; Grugel and Ruggirozzi

¹⁷ "Neoliberal" is not used here strictly as an academic term. In Uruguay, it is commonplace (particularly for those on the political Left) to refer to the economic policies under the dictatorship (trade liberalization, dollarization of the economy, and entering into loan agreements with international financial institutions like the IMF) and current policies (such as the expansion of the pulp and plantation forestry industry and push for greater foreign direct investment) as neoliberalism.

2012). As a process it can therefore open up a space in politics and the economy for those who have otherwise been excluded from participating (Motta 2013; Sekler 2009). Leftist governments in Latin America, including Uruguay, have participated in this shift towards so-called (post)neoliberalism with an increased focus on social development and equality. The Frente, for example, established the Ministry of Social Development (MIDES) upon its election in 2005. This ministry focuses on increasing opportunities for advancement and social inclusion for marginalized populations. It runs programs aimed at increasing labour opportunities for the unemployed, access to education for marginalized populations, and provides benefits for youth and individuals in vulnerable situations.

However, (post)neoliberalism can just as easily become a tool appropriated by the markets in order to give capitalism a “friendlier” face, rather than dismantling it as an economic system. Furthermore, the power relations that characterized the former model remain unchanged (Gago and Sztulwark 2009; Brand 2009; Veltmeyer 2012; Becker 2013; Springer 2014; Radcliffe 2012). Practices such as corporate social responsibility (CSR) undertaken by companies (including UPM) and certification processes offered by international bodies like the Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC) attempt to address social and environmental concerns that have been raised by such industries without harming their profit margins or opportunities for expansion. Neither the affected communities nor governments set the standards for the FSC or CSR: FSC is based on standards created by the industry “experts” or businesses,¹⁸ while CSR is simply a mechanism for self-regulation by companies, which guarantees compliance with the law and ethical standards. As a result, these guidelines work to guarantee that plans to protect the environment and encourage social development do not do so at the expense of businesses.

¹⁸ FSC and other standards of sustainability are discussed further in Chapter Six.

These complex dynamics are playing out in Latin America as noted earlier, where there has been a proliferation of what have been described as progressive governments coming to power over the last decade, including in Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, Venezuela, Brazil, Nicaragua, and El Salvador, not to mention similar events taking place elsewhere (Greece being just one example). In each of these cases, the president came to power on a platform of increased social development and inclusion. The victories of these progressive leaders have shown that electoral politics is no longer the exclusive terrain of the capitalist-oriented, political elite. A number of these governments have so far challenged the neoliberal status quo that had been characterized by the privatization of public works and energy industry, economic restructuring and debt repayment as dictated by the IMF, and low social spending, by introducing wealth distribution, greater state intervention in the regulation of accumulation, and making state administration more inclusionary.

However, as Perrault and Martin point out, these new leaders are nonetheless “far from the radical threats to neoliberal hegemony that they have been portrayed [to be] in US media and some sectors of the political right” (2005:192). Many of these governments equally “were able to push forward capitalist globalization with greater credibility than their orthodox neo-liberal predecessors, and, in doing so, to deradicalize dissent and demobilize social movements” (Robinson 2011). Brazil provides a clear case in point. Brazil’s Workers’ Party (PT), under the leadership of Lula da Silva, was elected to power in 2002 with strong support from the Landless Workers’ Movement (MST). While seen as a party that supported the rural worker, land ownership was more concentrated at the end of Lula’s term than it had been 50 years before as a result of expanding agribusiness

(Robinson 2011). A similar pattern is emerging in Uruguay under the Frente Amplio government with the expansion of plantation forestry and agribusiness.

Thus, while (post)neoliberalism might bring a greater focus to social development than its predecessor, its major weakness lies in its inability to overthrow the framework inherent in capitalism. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, President Mujica has almost admitted as much; following his election victory, he told the media that he has learned to “embrace serpents,” meaning he understood that he would have to compromise to get things done: “I am a wild cat who has turned a vegetarian” he told the press (Dangl 2010).

The Frente, as one might expect, advocates moving away from the policies of the Washington Consensus and continues the tradition of state involvement in the areas of social development and social services developed through *batllismo*-style policies. However, unlike the more past revolutionary politics of some of the coalition party members, the government finds itself presenting parallel agendas to the institution they once challenged. For example, the prioritizing of industrial development through extractive industry at the expense of traditional agricultural production holds echoes of the state’s crisis management strategies of the 1950s and ‘60s. The Frente has also supported the establishment of free trade zones to entice greater foreign investment for cellulose production and allowed corporations to challenge regulations that they deem harmful to their economic success, described in more detail in the following chapters. My interest lies in exploring how some of the coalition’s grassroots allies are navigating and reacting to these changes and how their actions are remaking the Frente Amplio coalition and strategies of progressive civil society. Doing so will begin to answer my second and third

research questions by demonstrating the work of neo-extractivism on the relationships between state and non-state actors.

Doing Fieldwork

Contextualizing the Field: Soriano and the Expanding Plantation Economy

Uruguay is small in size with a homogeneous population and a relatively high level of political stability. These factors have likely contributed to its being one of the least examined South American countries within North American and European scholarship. What research is being produced tends to focus on the capital of Montevideo and its surrounding communities. Yet the particular history of the country and its interior make it ripe for further ethnographic exploration.

Nestled between Argentina, Brazil and the Pacific Ocean and covering an area of 176,215 square kilometres with a population of 3.3 million inhabitants, Uruguay is one of the smallest and least populated countries in South America. Its warm temperate climate and rolling plains makes it an ideal site for ranching activities, while the fertile lowlands and sub-tropical climate (as one moves north and west) have been exploited for agriculture. Ranching and agricultural activities make up roughly 10 per cent of the country's annual gross domestic product (GDP). While the first Spanish expedition arrived in the Banda Oriental (which includes present-day Uruguay) in 1516, headed by Spanish navigator and explorer Juan Díaz de Solís, Europeans (Spaniards and Portuguese) did not begin to colonize the area until the 17th Century. The gap of over a century between European arrival in present-day Uruguay and settlement was in large

part due to the small but nonetheless noteworthy indigenous populations present at the time including the Chana, Yaro, small populations of Guaraní pirates on the coast, and the Charrúa in the interior. The semi-nomadic Charrúa, in particular, fought aggressively against new arrivals and initially created a major hurdle to European colonization.

Two key moments in the development of present-day Soriano department changed this. The first was the 1574 victory of the Spanish creole, Juan de Garay, against esteemed Charrúa leader, Zapicán. This triumph allowed the Spanish *conquistador*, Juan Ortiz de Zárate to regain control of the area on behalf of the King of Spain. The second key moment is associated with the introduction of cattle ranching. Hernando Arias de Saavedra (better known as Hernandarias), a creole from Asunción del Paraguay, introduced cattle to Vizcaíno Island in present-day Soriano in 1612 at the request of the King of Spain. With the introduction of ranching, more stable populations were established: The missionary communities of San Francisco de Olivares and San Antonio de Céspedes, created around 1626 to evangelize the indigenous Charrúa population, followed. Soon afterwards, these missions were re-established in Uruguay's first official settlement, Santo Domingo Soriano, which moved to its present location of Villa Soriano in 1708 (Lockhart 1970:6).

Ranching soon became key to the economy of Soriano and the interior region more broadly in the 19th century. Cattle were exploited for their meat, milk and leather and the department's industry was renowned first for its meat salting plants and, later, production of dairy products. Cattle ranching continues to dominate Uruguay's rural landscape¹⁹, both in reality and in the imagination, and as a result the country has been

¹⁹ "Landscape," as I use the term in this dissertation, is both physical and social, reflecting historical-geographical struggles and social powers and geometries (Swyngedouw 1999:461).

referred to as a “giant ranch overlooking the sea” (Achkar et al. 1999:34). Today, however, rather than specializing in the slaughtering and packaging of beef, Soriano’s ranchers specialize in breeding and cattle fattening technologies.

As Renfrew notes, Uruguay’s landscape hardly matches the “dominant western romantic tropes of ‘third world’ nature. There are few forests and vegetation is thin, there are no ‘forest peoples’ or indigenous populations²⁰, and there is a general absence of large wild animals” (2009:88) outside of the country’s bird populations. The largest animal presence is livestock: cows outnumber the human population by a ratio of 3.6 to 1, while sheep outnumber people 2.25 to 1. With 81,600 residents, Soriano is home to just 2.6 per cent of the country’s population. Low population density has always characterized the interior, leading Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano to call it “a landscape without people” (1973[1997]:120): This is in part due to the slow growth of the of the interior populations since colonial time. The growth rate was so insignificant that it took 100 years for the population of Soriano’s first settled area, Santo Domingo de Soriano, to double in size.

While population growth picked up in the years leading into the 1900s, it was still at a rate much lower than the demographic changes in Montevideo and the coast. In fact, the interior had one of the lowest population densities in the world throughout the 18th and 19th centuries (Barrán and Nahum 1984:656). This was the result of the significant presence of large *estancias*, which took up enormous swaths of land on which only the rancher’s family and workers resided. Even as landholdings were broken up into smaller

²⁰ While indigenous resistance was initially strong, the conquistadors succeeded in decimating the indigenous populations through assimilation and genocide. Today, Uruguay’s indigenous population is almost non-existent, with just 2.4 per cent of the population identifying as having mixed European-indigenous heritage or Amerindian ancestry. During my fieldwork, I only met one person who made mention of having Charrúa heritage, noting that her great great grandmother had been Charrúa.

farms and ranches as inheritance was divided down through the generations, the increase in rural residency has never been significant to the country's overall population.

However, while the department is trivial in terms of the demography of the nation, the rich soil and ample water sources have made Soriano one of the most important regions for the country's agricultural production, leading to its official slogan as "the fertile department." Located in the southwest region of Uruguay, Soriano covers 9008 square kilometres and is bounded in the north by the Río Negro (Black River) and the Uruguay River to the west. Considered the "bread basket" of Uruguay, Soriano's farmers produce a number of important crops: In winter, wheat, barley and colza canola are planted. In summer, corn, sorghum, sunflower, and soy are grown. Apiculture is also a key component of the department's economy, with 40 per cent of national honey production taking place in Soriano. Most of the industrial activity that exists in the department is also linked to the field: Grain silos and storage sheds, grain dryers, dairy production, poultry refrigeration, and slaughterhouses are key contributors to the local economy.

Non-traditional agricultural industries have also expanded. Plantation forestry (predominantly eucalyptus) has grown significantly over the last twenty years since the Forestry Law was established in 1987, covering around 40 thousand hectares in Soriano. While some ranchers in the area have dedicated a few hundred hectares of their land to forestry, the largest plantations are owned by UPM-Kymmene (UPM), the Finnish company that bought the Orion pulp mill in Fray Bentos, Río Negro from Botnia in 2009; and to Montes del Plata, which is building an even larger pulp mill in the town of Conchillas, Colonia. Mercedes is in between the two, located just 32 kilometres southeast of Fray Bentos and 100 kilometres north of Conchillas.

The objective of the Forestry Law, and Uruguayan forestry policy more generally, was not to reforest the country, as the name might suggest. Since the country is an extension of the Argentinean Pampas, although not quite as flat, or a transition zone between this ecosystem and the dry forest and savannah of southern Brazil's hilly uplands, 90 per cent of Uruguay is in fact grassland. So-called reforestation therefore brought a net increase in the area of planted forest, most of which is grown for pulp production, with trees being planted in what were originally prairie ecosystems (see Map 1). In the Littoral region of Western Uruguay for example, where Soriano is situated, the banks of the rivers are well wooded, but fertile plains otherwise dominate the department, making it ideal for livestock and agricultural production. For this reason, forestry in Soriano is not as extensive as it is in the neighbouring department of Río Negro and those of the northern littoral and central-north region. However, the importance of Soriano to Uruguay's food security in addition to its stronger economic position compared to Río Negro department and those located further north might explain why there is still some visible resistance to the movement here unlike in these other affected areas, even after Botnia (now UPM) began producing cellulose and Montes del Plata barely provoked any resistance.

Another non-traditional industry that has grown rapidly in the last decade is soy cultivation: at present, 50 per cent of Uruguay's total soy production is based in Soriano (Soriano 2014). The expansion of non-traditional industries has brought new ways of cultivating, as I will explore in more detail in the following chapters. Specifically, small family landholdings are increasingly being replaced by large plantations owned by investment groups from abroad while the day-to-day maintenance, cultivation, and harvesting is carried out by contract workers. That the farmers I interviewed were still

producing traditional goods (dairy, meat, honey, and fruit and vegetable cultivation) at a small-scale on their own family farms, once common in Soriano, now makes them somewhat of an anomaly as most farmers sell their land or rent out parts of their fields to investors in soy production.

The scale of their production and what they produce is not the only thing that makes these individuals somewhat atypical in Soriano. What all of the *chacreros* and their allies (described below) had in common was identification with the political left. That all of them were Frente Amplio supporters before the conflict over the UPM/Botnia pulp mill - and many continue to be despite their criticisms of the coalition – is of note. For those working with the NGOs in Montevideo this is not such a surprise; the Frente Amplio has always received the majority of its support from residents of the capital. However, in Soriano the Blanco party has historically had a stronghold, particularly among the rural populations' landholding class, and the *intendente* (political head of the department, equivalent to a governor or premier) has always been from one of the two traditional parties (the Blanco party held power during my fieldwork). This is not to say that Frente Amplio supporters in Soriano are hard to come by; in fact, I met many people who supported and/or were actively involved with the coalition in Mercedes. The Frente Amplio even held one of the three seats for senators from Soriano. Nonetheless, the fact that all of my key interlocutors involved in food cultivation²¹ were self-identified as being on the left speaks to their personal histories.

²¹ I did interview many non-Frente Amplio supporters, specifically *estancia* owners, agronomists, forestry workers and managers, and the *intendente*. They provided useful information and I thus cite these individuals throughout my dissertation. However, my main focus is on those resisting the plantation economy and thus I consider these informants as secondary.

The majority of the small-scale farmers and beekeepers that I met (six men and one woman, all middle-aged and of European descent) had come from urban-based families and had made a decision to go *al campo* (into the countryside) to earn a living in their 20s. As will be further explored in Chapter Two, many made this decision in the 1970s and 1980s, when the Frente Amplio began extolling the virtues of land reform and demonstrating solidarity with the rural worker and labour movement. For example, Raúl Sendic, a founder and leader of the MLN Tupamaros, had begun participating in the struggles of the sugar cane workers in the north of the country in the 1950s, helping to form their first workers' union in the department of Artigas at the time. This experience with the rural worker informed Sendic's political ideology and was a catalyst for his founding of the Tupamaros, whose armed struggle he believed needed to complement the work of the unions. Many of my interlocutors also had parents who were militant *frenteamplistas*, making their political activism a family affair.

If this were not enough to make this particular group of *chacrer*os stand out, their unyielding and visible stance against the expansion and the pulp and plantation economy did. The need for expanded job opportunities, the boom in land prices linked to the expansion of plantation forestry, and the investments made by Botnia-UPM in the local community through employment as well as its charitable foundation, meant that there has been large support for the industry (see Chapter Six). While I met many others who expressed concern over what the eucalypti were doing to the land (see Chapter Five) the vast majority did not take any real action to combat it, accepting that there was little that could be done. As I was told by one Soriano woman, a dairy farmer who sells her organic milk to Uruguay's dairy cooperative, *Conaprole*, and grows native tree species on her land, "I don't participate in the anti-plantation meetings because they aren't productive. The

situation is what it is, these companies are the world's owners and no amount of protest is going to change that." Those who continued to challenge the industry were often accused of not accepting the present reality or unable to acknowledge the benefits the industry had brought, giving me the impression that this minority of vocal anti-plantation were somewhat ill regarded by many in Soriano.

Yet, while the plantation economy may have broken apart traditional alliances, both between the activists and the Frente, as well as between rural producers, it also led to the formation of new and unexpected alliances, although these were at times fraught. Particularly interesting is the attention and support the *chacreros* against the plantations received from urban organizations, including local groups and NGOs, bringing broader national attention to the issue. Local groups here refers to the volunteer organizations *Movimiento por la Vida, el Trabajo y Desarrollo Sustentable - MOVITDES* (Movement for Life, Work, and Sustainable Development) in Fray Bentos; *Asociación Soriano para la Defensa de los Recursos Naturales - ASODERN* (Soriano's Association for the Defense of Natural Resources) in Mercedes; the *Coordinadora Mercedes Contra los Monocultivos de Eucaliptos y Plantas de Celulosa* (Mercedes Coordinate Against Monoculture Eucalupti and Pull Mills, *Coordinadora*); and the *Movimiento de Chacreros del Ejido de Mercedes* (Small-scale farmers' movement) in the rural Soriano communities along *Ruta 14* (Route 14). The national NGO organizations are two professional NGOs based in Montevideo: *Grupo Guayubira* of the World Rainforest Movement and *REDES- Amigos de la Tierra* (Networks – Friends of the Earth). While all of these groups tended to support the work of the other, the associations were somewhat loose and they focused their energies differently.

The NGOs produced communications and publications, organized international events, and demonstrations, generally working to bring attention to the problems with

plantation expansion. Both of these NGOs are well-known and well-funded, receiving financial support from international donor organizations for their work. The local groups, however, were in a different position. While the professional NGOs thrived, the local organizations had mostly fallen apart by the time I arrived in Uruguay. Meetings were no longer being held and some organizations were down to only a few members.

MOVITDES is a case in point: Its only remaining active member was the group's founder, Delia Villalba, a retired schoolteacher and local politician in her mid-70s. While well respected nationally and internationally by those in the environmental movement, she remains lone voice against the Botnia/UPM plantation in her hometown of Fray Bentos. The groups in Soriano only fared slightly better. While I was able to meet or electronically communicate with several members of the Mercedes-based groups (all of whom happened to be men over the age of 50) and have access to meeting notes produced by the *Coordinadora*, most had stopped meeting regularly. ASODERN, I was told, was on hiatus after its president stepped down, whereas the *Coordinadora* began slowing down in 2008 after the Botnia mill had begun producing pulp. Furthermore, I learned that arguments between select members of the *Chaceros'* movement and the *Coordinadora* had soured the initial cooperation between these groups, no doubt contributing the burn out felt by the volunteer participants. Some members of each of the groups still remained active in their own way, participating in visits to Soriano organized by the NGOs as well as by talking with the media, each other and me about their anti-plantation work and/or experiences living alongside the eucalypti, but this included only a select few.

Working with such a small and particular population in Soriano, who were considered by some as radicals or troublemakers by many people I met (including ardent

frenteampelistas in Montevideo and Mercedes who refused to criticize the government) brought its own challenges. I tried to balance my position as an outsider sympathetic to the movement and my desire to not alienate the majority of the people in the community where I was based as best I could. This was at times challenging, particularly as I was asked about my position on the pulp and plantation dispute on locally broadcast media, as occurred on several occasions. I describe my navigation of these challenges below.

Making Sense of the Field

While it might appear logical to evaluate the current pulp and plantation industry in Uruguay through a macro-lens, tying it to larger global processes under the banner of neoliberalism (or even (post)neoliberalism) and writing it into history as yet another clear-cut example of dispossession by accumulation (Harvey 2003), I argue with Nugent that taking this macro approach would be presentist, centrist, and abstract:

It [a macro approach to analyzing the case study] would be *presentist* because it would assume the possibility of explaining historical development and socioeconomic process in terms of one particular and perhaps exceptional historical conjuncture (i.e. the ‘ethnographic present,’ itself, in any event, an invention). It would be *centrist* because the distinctive characteristics of political, economic, and ideological change... would be cast in terms of a supraregional, falsely national or international idiom of change. It would be *abstract* because it would presume to resolve conflicts and contradictions, and characterize distinctive engagements in terms of a set of unexamined *a prioria*” (1993:28).

In essence, this approach would simply lead to a reinforcement of already existing beliefs around the functioning of the world capitalist system. Conversely, taking into account the particularities of Uruguay, and Soriano’s, socio-economic and political histories can lead to expanded and concrete knowledge of the economic realities facing people living there, rather than just a reiteration of accepted theories (Nugent 1993:28).

However, this is not to suggest that I see a clear divide between “the global” economic system and “local practices.” Rather, I recognize that the pulp and timber industry and responses to it are part of a global assemblage (Tsing 2005; Collier and Ong 2005; Collier 2006) in which the global system is just one in a series of concrete elements. Thus my ethnographic focus on responses to the timber plantations in Soriano does not erase the larger abstract systems and networks that shape the industry and our understanding of economic structures. Rather, it works to complicate and expand the established narrative of the neoliberal - or (post)neoliberal) - world order by acknowledging the complex and diverse responses to the economy and various actors at a particular scale and in a particular context.

Capturing the nuances of such a response, however, is one of the challenges of social science research and I engaged with multiple methods in order to construct as complete a picture as possible. I collected information from a variety of people and sources, in a number of locations. Spending my first four and last two and a half months in Montevideo, I took advantage of access to people and information that would not be available outside of the capital. I met and communicated with five academic researchers from the social sciences working on various aspects of the forestry industry; three female employees between the two NGOs as well as a male volunteer who also owned an ecology-focused bookstore downtown; a forestry engineer at Uruguay’s Technology Laboratory (LATU); several people at the Ministry of Livestock, Agriculture and Fisheries (MGAP), including employees in the departments of statistics and rural development; and the head of public relations in the Ministry of Tourism and Sport, where the “Uruguay Natural” campaign was created. I also attended a conference in September 2011 for the International Day Against Monoculture Plantations and the annual international rural

exhibition, Expo Prado. This was in addition to my daily interactions with friends and acquaintances, some of who worked for the government, the university or with public companies.

At the end of May 2011 I moved to the urban-centre of Mercedes, Soriano, located in the littoral region of the country's predominantly rural interior. Travelling 278 kilometres along the two-lane highway that passed by endless green fields of sheep, cattle, corn, and grain crops, broken up only by the occasional stop to drop off passengers in the small towns along the way, I arrived in the city as the cold weather was approaching. After spending the first few weeks in a small, old and centrally-located hotel, I rented a room with a middle-aged couple in the centre of town, two blocks from the main square (*plaza central*). Long-time residents of Mercedes who ran a real estate brokerage, the wife had worked for years with the Frente Amplio in Soriano and we had numerous interesting political conversations over lunch. I had originally planned to base myself in the interior city of Fray Bentos, where the Botnia/UPM pulp mill was built and approximately 52 thousand hectares of plantation forestry are being cultivated. However, after discussing my research with a number of NGO workers and activists in Montevideo and Fray Bentos, it was suggested that Mercedes would be a better choice, as there was more anti-pulp and forestry activity in Soriano. From my base in Mercedes, I was able to travel to the small farming communities surrounding the urban centre when a ride was available, meeting with farmers, ranchers, and plantation owners to try to understand how they were experiencing the industry. Often such meetings involved walking (or riding tractors or horses) through their fields, getting a sense of the physical land as they described their experiences working and living on it.

While my focus in Mercedes was predominantly on the impacts of the pulp/timber industry on the rural population, I also wanted to understand how the area as a whole experienced these changes. To do so, I distributed surveys through the Rural Association and agricultural cooperative, CALMER and met with environmental and anti-pulp mill activists from several local volunteer groups. I also talked with three agronomists, six small-scale farmers and ranchers; three beekeepers; seven individuals working in forestry in some capacity and living in or near Mercedes (forestry managers, plantation caretakers, large ranch owners with several hundred hectares of land dedicated to eucalyptus, and a vendor of forest priority lands); three members of government in Mercedes (at the departmental and national level), of which two belonged to the Frente Amplio; two local historians; a contract farm worker; and a manager of traditional *estancia* and one of his employees²². The vast majority of my interlocutors in Soriano were men.

Several of these connections were made through everyday participation in the daily life of the city. I joined the community sports centre, the *Club Remeros*, which was a hub of Mercedes activity, and became a volunteer language instructor at the local *Alianza Ingles* (English Alliance). Doing so not only helped me to meet people in town and build a social network but also opened the door to meeting a number of informants, including two forestry employees and several farmers whom I might not have otherwise known if I was not teaching English or practicing with the local Master's swim team.

Over the course of my fieldwork I made several trips to nearby Fray Bentos, where I toured the Botnia/UPM mill, talked to an expert in the city's industrial history, and met on several occasions with Delia Villalba, the founder of MOVITDES. While

²² With the exception of five of these individuals (a rancher, an agronomist, a ranch/planation owner, one politician with the Frente Amplio at the departmental level, and one small-scale farmer), all of these informants were men. The age range of all of these people with whom I spoke was from mid-30s to mid-70s.

many parts of Uruguay have been affected by plantation forestry, the effects of the pulp mill (both positive and negative) have been most acutely felt in Fray Bentos and I wanted to have a first-hand understanding of how these impacts were experienced. I was also fortunate enough to be put in touch with a filmmaker from Montevideo, who had recently completed a documentary, called *Fraylandia*, on the arrival of Botnia in Fray Bentos and the city's response to it. I was able to see a screening of the documentary before its official release, and this provided me with some insight into the larger economic context in which the pulp industry was situated. In the end, I met and talked to close to 40 people who were in one way or another involved in politics, forestry, environmental activism, or livestock and agriculture production during my fieldwork.

I also supplemented the more formal moments of data collection outlined above with information gleaned through participant observation, both via the day-to-day conversations I had with friends and acquaintances in Soriano and Montevideo of all ages and professions (although the majority were middle class and of European descent with only some variation on this), and by paying attention to what was happening around me. These "informal" moments of data collection make up the bulk of my ethnographic research and provided the deepest insights into what was going on in Mercedes and Uruguayan politics more broadly. Sometimes the discussions I had directly addressed the pulp mill and plantation industry, but this was not usually the case. More often than not the personal relationships I established with people offered me a general picture of how *montevideanos* and residents of Soriano relate to the government and the state, and conceptualize their economic and political reality. These insights helped to shape my broader analysis. Many of our conversations took place while sharing a *mate* in the park, someone's home or workplace. Others took place over meals and social gatherings, such

as birthday celebrations, dinners, in the change room of the community centre, or even during car rides between Mercedes and the rural communities.

In addition to their words, I also consider people's actions. As a result, I was able to recognize differences that existed between what people said and what they did, as well as between the statements made during interviews versus those given casually over tea. An example would be the seemingly contradictory opinions and activity of small farmers who were highly disapproving of the soy and timber industries. While they vocally derided the industries' reliance on pesticides and their impacts on the environment, as farmers they depended on chemicals produced by Monsanto in their agricultural production. Many individuals who were strongly and actively against the Botnia/UPM pulp mill had worked for, or at least lauded, the PAMER paper factory for its important role in the Mercedes economy. However, the pulp and paper production at PAMER is almost universally understood to be much more polluting than the newer and more technologically advanced pulp mill in Fray Bentos. I do not point these out to suggest that people were deliberately trying to mislead me, nor to belittle the position anti-plantation activists, many of whom have been directly impacted by the industry. However, these differences helped to clarify the motivation of my key interlocutors and forced me to pay attention to important characteristics specific to the pulp and plantation industry, such as the scale of the production, the ownership of the industry, and the political context in which the industry emerged – all important factors in the resistance movement.

What was less uncomfortable was my position as a non-Uruguayan scholar. A number of social scientists have theorized one's position as an "outsider" as a challenge or ethical concern to be overcome in ethnographic fieldwork, particularly feminist scholars (McDowell 1992; England 1994; Bridges 2001). Yet my position as an "outsider" in a

smaller city with little foreign tourism ended up being advantageous. First, my distinct accent in Spanish made me instantly and highly visible in a city with few non-Uruguayans, positioning me as a novelty or curiosity. Thus an early attempt on my part to find accommodation by placing a radio announcement led to contacts in the local media. I had left my contact information with the radio station within days of arriving in Mercedes, with the hope that someone would get in touch with me about a furnished room to rent.

This never happened. (With no responses to my ad, I had to rely on my newly made friend Susana, a long time resident, to help me find a place). However, the announcement I placed apparently caught the eye of one of the station's producers and he contacted me the next day about giving an on-air interview discussing the research I was planning to do in Mercedes. A couple of days later I showed up at the station as scheduled and gave the interview following the community announcements. While somewhat nerve-wracking, as the interview was live and I was still very early on in my fieldwork, this media exposure was invaluable, as it resulted in a number of key members of the local environmental movement seeking me out to talk about their work. The first person to call me after the radio interview was a journalist who had worked with the *Coordinadora*; the second was Ariel. While I was never able to connect again with the journalist after our initial meeting, Ariel turned out to be one of the most important contacts I made in Mercedes. Besides being a member of ASODERN, he was also close with a number of the *chacrer*os in the struggle against the plantation forestry. It was through Ariel that I met Washington "Coto" Lockhart, a key player in the anti-plantation struggle, as well as several others who are cited throughout this dissertation.

The radio interview also drew attention from the local TV station. Soon after I gave an interview for the local evening news and then, months later, I was invited as a

guest on the local morning news show, arranged by Susana, who knew the hosts. While these were not as productive as the radio show in terms of leading to contacts directly involved with the plantation forestry or the resistance to it, they nonetheless made me a recognizable face within town. Of course, even with this vocalized acceptance as a member of my friends' local community/ies, my experience and knowledge was still mediated by my situated position as a foreign researcher (Hawaray 1988). My decision to live in Mercedes, rather than commute in from Montevideo like many Uruguayan researchers and NGO workers, and my willingness to partake in the sharing of *mate*, for example, helped to break down some of the walls between my informants and myself and near the end of my fieldwork, my friends became to call me "*urucanadiense*," (Urucanadian) acknowledging that I did, in my own way, fit into the daily rhythms of Mercedes life even as someone from abroad.

This does not mean that there were no challenges in conducting my research, and the greatest one related to the fact that my fieldwork was not conducted in one specific location. Although my main research was focused on what was happening in Soriano, the fact that all major organizations (national government offices, NGO offices, the university LATU and so on) and activities (rallies, roundtables, and son on) are centralized in Montevideo meant having to spend a fair amount of time in the capital as noted earlier. While bus travel to and from the capital is regular and reliable, a round trip is still 8 hours on the most direct route. Thus, while I was in Uruguay for over a year, my time was split between two distinct sites, giving me less time to become as deeply immersed in each place as I would have liked.

Not having my own vehicle also posed its own challenge. Because of the distances of the farms from Mercedes and each other and the non-existent public transport, my

ability to meet with the *chacrerros* at their homes was dictated by when someone was available to drive me to and from the farming areas surrounding the city. This certainly played a role in limiting the amount of time I would have otherwise spent out in the rural regions of Soriano and thus the number of conversations and insights that could be had. Nonetheless, when these visits did take place, they were often extended, and talking in the living room or the field often carried into lunchtime and then afternoon tea or *mate*. I was never made to feel as if I was getting in the way of the daily work that needed to be done, something I had initially worried about. With each additional visit I had with an interlocutor, more information was readily shared, and questions that had been answered concisely at an earlier meeting were elaborated on, providing details that revealed the complexity of their relationships with their neighbours, their lands, and the state.

While many welcomed me, there were still those who wondered about my motives, or why I was there, and “whose side I was on.” In a number of these situations, it was clear that information was being held back, as responses were kept short and vague. On these occasions, I worked to understand what was driving these silences and what they represented in the context of our conversation. Others vetted me in advance, asking me to disclose my personal opinion on the pulp and plantation industry before they would agree to speak with me. While I tried not to alienate anyone willing to meet with me, at times this was unavoidable.

Despite these challenges, I gained a deep understanding of the topic at hand during my time in the field. Trying to compile this knowledge into a single, cohesive work, however, was more challenging. Insights and information were not received in a linear, cumulative fashion; rather it came to me in disjointed pieces encountered in no particular order. This dissertation is my attempt to join these pieces together, relying on what I

heard, observed, and experienced, all the while taking into account the historically sedimented landscape (Moore 2005:2) in which I was working. The following chapters, outlined below, work to bring attention to these fragments, which together provide insight into the changing social, political, and physical landscape in rural Uruguay in the context of the expanding of the pulp and timber industry.

Chapter Outline

The remainder of this dissertation is organized into five chapters and a conclusion, which are loosely organized into three parts: “History and Politics,” “(Post)Neoliberal Projects,” and “More-than-Human Actors.” Each chapter looks at the emergence of a particular boundary object or objects that have become contentious as a result of the growing pulp and plantation industry in Uruguay, while making links to the political landscape that has given shape to tensions that have arisen. The following three chapters focus on the relationship between the state and the anti-plantation activists. The last two chapters focus more specifically on the role of non-human actors (including the eucalyptus trees, the river, and the pulp mill) and their interactions with my interlocutors, noting the impacts of these moments of connection. Collectively, these chapters will demonstrate how small-scale farmers are advocating for the creation of an alternative to the present (post)neoliberal economic strategy in interior Uruguay and their changing relationship with the Frente Amplio, the Uruguayan state, and their environment. Focusing on boundary objects demonstrates over what terrain the tensions between the government and my interlocutors emerge, while discussions of Uruguayan politics, both of the past and present, help to explain how these competing social worlds have arisen.

Chapter Two looks at the way nostalgia for agrarian reform functions as a critique of current Frente Amplio policies regarding rural development. Taking the national hero, José Artigas, as a boundary object, I demonstrate how the different interpretations surrounding his policies lead to a disconnect between the Frente Amplio and Soriano's *chacrer*os. While land reform was a key goal of both Artigas's revolution and the Frente Amplio upon its foundation, to this day Uruguay has never carried out a policy of land reform. Instead, the Frente has worked to reposition itself as less a revolutionary force and more diplomatic than its historical stance, positioning the coalition as a legitimate part of the formal political landscape. Rather than creating a sense of malaise for small-scale farmers, however, I argue that looking to the past and Artigas's call for land reform in the early 19th century provides anti-industry individuals the means to envision an alternative future for rural Soriano.

The second section of this dissertation outlines two distinct neoliberal projects under the Frente: One that is denationalist (the selling of productive lands to non-Uruguayan investors and companies) and the other nationalist (the Uruguay Natural campaign). Yet, both of these projects are based on attracting foreign dollars through the marketing of Uruguay's interior and both have become areas of critique for the anti-plantation movement. Chapter Three examines how the government and small-scale farmers interpret commoditization of nature. For both groups, the natural environment is a commodity to be exploited for economic gain; however the scale and type of exploitation that is acceptable vary between the two. With the rural interior consistently being viewed as lagging behind the country's urban regions, the government hopes to "modernize" the region through large-scale economic development projects like the pulp and plantation economy and its *Uruguay Natural* campaign. However, small-scale farmers

feel that this approach will not create the desired economic development and equality that the state purports to support. They therefore promote development much more rooted in traditional, or what they call “natural,” practices, arguing that to do otherwise would be to engage in a course of negative progress.

Chapter Four looks at the charges against foreign land ownership levelled by small-scale farmers in Uruguay and anti-industry activists. Taking land as an assemblage and boundary object, I show how the critique of increasing foreign ownership of land is not about who owns the land, as it might first appear. Instead, I argue that resistance to land foreignization is about the what large-scale plantation economy does to small-scale farmers, namely displacing their social networks and making the practice of traditional agricultural pursuits more difficult, provoking what appears as an uncharacteristically nationalist sentiment within the anti-plantation movement. Additionally, those against foreignization read this process as a continuation of economic policies that began in the mid-20th century, with the introduction of neoliberal reforms and the state’s attempt to diversify rural exports. During this time, land was remade into as a site for large-scale plantation forestry and foreign investment, which has, in turn, redefined rural Soriano.

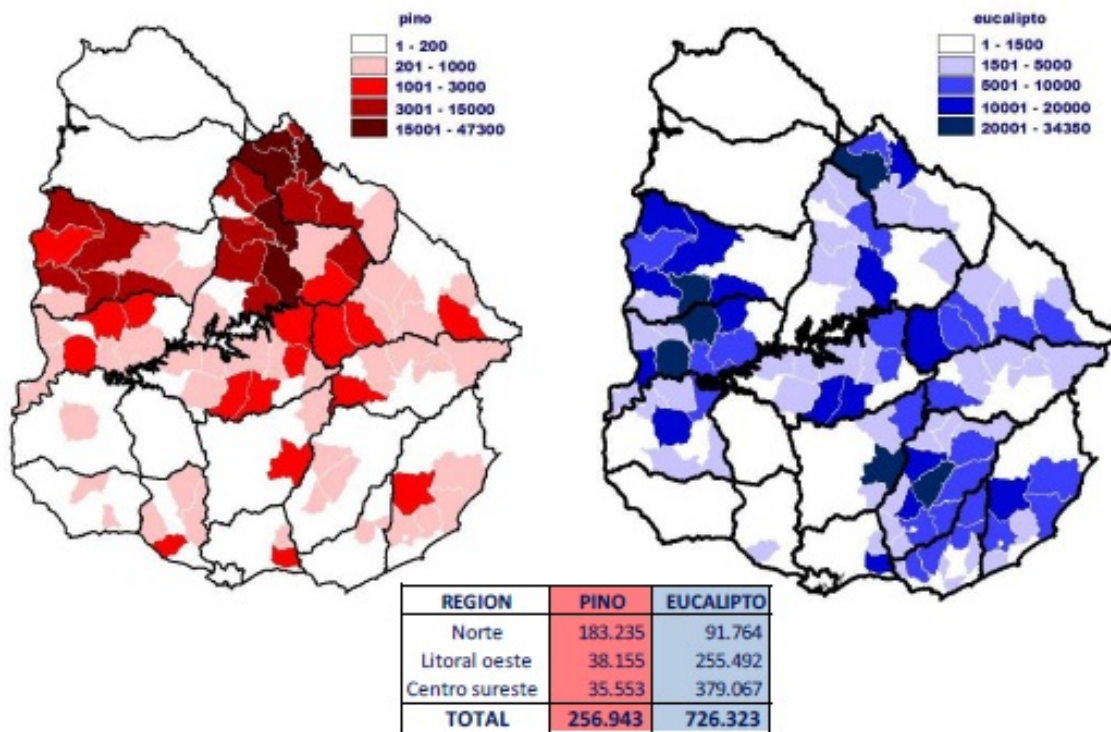
Section Three demonstrates the importance of the non-human actors in projects of state formation and neo-extractivist projects and their impacts on the physical and political environment. Chapter Five takes a step back from a direct examination of farmers’ relationship with the state and brings the focus onto the plantation trees themselves. Drawing from interspecies and affective ecologies literature, this chapter looks at how the arrival of plantation forestry and the eucalyptus trees have remade relationships between residents, both human and non-human, in the region. While it was state policies that allowed the plantation economy to expand across Uruguay, the

plantation trees themselves have been key players in bringing about unintentional consequences. This chapter draws on ethnographic accounts to outline what some of these consequences have been, demonstrating how the eucalyptus plantations of today vary from those that arrived in Uruguay over 160 years ago. Today's trees are like state agents gone rogue, bringing about changes and acting on the land in ways that were not intended. Deployed for ornamental purposes and to advance efforts of environmental conservation and economic development, the plantation eucalyptus have also made food and agricultural production in parts of rural Soriano a growing challenge.

Chapter Six turns to the protest over the construction of Botnia/UPM's cellulose plant on the international boundary. While industry and the state see the pulp mill as a symbol of sustainable growth, its opponents understand it as the source of environmental catastrophe. The conflict was further complicated by the Uruguay River: assumed to mark a clear divide between two nations, the fluidity of the political boundary and its ability to carry industry outputs across the river turned the conflict into an international one. In order to resolve the dispute, the industry drew on "expert" scientific knowledge and impact assessment reports to demonstrate that the mill was not polluting, creating consensus through an illusory separation of politics and science. By contrast, the opposing view of the anti-pulp activists was written off as irrational and clouded by political motives, a characterization easily reinforced by their alliance with the Argentinean protestors who were consistently referred to as emotional or political, rather than rational, in their opposition. The result was a silencing of the anti-industry arguments, even as those opposing the pulp mill and accompanying plantation forestry equally drew from "expert" scientific findings.

I conclude by summarizing the insights gleaned from my research, noting their contribution to studies on boundary objects and state formation in contemporary Uruguay.

Map 2: Pine and Eucalyptus Plantation Coverage in Uruguay, 2012



Source: Tommasino and Annunziatto, 2014.

Chapter 2

Land and Longing: Artigas and Agrarian Reform in Soriano

Depués de todo la nostalgia existe

(After everything, nostalgia exists)

-Mario Benedetti, “Bienvenida” (1996)

Introduction: Remembering Artigas

One thing that is unavoidable in Uruguay is Artigas, the country’s revolutionary hero. The most recognizable landmark in Montevideo, the *Plaza de la Independencia* at the entrance to the *Ciudad Vieja* (Old City), is dominated by his monument and mausoleum that mark the plaza’s centre (Figure 2), a strong masculine figure who is at once portrayed as a man engaged in military battle (as the traditional man-on-a-horse motif demonstrates) and as a man of the rural people (revealed in his use of the *gaucho* poncho and the carving of rural people at his feet on the monument’s platform). He is “our George Washington,” my friend Rodrigo liked to tell me each time he recounted the country’s struggle for independence from Spain. His portrait graces their peso coins¹, monuments have been erected to him across the country, streets as well as a large department in northwestern Uruguay bear his name. In short, it is hard to deny the role Artigas plays in the nation’s history and self-identity.

This reverence for Artigas in Uruguay was even further emphasized in 2011 via the bicentennial celebrations taking place across the country that year, commemorating the beginning of his revolution. In Mercedes alone memorabilia such as banners with

¹ The Uruguayan peso coin comes in denominations of 1, 2, 5, and 10. His portrait also serves as the watermark for all of the country’s bills in circulation (denominations of 20, 50, 100, 200, 500, 1000, and 2000).

Artigas's words, flags declaring "*Aquí Nació la Patria*" (The Homeland was Born Here), and decals featuring an outline of his image were proudly on display on the doors of homes and businesses alike, while two of his famous quotes hung from the palm trees of the central square: "*Sean los Orientales, tan ilustrados como valientes*" (Easterners², as illustrious as they are brave) declared one, and "*Mi autoridad emana de vosotros y ella cesa ante vuestra soberana*" (My authority comes from you and it ceases before your sovereignty), the other.

Perhaps the biggest event for those in Soriano, however, was the re-enactment of the *Grito de Asencio* (Cry of Asencio, also known as the Admirable Alarm), one of the first notable events on the country's road to independence. In rebellion against the Spanish government in Montevideo, a group of militants took over the settlements of Mercedes and Santo Domingo (now Villa Soriano) sounding the "alarm" and marking the beginning of the revolutionary uprising. To celebrate, numerous residents from Soriano retraced on horseback the route that the revolutionaries took from Montevideo to Mercedes, bringing the events of 1811 into the present in a very material way.

It would be easy to discount the constant stories of Artigas and his revolution as, at worst, an overly sentimental but harmless show of nationalism³ and, at best, people's attempts to simply provide some historical background information to the foreigner in their midst. But as the historical narrative was repeated over and over, and at times in the context of what was happening at present in Soriano and the larger political context, including the possible opening of the Indian-owned Aratirí open pit nickel mine in the

² Before Argentina and Uruguay became two separate nations, those who are now in present-day Uruguay were referred to as Easterners because of their location to the east of the Uruguay River. In fact, the full name of the country is the República Oriental del Uruguay, or the Eastern Republic of the Uruguay [River].

³ Like any revered figure, the more scandalous aspects of Artigas's life have been downplayed or even denied. Very little is ever mentioned, for example, around Artigas's personal life, which would reveal his multiple marriages and affairs with various women and the children (some illegitimate) resulting from these unions.

centre of the country and the expansion of the pulp and plantation economy, I began to see how these narratives were often linked to a particular political agenda. While all political parties and my acquaintances noted Artigas's importance in the creation of Uruguay and his commitment to bringing about social justice, there were nonetheless variations in how his story was told. How the story changed depended on who was recounting it to me, making the national hero an important boundary object in discussions of politics and rural realities.



Figures 2 and 3: Artigas's mausoleum in the *Plaza de la Independencia* and a poster for the *Asamblea Popular* with Artigas's image and words, Montevideo 2009 and 2011. Photos by author

Artigas has been a powerful symbol in state formation projects in Uruguay and his revolution have been co-opted by political powers of all stripes over the last century. During the military dictatorship, for example, what has been called the “green legend” of Artigas was promoted. It built off of the so-called “light-blue legend” which emerged at

the end of the 19th century (Garibotto 2013:134) as Uruguay was coming out of a period of political violence and consolidating its national identity. This “green” version focuses on Artigas as a patriot who led Uruguay to becoming an independent nation, although this was never his aim.⁴ Unsurprisingly, in this legend the revolutionary side of Artigas was downplayed. When the military regime opened Artigas’s mausoleum under the statue in Figure 2 in 1977, they avoided placing any of his famous slogans on the wall because of their revolutionary tone. Instead, the walls simply display important dates in the life of Artigas, framing him as a patriot and military man. (Artigas had, in fact, been a member of the Spanish military before becoming part of the movement for independence from Spain).

However, the contemporary political Left has used his image most vigorously, adopting it and his words in the 1960s, with both remaining part of their campaigns ever since. The Frente Amplio took a progressive stance through its incorporation of radical groups into the coalition upon its founding and from its beginnings some members positioned themselves as revolutionary by emphasizing the coalition’s commitment to the ideology of Artigas, even adopting the red-white-and-blue striped flag as their symbol, invoking the revolutionary’s use of the colours of the French Revolution in his revolt against Spanish and Portuguese rule. In doing so, they have established a particular narrative for the coalition’s direction. Likewise, the leftist splinter group, *Asamblea Popular* (Popular Assembly), also uses his image and draws from his famous phrases on their

⁴ Under Artigas’s leadership, the *Liga Federal* or *Liga de los Pueblos Libres* (the Federal League or League of Free Nations) was formed in 1815 in an effort to gain political independence from Spanish rule. Artigas hoped to establish a federation of United Provinces, which consisted of present-day Uruguay and five provinces that are now part of Argentina (Santa Fe, Entre Ríos, Corrientes, Misiones, and Córdoba). Uruguay’s independence came in 1828 with the Treaty of Montevideo, with mediation from Great Britain.

political materials (Figure 3).⁵ They perpetuate a historical narrative of Artigas known as the “red legend,” which plays up his populist image. In this version, his ties to the rural communities, socialist-style politics and his revolutionary ideas about agrarian reform are emphasized (Garibotto 2013:133).

Many have taken the resurgence of the image of Artigas and, I would add the victory of the Frente Amplio, to be proof that Uruguay has returned to the politics of the past (Garibotto 2013:129), reviving the founding myths of Uruguay in the present. For my informants, however, the version of Artigas supposedly supported by the political left is missing several of these key elements, which have quietly disappeared from the coalition’s political platform over the last 40 years. Their retellings therefore take a different focus, more representative of the rural areas’ past political aims and interests by restoring Artigas’s position as a man who became a champion of the rural worker. Taking this last narrative as my focus, this chapter explores how longing for a rural landscape defined by the principles of agrarian reform first pronounced by national hero, José Artigas and then taken up by the Frente Amplio, inform anti-industry farmers’ and their allies’ notions of progress and nation-building. It also examines the ways that nostalgia for this promise is invoked as a critique of current rural development strategies. Rather than creating a sense of malaise for small-scale farmers, looking to the past provides anti-industry individuals the language in which to critique the concentration of land taking place in Uruguay at present.

⁵ The slogans on the poster in Figure 3 read, from left to right: “Onwards with the workers’ struggles. No more with hunger salaries. No more criminalization of protest;” “Land for he who works it. No to the invasion and contamination of multinationals;” and “More schools, fewer prisons. No more poor prisoners and free corrupt individuals. No more rich people in government.”

The promise of agrarian (or land) reform has a long history in Uruguay, from Artigas's "social revolution" in the early 19th century, to Batlle Ordóñez's push for greater equality in the early 20th century right through to the founding of the Frente Amplio coalition and its platform in the 1970s. It is this constant promise of reform that has turned it into such a strong symbol of Uruguay's necessary path to development. Yet, while agrarian reform has been such a long-discussed topic in Uruguay, the reality is that it remains one of the few Latin American countries to have never implemented one. And, unlike the interpretations of Artigas as a patriot or as a symbol of justice that have been used to unite Uruguay, land reform can be a divisive issue since large landholders make up an important part of the rural economy. This lack of apparent interest from the national government in addressing rural concerns that had once been important to the agenda of the Uruguayan Left (in general, although agrarian reform is the focus here) is somewhat ironic considering that rural pursuits are presently responsible for 70 per cent of Uruguayan exports. The contradiction between the Frente's founding principles, rooted in the aims of Artigas's revolution, and its current approach to rural development has made the unfulfilled promise of agrarian reform even more salient.

The introduction noted how the Frente Amplio's state formation project has changed since coming to power in 2005. This chapter focuses on how land reform, José Artigas and nostalgia are also employed as a critique of the coalition's new turn. I begin with a discussion of the ways that nostalgia, often criticized for its focus on the past, can actually work to challenge the present and define future progress. I then take a brief historical look at agrarian reform across the region, followed by a discussion of how it has figured (at least ideologically) into the creation of the Uruguayan state and the Frente Amplio coalition within a context of extreme inequality in landholdings. Doing so will

illustrate the power that land reform holds over my interlocutors in Soriano, both as a symbol of the Uruguayan nation and as one of development and progress. Implementing land reform, they believe, will culminate in the establishment of Uruguay as it is *meant* to be but has never yet become. The present-day concentration of land resulting from neoliberal policies beginning in the 1970s, including the Forestry Law (discussed further in Chapter Four), are not something new but rather a return to an inequitable system of land distribution that has existed since the founding of Uruguay. By invoking Artigas and his thus far unimplemented promises of agrarian reform, anti-industry activists draw this parallel between the past and present, while offering what they see as the only viable solution for the future. Nostalgia therefore functions as the mode through which to critique current government policies and provide an alternative path.

Nostalgia and Progress

Burgess suggests that nostalgia and progress make strange bedfellows, “one looking forward as it does and the other looking backwards. Yet we know we can look back to the future or forward to the past” (2006:275). Nostalgia often provides the impetus for progress, helping to define the future through ideas of what once was. That is to say that nostalgia helps to construct a “lost golden age that never existed” (Burgess 2006:276), creating a deep yearning for a return to a time that is understood but has never been experienced, equating progress not with the future, but ironically with the past (Burgess 2006:277). Thus while seemingly sitting at opposite ends of the spectrum, nostalgia and progress work to interrupt the linear movement of time, seeing the future by moving both backwards and forwards. This back-and-forth movement through time

should not be assumed to be a longing for a future from the past as it existed: it may actually be an attempt to find the beginnings of a political project that has yet to be fully carried out and reconnect it to past promises.

Tannock's definition of nostalgia leaves room for such a possibility, arguing that nostalgia is:

A structure of feeling (in the Raymond William's sense of the term), invokes a positively evaluated past world in response to a deficient present world. The nostalgic subject turns to the past to find/construct sources of identity, agency, or community that are felt to be lacking, blocked, subverted, or threatened in the present. The "positively evaluated" past is approached as a source for something now perceived to be missing; but it need not be thought of as a time of general happiness, peacefulness, stability or freedom" (1995:454).

I only add the caveat proposed by Cashman, that it is both part of a structure of feeling *and* present in the realm of action and practice (2006:138). In particular, it is a cultural practice, as nostalgia contains not a given content, but one that is inherently selective (see Cashman 2006:138). Furthermore, nostalgia as known and practiced by those on the margins can be substantially different from how it is understood and experienced by those who belong to dominant power groups (Stewart 1988).

Uruguayans have been accused of being particularly nostalgic (see LaRed21 2001), and nostalgia has certainly played its role in the country both in terms of how people think and talk about Uruguay and their everyday practices. Writings about and informed by nostalgia by Uruguayan writers often focus on a "Golden Age," namely the period before the end of the Second World War, when Uruguay was a prosperous, well educated, and liberal country. These ideas tie into the foundational myths that Uruguayans have about themselves that were discussed in the introduction. Likewise, nostalgic evocations can be found in both *guachesca* (cowboy) literature (for example, those of Eduardo Acevedo Díaz, Javier de Viana, and Justino Zavala Muniz) and in writings

produced during the period of dictatorship, particularly in the writings of those in exile. These latter writings spoke of a longing for home, a desire to return to the way things were before the dictatorship, perhaps best expressed by the Uruguayan poet, journalist and author, Mario Benedetti, who is cited at the beginning of this chapter.

In both Soriano and Montevideo, *folklórico* and gaucho festivals, such as the Expo Prado in Montevideo or the local celebration I attended in Villa Soriano, play on the aforementioned romantic idea of the gaucho and rural life. Wearing the traditional gaucho clothing, still used by some on a daily basis, these events centre on bucking bronco events, agricultural exhibitions (in the case of the Expo), and a *parrillada* (full Uruguayan barbecue). The creation of the *Noche de la Nostalgia* (Nostalgia Night), a nation-wide party held on the 24th of August in which participants might wear costumes and dance to retro music late into the night, only furthers to demonstrate how the past continues to play out in the Uruguayan present. Often, this “looking back” is framed as a resistance on the part of Uruguayans for “advancement” or, as one pro-forestry large landowner in Soriano put it, “Uruguayans are happy to stay with things as is, not to move ahead.” At other times it was said with admiration, mostly by non-Uruguayans who had moved there, having felt trapped or tired by the growing consumerism they saw around them back home. I found the tone, however, to verge on being unintentionally paternalistic. I suggest an alternative reading, in which nostalgia serves quite the opposite function: rather than prohibiting progress, idyllic rural imaginings in Uruguay actually speak clearly to a vision for future development.

Much scholarly writing at the end of the 20th century characterized nostalgia in a negative light, referring to it as an “industry” manufactured to pacify citizens or as a form of “universal modern malaise,” (Lowenthal 1985), in which looking to the past precludes

productive progress in the present. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s it was attacked for its “falsifying idealization of the past, its counterproductive withdrawal from modernization, and its inbuilt slant towards conservative politics” (Cashman 2006:139), the latter an argument taken up by feminist scholars (Greene 1991, for example). Nostalgia has been accused of being untrustworthy, distorting the past so that it would resemble utopian ideals (Chase and Shaw 1989; Hutcheson 1988), disguising the brutality of past events (Berman 1982), displaying a romantic weakness (Rosaldo 1989), and deceiving those who subscribed to it. This argument overlaps with another charge levelled by anti-nostalgia scholars, who see it as creating a dodging of the present and endangering a society’s future development and growth (Cashman 2006:140; Hutcheson 1988:39).

Yet, as Cashman points out, these attacks on nostalgia all implicitly endorse modernity as “a project of positive progress” (2006:140). They suggest that any changes in the present day must be accepted as they are moving people forward into a better, more advanced reality; to believe that something can be learned from turning to the past is foolish, itself a problematic assumption and not one with which everyone in Uruguay agrees. Anti-plantation actors, including small-scale farmers and their allies in the movement, do not believe that the road to progress in present-day Uruguay is the right path for the country to take and nostalgia, via discussions of Artigas and the foundational politics of the Frente, becomes a way of indirectly conveying this belief. Expressed longing for land reform is also a way of making sure that historical promises are not forgotten or erased, particularly because land reform was promoted as a means to greater progress. Looking to the past, therefore, is at times less about recovering what was, and more about setting up guideposts for a better future.

Furthermore, while nostalgia may see the past as a stable source of meaning, this “cannot be conflated with the desire for a stable, traditional and hierarchized society” (Tannock 1995:455). Arguably, my fieldwork shows that the longing for agrarian reform in Uruguay is about something quite the opposite: the promise of agrarian reform has led to a resurgence of grassroots action amongst Soriano’s small-scale farmers. That is, it is a tool for critically analysing the present as well as future directions. The nostalgia that I witnessed was not strictly romantic in nature, in which a utopic vision of “something better” is “beyond the grasp” of the present. Nor was it a tool of the state, which aims to glorify the past or stir up nationalist feelings, as was the case during the country’s dictatorship. Instead, past promises of agrarian reform and memories of a more equitable land distribution were invoked as a way to reorient discussions of contemporary economic development. Such findings are reflected in the growing scholarship, which acknowledges that nostalgia takes various forms or reinterprets nostalgia as an active critique of the present (Cashman 2006; Tannock 1995; Stewart 1988), rather than as a passive longing for what was.

This is not to suggest that nostalgia is never contradictory or overly romanticized. The notion of a rural reality in which small family farms and community prevailed was powerful for many people, so much so that when discussing the problems they perceive with the forestry industry, they juxtaposed the terrible working conditions in the plantations with the “dignified work” of ranching and farming. Yet my conversations with one *peon* who has worked his whole life on *estancias* in Soriano, as well as with an older married couple who have found employment as forestry caretakers after spending many years in poverty, challenge such a clear cut distinction. Other contradictions also arose at times. Emilio, an amateur local historian who works to preserve and promote Soriano’s

history through the *Centro Histórico y Geográfico de Soriano* (History and Geography Centre of Soriano) in Mercedes recounted over the course of one interview how “land was concentrated in the hands of a few” during Soriano’s early history, while only minutes later telling me, “this land was once in the hands of many small producers but now is in the hands of just one,” when expressing displeasure over the arrival of industries like UPM/Botnia who buy up large swaths of land.

I do not include these contradictions to belittle or lessen the importance of the small farmers’ and activists’ struggle for agrarian reform. Nor am I suggesting that it is more dignified to commute into work for a large foreign forestry company on contract than it is to work for a local rancher for many years. Rather, by framing the push for agrarian reform as nostalgic critique, rather than arguing that people are remembering a long-standing past, helps to understand its function as a tool of the anti-monoculture movement. The role of these recollections of the past is to highlight agrarian reform as a promise of something better, their right to which is guaranteed by the state over the last two hundred years and most recently with the creation of the Frente Amplio. The dangling dream of reform is a painful reminder of what still has yet to be accomplished, creating a yearning not “for an ideal past, but for the present perfect” and its lost potential (Boym 2001:21).

Thus, when people in Soriano, and in particular, small-scale farmers who began farming during the 1960s and 1970s, talk about what Uruguay is supposed to look like, they are revealing their desires for a specific place, one which seemed to be possible at the time they began farming in the small, rural communities near Mercedes. They also often frame it, sometimes explicitly, as a kind of national project; an obligation to make sure Uruguay is developed as it was promised around the same time as the fight for

independence began. This explains why José Artigas and his 19th century Revolution with its emphasis on agrarian reform, becomes a recurring topic in discussions of the plantation economy and today's political reality.

Agrarian Reform in 20th century Latin America

Agrarian reform, seen as a solution to widespread poverty and a path to greater equality, arguably defined progressive Latin American politics throughout the 20th century. In fact, projects of agrarian reform had become such a force across the region, a mid-Century document by England's Royal Institute of International Affairs declared, "the question is thus not whether land reform is likely to be applied extensively in Latin America, but when, in what form, and with what effect" (1962:1). Inequitable distribution of land had been an issue across most of Latin America, being cited as "the leading cause of rural poverty by far...Inequitable distribution of land resources is the norm in Latin America where a tiny majority of landlords hold a high percentage of the best lands and the majority are crowded onto tiny holdings" (Thiesenhusen 1995:2). Land reform, it has been argued, would provide the solution to this (Griffin et al 2002:291). With farming and the production of raw materials making up the greater part of regional economies at the time, it is no wonder that agrarian reform became an important issue across the region.

In 1920, the first large-scale Latin American agrarian reform of the 20th century began in Mexico, following the Revolution (Stavenhagen 1970:97), with 8.7 million hectares distributed to around 778 thousand peasants in the early post-revolutionary years and another 17.9 million hectares given to 810 thousand peasants under the Cárdenas government (1934 – 1940) (Hamilton 1975:90). In the 1940s, Guatemala entered into

what is referred to as the “Ten Years of Spring,” first under the presidency of Juan José Arévalo and then Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán. The governments of these two men saw 690 thousand hectares expropriated or in the process of being expropriated, with the aim of “liquidation of feudal property in the countryside, along with the relations of production that gave rise to it” (Grandin, Levenson, and Oglesby 2011:218).

Agrarian reform took on even greater significance in the 1960s and 1970s across the region. The Bolivian (1952-64) and Cuban (1953-59) revolutions, following the example from Mexico, placed agrarian reform as a key issue within the context of socialist transformation. Other countries also implemented their own policies addressing the issue of inequitable land distribution, including Chile (1962; 1967-1973), Colombia (1958-1970), Ecuador (1964-1977), and Peru (1968-1980). While urban areas had been equally important in revolutions throughout the region (Havana and Montevideo, for example) the rural areas nonetheless were understood as a key region for the implementation of revolutionary ideals, embodied in the idea of agrarian reform.⁶

It is within this context that the revolutionary Tupamaros also declared agrarian reform as part of its plan for Uruguay, which would entail the expropriation of land from the *latifundias*, without compensation to foreign interests (Porzecanski 1973:8). Although the guerrilla movement in Uruguay was urban-based, the rural areas nonetheless became symbolic of Uruguayan identity and an emblematic background on which their aims were to be won. Uruguayan economist and editor of the non-Communist leftist weekly, *Marcha*, Carlos Quijano embodied this outlook when he called for a “return to the countryside in

⁶ Latin America, however, was not unique in its move to land reform in the mid to late -20th century. Around the same time, numerous countries in Asia and Africa were also undergoing land reforms and these also captured the attention of anthropologists and other social scientist. Regarding India, for example, discussions focused on understanding why the country’s Five-Year Plans benefitted the intermediary classes but failed to reach the country’s rural poor (Joshi 1970; Bandyopadhyay 1986)

order to reconstruct the country” (1963:110; Frens-String 2011:18). While returning to rural life was not on the agenda of the Tupamaros, they nonetheless laid out an explicit plan for agrarian reform in the program put forward by the *Movimiento de la Liberación Nacional – Tupamaros* (or MLN-Tupamaros), the political wing of the Marxist guerrillas. It states:

Our main points for the reconstruction phase of the country by a revolutionary government are tied to agrarian reform:

- 1) Large ranches, plantations, and dairy farms will be expropriated and their operations will be managed by the workers.
- 2) Based on the assumption that the main wealth of the country emerges from the field, it will be capitalized upon and mechanized to multiply its production quickly.
- 3) The small rural business will respect its workers, the rural workers who presently have precarious land rights as tenants, sharecroppers, and workers will be given real rights to the land. The land is for the person who works it.
- 4) All farmers will be given the best technical support as well as fertilizers, seeds, wires, and other instruments for better exploitation of the land (MLN 2006[1971], my translation).

It was in this context of a socialist dream of reform in the early 1970s that many of the left-leaning *chacreros* with whom I spoke began working the land, defying the model of generation-to-generation farming characteristic of rural Uruguay in the mid-20th century. While never explicitly cited as the reason for turning to farming for a living, their politics certainly influenced their vision of rural production, a fact made clear in our conversations. Coto, for example, was unlike many of the other farmers in the area of Pensé when he began working on the land. Coming from a family of intellectuals based in the city of Mercedes. His father was a prominent historian and his grandfather a well-known educator, for whom a school in Mercedes is named, but he always had an interest in working the land and studied agriculture at university. At 20 years old and just three years after the MLN laid out its plan for reform, he bought the property he still owns and began his dairy farm, integrating into his local community. His four children, all grown,

have all left the farm, three of them working in areas completely unrelated to agriculture, but he continues to gain a livelihood from working the land with the help of his four (sometimes five) employees and remains politically active on issues of *chacreros*' rights, including pushing for land reform.

Coto had referenced in general terms his families' active involvement in the Frente during the dictatorship, a coalition to which he's been aligned for many years. Yet, as our conversation turned towards the coalition's current policies, Coto began to express his disappointment with the government's rural development plans, using Artigas to illustrate his point. He told me: "Artigas was in three wars: In 1811 against the Spanish, in 1815 against the Portuguese. And then they were also fighting the *Porteños* [the government in Buenos Aires]⁷. And in the middle of all of this they managed to implement agrarian reform. This [current] government has had eight years without war and has not been able to do it." His criticism of the government often made reference to past promises, but he admitted that what motivates his critiques is also one of the challenges facing pro-reformers: many people who are linked with the Frente Amplio were still hopeful that the Frente would change their vision and side with the rural producers, and this has minimized the amount of protest from within the Left. "When's there's a revolution there's always a counter-revolution. Peace is a sign that there is no revolution," he argued, alluding to the lack of resistance facing the Frente since coming to power and abandoning its truly original *artiguista* roots.

One of Coto's *compañeros* from the *chacreros*' movement, Pablo, a retired strawberry and tomato farmer in his mid-60s who now works in town assembling motorcycles from

⁷ Literally meaning people who live by a port, this term refers to people from Buenos Aires and in this case in particular, he's referring to the Buenos Aires government.

China, is similarly political in his discussions of rural production. I had heard Pablo mentioned frequently by Ariel and Coto during discussions about the *chacrer*os' movement and his role in the struggle against the plantations, but it was nearly five months into my stay in Mercedes before we got a chance to meet. Telling me that he "became independent" when he purchased his 16 hectares of land, he noted how he was the only one in his family drawn to *el campo* (the fields). As we sat on his concrete patio overlooking his land and the gravel road that passes by it, he recalled how he was drawn to the countryside: "My dad was in sales, and I remember that on the bulletin board [in his office] there was an ad for a piece of farmland. For my father and brother, *el campo* was understood as a source of money and that's it. But I loved being out in the fields and in 1974 I bought this piece of land where I'm still living," he explained. While he pointed out that he was not particularly militant until the arrival of the plantation forestry and he realized that the survival of his community's land and livelihoods was under threat, it was clear that he had been drawn to the land for more than just economic reasons, noting how it had been a challenge trying to earn enough to support his four children. He formed a loose cooperative-like association with a number of small farmers to better manage the economic risk that comes with agricultural production, and saw his participation in the *chacrer*os movement as part of attempt to "better the lives of the people in *el campo*," partaking in the first blocking of the highway in 2001 as a protest against the plantation expansion and concentration of land into the hands of a few multinationals.

This kind of militancy carried into the post-dictatorship period for these producers. Almost a decade after Coto and Pablo began farming, José, a self-described former Frente Amplio militant and pro-reformist, fought hard to get compensation from the government in the form of land after natural disasters devastated the countryside throughout 1980 and

1981. He worked as part of a cooperative made up of seven small-scale tomato farmers who ran their own packaging plant. Although they struggled to compete with larger factories as a small artisanal collective and the business eventually closed in 1990, he continued to push for government support, including land distribution, for *chacreros*. He was proud of the accomplishments of the Frente and its militant supporters in Soriano as the dictatorship was coming to an end, noting the backing many small farmers received from the coalition before its victory in 2005 and how the strongest politicization came from supporters in his hometown of Dolores. For José, his struggle for livelihood and his politics are closely bound up with one another, and his disappointment in the Frente Amplio's treatment of rural supporters was palpable.

Yet, despite these examples above, agrarian reform was not just a policy of the radical left in the mid-20th century. In 1958, President Kubitschek of Brazil launched his Operation Pan America, described as “an effort to relieve millions of human beings for whom freedom is but a word strangled in the most anguishing poverty” (Maritano and Obaid 1963:16) by Brazil's committee representative, Federico Schmidt. Hardly revolutionary, it aimed to do so by encouraging governments to utilize their available resources in an effort to raise the standard of living of the poor and working class as a way of preventing communist infiltration, with its promises of land reform and greater economic equality and stability among others. That is, by improving the conditions, such as landlessness and poverty that nurtured socialist revolutions, Latin American countries could minimize the influence of Castro in the region (Maritano and Obaid 1963:19). Out of Operation Pan America, the Alliance for Progress was born.

Created in early 1961 under the presidency of John F. Kennedy, the aim of the Alliance was to promote economic cooperation between the United States and Latin

America (Marchesi 2011). Contrary to much action taken by the United States and CIA throughout the region in the mid-20th century, which supported the overthrow of various democratically elected governments (of which there are too many to list here) and often propped up military dictatorships in their place, the Alliance for Progress aimed to stave off communism through a “peaceful revolution.” This was to be carried out by understanding and addressing a number of interrelated issues facing the region, including economic equality, political repression, and social inequality (Smith 1991:71). As Kennedy stated, “political freedom must be accompanied by social change. For unless necessary social reforms, *including land and tax reforms*, are freely made... unless the great mass of Americans, share in increasing prosperity, then our alliance, our revolution, and our dream would have failed” (Alba 1965:127; emphasis mine).

With this policy aim in mind, in August 1961, with prodding from the United States, many Latin American countries (Uruguay included) signed onto the Declaration of Punta del Este with the aim of encouraging,

in accordance with the characteristics of each country, programs of comprehensive agrarian reform leading the effective transformation, where required, of unjust structures and systems of land tenure and use, with a view of replacing the *latifundia* and dwarf holdings by an equitable system of property so that, supplemented by timely and adequate credit, technical assistance and improved marketing arrangements, the land will become, for the man who works it, the basis of his economic stability, the foundation of his increasing welfare, and the guarantee of his freedom and dignity (Stavenhagen 1970:98).

Through vast multilateral programs (which also included programs of police and military assistance from the U.S. to combat the Communist threat), the Alliance planned to carry out its mandate of social and economic development. Latin American nations (excluding

Cuba) pledged \$80 billion dollars in investment over 10 years and the United States agreed to commit \$20 billion to the project⁸.

In short, while agrarian reform was often driven by profound social changes from below, in the majority of cases it was usually the outcome of policy changes from above (Kay 2002:28) via national governments or international organizations, although with varying degrees of success and driven by a variety of ideologies. Uruguay is no exception to this pattern: Originally driven by the ideas of republicanism and social revolution from Artigas and his fellow fighters, agrarian reform is understood to be the responsibility of the state and its policies. Yet, the Frente Amplio and the small-scale farmers I met in Soriano have different ideas about the urgency of such a policy. Whereas the former see it as secondary to its urban social programs (perhaps not explicitly, but through the policies it has prioritized), the latter see it as the very heart of any social movement and key to signalling a departure from traditional Uruguayan politics. Thus, an abandonment of these foundational promises by the Frente Amplio is read as a major ideological shift, as a relinquishing of the coalition's ideals. These tensions at times play out through recollections of Artigas and his agrarian revolution, as I will further show below.

By the 1990s, state-led agrarian reform in Latin America, which had dominated the middle of the Century, was being replaced by market-led agrarian reform (MLAR) across the region, which called for a redistribution of land “via privatized, decentralized land transactions between ‘willing sellers’ and ‘willing buyers’... [including] a range of variations [such as] a liberalised share tenancy-land rental market approach, doing away with existing land-size ceiling laws, formalization-privatization of ‘non-private’ lands and

⁸ It should be noted that the Alliance was a failure. Just two years after its launch, Kibitschek and former Colombian president, Alberto Lleras Camargo, expressed frustration with the program, arguing that it had done little in terms of its promises (Frens-String 2011:14). The program faded away by the early 1970s.

various combinations of these policies” (Lahiff et al. 2007:1418). While it may have resisted implementing such policies longer than other countries in the region (Renfrew 2007:27), in the end Uruguay was not immune to this growing trend.

Agrarian Reform and Revolution in Uruguay

Galeano writes of how agrarian reform was a demand from the beginning of Latin American independence and that José Artigas, the national hero of Uruguay and the country’s founding father, was himself the “personification of agrarian reform” (1997[1973]:117), in essence giving life to Latin America’s first land reform. The majority of those who took up arms to fight with Artigas against the Spanish and the Portuguese were poor *campesinos*, gauchos or indigenous people who were exploited under European rule. Artigas and patriots led this “cowboys’ revolution” (Galeano 1973/1997:117) against the Spanish and Portuguese between 1811 and 1820. In 1815, Artigas set up the first independent government of the Banda Oriental⁹ in what is now Soriano department and, as part of Uruguay’s new constitution, created the agrarian code. On September 10, 1815 Artigas wrote his *Reglamento Provisorio de la Provincia Oriental* (Interim Rulebook of the Eastern Province), in which he called for redistribution of land held by the state and by “the emigrants, bad Europeans and worse Americans,” that is, the enemies of the Revolution, to be redistributed to “free blacks, half-breeds (*zambos*), and poor creoles” (De la Torre et al 1972:5).

⁹ At the time, Uruguay, then known as the Banda Oriental, was not an independent nation, but part of the territory under Spanish rule.

Taking a tone of social morality (Street 1959:226), Artigas oversaw the confiscation of ranches not put back into proper working order and condition within two months following the end of the war with the Spanish as a way to reward and encourage rural workers who demonstrated their ability to be industrious citizens and bring benefit to the provinces. As Artigas wrote, seized lands would be given to “useful hands, which with their labour will advance the settlement and with it the prosperity of the nation” (Street 1959:226). This approach allowed for the appropriation of land from his enemies (who were predominantly large landholders) without compensation, which was then redistributed to his supporters. Artigas declared that “the most unfortunate will be the most privileged” (Galeano 1997:118; De la Torre et al 1972:5), in attempt to settle the rural poor, and free the *gauchos* from making a living through clandestine activities such as cattle theft, or work as peons of large estates.

A scheme to completely reorganize the interior, Artigas and his government created detailed rules about how land was to be redistributed and the expectations for those who received property. All plots were to be one and a half leagues long and two leagues wide (approximately 5.2 by 6.9 miles) with a reliable water supply and fixed boundaries (Street 1959:229). Officers were to guarantee that each person received no more than one plot to prevent anyone from benefitting unfairly. Lands received could not be sold or mortgaged without further legislation. Rules were also established about how and when cattle could be killed, in order to keep sufficient stocks needed to feed the province. In short, it was a plan to rebuild and redefine the territory newly freed from European rule, in a state of chaos after years of war, via the promotion of social justice, equitable land distribution and efficient rural production.

As I have already alluded to, an assumption that Artigas's words belong only to history would be highly misdirected. His aims still resonate today for many Uruguayans, and certainly his focus on reform is important to those fighting against the pulp and timber industry, as I learned during my time in Mercedes. When the Frente was elected in 2005 they held their first public meeting, the *Consejo de Ministros*, in Villa Soriano, the first settlement established under Artigas, around the time that Botnia was under construction and the plantation economy was expanding (Diario el Sol 2005). Many locals showed up expressing their concern over the industry, including Jacqueline, a town councillor in the departmental government with the Frente Amplio coalition. A member of the Frente for 30 years and serving for 8 of those years as a member of government, Jacqueline nonetheless admitted that she is was in disagreement with many of her colleagues over the expansion of the plantation forestry. Like Coto, she turned to Artigas to express her opposition: "I went to that meeting, when Vazquez came here for the first public act of the Frente, holding a sign that said '*No Venderé el Patrimonio de los Orientales al Bajo Precio de la Necesidad*,'¹⁰ which is a quote from Artigas" she told me. She felt proud holding up these words with many of her fellow residents, noting how they fully captured her sentiments on the issue.

Unfortunately, most of Artigas's reforms were wiped out with another invasion of 10 to 12 thousand Portuguese troops in 1816, supported by the powerful oligarchy, predominantly owners of large *estancias* who feared such reform as well as by Buenos Aires, a process that continued until the end of the 19th century. Composed of trained and disciplined soldiers, many of who were veterans of the Napoleonic War, the Portuguese army proved to be a difficult enemy for Artigas and his gaucho army. By 1820, the

¹⁰ "I will not sell the rich heritage of the Easterners [Uruguayans] at the low price of necessity."

agrarian policies of Artigas had been dismantled. The poor who had received land through the 1815 code were violently evicted, their newly gained property confiscated. The land titles assigned by Artigas were deemed worthless, leaving many with only “enough [land] to be buried in” (Galeano 1973[1997]:118). Artigas was forced to flee to Paraguay in 1820, where he died in exile 30 years later, putting an end to his dream of a united confederation of provinces.

Despite this major setback, land reform once again made its way into political discussions in Uruguay, 100 years later. During the two presidential terms of Batlle y Ordoñez (1903-07, 1911-15), measures such as a progressive land tax, the promotion of land colonization (which became a law in 1948)¹¹, technological advancements, and agricultural development were taken to reduce the concentration of land (Marchesi 2011). During the 1929 crisis, which affected Uruguay heavily, providing the catalyst for the eventual installation of a fascist dictatorship in 1931 and leading to a 55 per cent decrease in meat and wool prices, Batlle y Ordoñez became more radical in his discourse (albeit briefly, as he died just before the stock market crash of 1929). In an editorial piece he wrote for *El Día* newspaper, he declared, “the large landholder is the greatest enemy of social progress...it is necessary to populate our territory and we will never achieve this if we do not work on subdividing the land which opens the promised horizons to men of the [social/reformist] campaign ” (Marchesi 2011; my translation). While Batlle’s relationship with the interior communities was at times tense – his policies, which increased the concentration of power within the national government, were taken as an affront to the

¹¹ The Colonization Law (#11.029) first established in 1948 and revised since then, created a “set of measures to be adopted in accordance with the law to promote a rational subdivision of land and its proper exploitation, seeking the increase and improvement of agricultural production and the establishment and the welfare of the rural worker” (Asamblea General 1948). As one retired farmer put it, this is “an excellent law. It covers all possibilities within the state for people to have access to land and start a new settlement.”

rural areas – it must be acknowledged that he was nonetheless an important and vocal advocate of reform.

In 1959, the government of the time commissioned the Committee for Research and Economic Development (CIDE) to come up with a solution to the country's structural crisis, particularly within the agricultural sector. They identified inadequate land distribution and tenure issues as the key problems and produced the Development Plan that included a program of agrarian reform (Tambler and Guidice 2009:4). The leftist newspaper, *Época*, printed an article that argued that, “The CIDE has put front and centre for the country the basic characteristics of this most serious crisis that has spread across the country” (1963; in Frens-String 2008:16). The paper cited a number of the Committee's statistical findings, including the fact that, at that moment in history, just one per cent of the population controlled a third of the country's land. CIDE's recommendations included direct measures, such as expropriation of lands and a new legal regime for non-landowning businesses that exploited the land, and indirect measures, such as setting the maximum size of a rural property that could be owned, a new tax policy, and the ban of rural production by corporations (Tambler and Guidice 2009:4).

Beyond CIDE, Uruguayan intellectuals were also bringing the topic of reform to the fore, in particular economist Carlos Quijano. Quijano, who had been highly critical of the CIDE process, calling it “pedantic,” proposed a parallel political agenda, based in the same principles as CIDE (Frens-String 2011:17). In 1963 he wrote *Reforma Agraria en el Uruguay (Algunos Aspectos)*, based on a serial editorial that appeared in *Marcha*, in which he outlined a plan for Uruguay. Working from a nationalist perspective, which critiqued the presence of foreign aid as promoted via CIDE, Quijano nonetheless agreed that a program of agrarian reform was the best way to rebuild Uruguay, stating that “authentic

national revolution” could only be done through a change in the structure of the countryside (1963:14).

And yet, despite the agrarian code, the 1959 recommendations, the Colonization Law, the CIDE proposal and a strong pro-reform discourse, Uruguay never implemented significant, long-term agrarian reform (Kay 2002:28; Chonchol 2003:212). In the first couple of decades of the 20th century, *latifundización* and *minifundización*¹² were identified as two main problems existing in rural production. In regards to the former, 14 million hectares dedicated to cattle ranching were distributed among only 22 thousand different establishments. As for the latter, the 565 thousand hectares dedicated to agriculture production were distributed equally among the same number of different establishments (Faraone 2008:66). That is to say, of all the people working in agriculture or ranching, less than half of them were in possession of land, with the majority representing a vast population exploited by the large ranch owners (Faraone 2008:66).

By the middle of the 20th century, little had changed regarding inequalities in the rural areas. According to statistics from 1959, while owners of large productive landholdings represented only 1.3 per cent of total landowners, they held 33.2 per cent of the productive lands. While the number of landowners with an area of greater than two thousand hectares appears almost insignificant, they in fact possessed 5,946,000 hectares between them, giving each an average property size of nearly five thousand hectares (Quijano 1963:31). Looking at the most extreme end of this one per cent, 19 people owned 695,817 hectares, or an average property size of 36,622 hectares per person.

¹² *Latifundización* refers to the privatization of land into large estates, while *minifundización* refers to the creation of landholdings that are only big enough for subsistence farming.

As Brannon points out, even Batlle, with his state welfare policies and discourse on land reform never challenged the system of “ownership patterns and privileges established during colonial times” (1968:xi)¹³. In fact, through policies of Batlle’s regime, Uruguay’s manufacturing sector was built off taxation of the agricultural sector, meaning the state itself benefitted from the wealth of the large landholdings. This resulted in a “largely neglected rural sector, where a substantial segment of the population [was] in effect excluded from full participation in the state and economy” (Brannon 1968:xi), while large landholders held a rather key position as the economy’s backbone, a pattern repeating to a large degree at present.

Regarding the 1959 reform, only the last measure, prohibiting the exploitation of land by companies, was implemented. By 1980, Uruguay had the third highest rate of inequitable land distribution in the world, with a Gini Coefficient of 0.84 (Thiesenhusen 1995:9)¹⁴. In the 1990s, the results of the GATT and Uruguay Round agreements unleashed new difficulties for those in agro-industry, including the loss of subsidies, deterioration in the terms of trade, and the virtual disappearance of soft credit (Ferández Aguerre 2002:388). There were also changes to several laws that further permitted for the concentration of land. First, there was a repeal of the provisions concerning minimum lease periods from the Rural Lease Law. Established in 1975, this law aimed to strengthen the situation of rural workers (Piñeiro 2012:472) and stated that the minimum lease period would be six years. The repeal allowed for more short-term leases, permitting more diverse land use via increased flexibility within the legal framework (Piñeiro

¹³ In *the Socialist Impulse* (2009), Ameringer writes that Batlle “tempered his idealism with practicality. He believed that nothing could be achieved without power” (28), giving insight into the neobatlist politics of the current Frente Amplio government.

¹⁴ The Gini Coefficient measures inequality in the distribution of land. It has a range of 0 to 1, with zero being the most equitable and 1 being the most inequitable distribution.

2012:472). In 1999, changes were made to Law 13.608/67, on rural property ownership, which removed the prohibition on companies owning land, allowing for new kinds of ownership beyond individual persons (Piñeiro 2012:473). Lastly, the Investment Law of 1999 provided various economic incentives for large-scale investment projects, of which one third of all investments were in agro-industry (Piñeiro 2012:473).

This is not to say that the original landholdings established during the colonial period remained completely unchanged. Many large landholdings were in fact broken up over the last two centuries, through the phenomenon of inheritance. As land was passed down through the generations, it became further and further subdivided (Lopez Barrera 2010:23), reducing the number of large *estancias* in Soriano. Only one traditional *estancia* (meaning that the workers and overseers still live on the establishment) remains in the department and even this, like others, have diversified its activities, using areas of land for agricultural pursuits such as soy, as the ranch's overseer explained to me during a visit. Additionally, the Law for Towns (*Ley 10.866 de de Centros Poblados*) in 1946 granted the government power to subdivide rural lands for the creation of new urban spaces (Asamblea General 1946). This was done to guarantee that all citizens had equal access to infrastructure and to prevent land speculation and non-agricultural development of productive lands (Lopez Barrera 2010:23). The consequence of this, however, was that by the end of the 20th century, with the arrival of the monoculture plantations, many of the biggest farms and ranches had already been sold or rented, leaving any land still available for sale or rent in the hands of small farmers. This has left the latter vulnerable to large corporations, who try to lure them with lucrative offers or by purchasing the surrounding land, leaving the small farmers enclosed and isolated.

It was such continual failure at significant state-led agrarian reform over the last two centuries that helped to shape a key element of the Frente Amplio's original platform. Prior to the official establishment of the coalition in 1971, a document known as *Llanamiento del 7 de octubre de 1970* (The Appeal of October 7, 1970), a group of progressives and leftists put out a call, like the MLN-Tupamaros to:

All political forces of the country that oppose the anti-popular and anti-national conduct of the current government, with a view to establish a program destined to overcome the structural crisis that the country is suffering, restoring its destiny as an independent nation and reintegrating the people into the plenitude of the exercising of freedoms of individuals, and unions (Frente Amplio 1970; my translation).

A strong, autonomous labour movement was already present in Uruguay, to which the Frente Amplio created ties through the already established relations between the labour and Communist party and also retained its links to the student and intellectual movements through the socialist party (Luna 2007). As such, by the early 1990s the coalition had evolved into a "labor-oriented mass coalition with a relatively weak capacity for encapsulating non-working-class subordinated sectors" (Luna 2007:5). Nonetheless, its historical roots stated clear links to the working *rural* class. In the March 1971 speech given by Frente Amplio President, General Líber Seregni, in the first official act of the Frente, declared:

There are three objectives that are not independent of each other, but rather make up an indissoluble unity. On top of this base we will erect the rest of the building. This base is our strategy: agrarian reform, nationalization of the bank, and nationalization of business, and will always be based on the guiding principle of that is Uruguayan man (Seregni 1971; my translation).

He went on in the same speech to state:

Our rural men and our rural resources are poorly used, drowned by the large estate, crushed by the smallholding. But our agrarian reality is distinct from other countries: Because of the form of our agricultural practice, because of the characteristics of our campaign, our peasantry is not as numerous as in other parts.

Our agrarian reform has to be profoundly Uruguayan. In order to do this, we have to stand with the man of our fields, with our rural worker, with the medium and small farmers, who are the victims of bank speculation, *latifundización*, and marketing. We thus have to end the rural exodus, applying the technical, the research, the University, the knowledge and the adequate means of service so that the country's production and productivity can grow (Frente Amplio 1971; my translation).

Today, the coalition continues to see itself as working towards a just society, with “Artigas’s ideology of independence and economic autonomy,” stated as a fundamental tenet to the coalition (Frente Amplio n.d.). In fact, the resurgent “cultural hegemony” of Artigas since the victory of the Frente is sometimes cited as proof of the “return and reaffirmation of the ‘60s and ‘70s Left” in present day Uruguay (Garibotto 2013:144). Yet, I tend to agree with the argument made by Coto, José and a number of other self-identified leftists I met in Mercedes, that the Frente of today is not the Frente of the past. The image of Artigas invoked in the 1960s and 1970s – of a populist leader supported by rural communities and fighting for a socialist and agrarian revolution (Garibotto 2013:133) is not the same Artigas presented as the symbol of current Frente politics. The former worked to contrast the image of Artigas as a patriot promoted by the dictatorship by highlighting his rebellious acts against the European rulers and government located in Buenos Aires. Today’s Artigas, conversely, has lost his revolutionary roots.

Using the play “...*Y nuestros Caballos Serán Blancos*” (“...and our horses will be white”), written by Mauricio Rosencof, a former prisoner during the dictatorship and now a government representative with the MLN-Tupamaros /Frente Amplio coalition, as her example, Garibotto demonstrates how the meaning of Artigas as a political symbol for the Frente has changed over the years. She notes that within the coalition rhetoric, Artigas has moved from being a revolutionary to a pragmatist, disengaging himself from armed struggle and instead embracing the state and democracy as the means to change

(2013:137), a rhetoric I heard echoed in my conversation with Sen. Arregui, the coalition's national representative in Soriano, whose definition of productive development made no clear mention of land reform. This has created a source of tension: on the one hand, advocates of agrarian reform over monoculture plantations rely on the former image as symbolic of their vision for rural development. Yet the government depends on this revised image as the symbol of the country's pragmatic push for social development from inside, rather than on the fringes of, the state system. Like Batlle's welfare programs of the past, the Frente's work for social improvement needs these large-scale internationally funded projects, a reality explained to me by the senator.

The revised Artigas is thus reminiscent of the changes in the Frente's leftist politics. While the Frente has always been an urban coalition, and most leftist support comes from the capital, the coalition and its supporters and sympathisers initially emphasized the importance of rural production. Noting the changing economic conditions by the mid-20th century, a return to pre-crisis rural production was espoused in what could be described as a romantic manner. "Cattle came before the country and thus it is what defines the country," wrote Quijano. "We have had the extraordinary privilege of being able to live without changing, or improving, the natural conditions. Low populations, growing expanses of land, abundant and permanent pastoral lands, relatively stable international markets made our country an oasis" (1963:111; my translation).

This agrarian focus has slipped away over the years for the Frente, becoming less significant at the moment when the coalition is finally in the position to offer a program of agrarian reform. Instead, its official website states that they are inspired by "the ideas of American and national liberation, institutional democracy and social justice of our hero" (Frente Amplio n.d.; my translation). The image accompanying this text (Figure 5), rather

than showing Artigas on his horse and ready for battle, instead depicts the monument in Fray Bentos that portrays Artigas standing with his hat in one hand and his sword tucked away, looking more prepared to engage in a verbal negotiation than in a revolutionary battle.



Figure 4: Image of Artigas used on the Frente Amplio's website. Date of photo unknown

With so little attention given to agrarian reform in Uruguay's policies at present, it is no surprise that concentration of land has increased steadily. In 1961, there were 87 thousand farms in Uruguay; by 2000 that number had dropped to just 57 thousand (Piñeiro 2012:472). Most of the farms affected by this process were less than 100 hectares. According to the preliminary data from the most recent farming census carried out in 2011, 2.6 per cent of landowners possess one third (33.6 per cent) of the total productive lands (Gil 2012). In Soriano specifically, the number of productive hectares has remained

almost unchanged since 1970, but the number of farms has dropped from 3,458 in 1970 to just 1,866 in 2011 (personal communication with Camilo Saavedra of MGAP, February 21, 2013). Whereas grains and livestock once dominated the department's landscape unchallenged, forestry and monoculture, which have driven up the prices of land exponentially, are growing in popularity, as noted in the previous chapter.

Yet while this demonstrates a major shift in the rural landscape on the one hand, it also represents a long-standing relationship between the interior and the capital, that is, more of the same. It is after all not a coincidence that declaring the need for a policy for land reform (even if just at a theoretical, rather than implementation level) has been a recurring theme by groups challenging the national state in Uruguay. I am not suggesting that anti-monoculture individuals want to start a revolution or expect their government to do so when they refer to Artigas's struggle or the Frente's historical roots and MLN's ties to guerrilla activity. What they do feel is that the softening of the Left's rhetoric has had an impact most greatly felt in the interior.

Thus, when Pablo recounted how "the people who formed the Frente left the prisons [after the dictatorship] talking about agrarian reform. They had written it out on toilet paper while in prison, but now in power they've gone and done the opposite;" or Ariel told the story of a friend who returned to Uruguay from exile following the 2005 victory only to quickly flee back to Sweden because "this wasn't the country he fought for;" they do not do so as supporters of violent uprising. They are, however, making parallels between the past, when the plight of interior populations necessitated the emergence of revolutionary ideas, and the present situation. When Jacqueline's poster declared that the land in Soriano should not be for sale without boundaries, she was imploring the Frente

to return not just to the ideas of progress of the early 19th century but also to its foundational promises.

For many farmers and activists I met during my fieldwork, the lack of a clear plan for land reform speaks to the growing divide between the visions of the national state and the rural populations of the interior, explaining how two visions of development have emerged. It is a problem that is exacerbated by the realities facing contemporary rural communities and powerful perceptions of these areas that still hold in the capital. This has created new potential allies for the farmers. The *Asamblea Popular*, a leftist organization created in 2006 (and which has since incorporated parties that splintered from the Frente) in response to their disappointment over the elected government's policies, including its support of Botnia, is positioning itself as the new *artiguista* party. Like the Frente before them, they have incorporated the revolutionary red, white and blue colours into their party symbol, along with the image and slogans of Artigas (Figure 3). Delia Villalba, as well as some members of the anti-planation movement who feel that the Frente have gone back on their promises, have become party members, although their numbers remain small and the party insignificant at the national level. Nonetheless, the fact that the image of Artigas continues to be used as the left reinvents itself or finds new incarnations is telling of his important role in Uruguayan myth-making in general and for the left in particular.

Conclusion

This chapter aimed to show the ways that longing for agrarian reform provides a medium through which small farmers in Soriano can discuss the lack of political will on the part of the Frente Amplio to address rural concerns within its current state projects. Focusing on national hero, José Artigas and his revolutionary call for land reform, small-scale farmers in particular, and those in Soriano against the industry, mobilize Artigas in a way that the Frente Amplio has yet to do. Nostalgic recollections of land reform are often read as further proof that any resistance to these industries is simply a last ditch attempt by rural populations to stay “in the past.” Yet, as I have tried to demonstrate, what is often described as inertia on the part of the anti-industry producers is in fact a strong stance regarding future economic policy.

Rural reform was a key part of the socialist dream promoted by the Tupamaros and Frente Amplio in the 1960s and 1970s and provided the ideological foundation for the Left’s policies geared towards building a new and equitable Uruguay. Providing a different narrative of the interior to that being written with the invasion of large-scale monoculture plantations signals the dissatisfaction anti-industry individuals feel with the country’s current path to progress for the interior region. Stories of a time when small farmers had access to property and dignified work or retellings of Artigas’s revolutionary achievements act as a guideline for the urban-based national government to follow if they want to make effective change for its rural residents.

While this push against the Frente from its once loyal rural supporters may have developed since the coalition’s victory in the national political arena, it should be noted that the drive for agrarian reform specifically has not come out of nowhere: promises of

reform in terms of productive landholdings have been made in Uruguay for 200 years. Drawing Artigas, Batlle, and the Frente's beginnings into the 21st Century, advocates of agrarian reform work to remind the current government that they have not forgotten the promises made to them throughout the nation-building process, and the important role that equitable land distribution has played in the nation's quest for social development. By refusing to let the idea of agrarian reform and the history of Artigas's revolution to fade away, they are asking the Frente to reflect on how both the coalition and its invocations of Artigas have changed over time with the hopes of bringing agrarian reform back onto the agenda.

Yet, as the following chapter will show, this is a longstanding challenge confronting rural populations with historical roots. The divide between the capital and the rural areas runs deep, with the interior of Uruguay being viewed from Montevideo as wild and uncultured, far removed from the world of politics. It has thus been an ongoing challenge for pro-reform farmers to redirect the state's gaze to the rural regions on Montevideo's doorstep in a way that is meaningful for the *chacrer*os living and working there.

Part Two: (Post)Neoliberal Projects

Chapter 3

Commodifying Nature: *Uruguay Natural* and the Interior

Introduction: Interpreting the Natural

It was a sunny September morning at the end of Uruguay's winter when an international group of anti-monoculture plantation activists gathered in the fields of dairy farmer, Coto. The farm visit was part of the activities *Grupo Guayubira* organized to mark the International Day Against Monocultures. NGO workers from Europe, Asia, and Africa had been invited to Uruguay to participate in panels, protests, and field visits to the eucalyptus plantations. After a brief walk to see the nearby eucalyptus plantation growing up against the edge of the farm, the group of visitors congregated outside Coto's home to listen to presentations given by him and two anti-monoculture activists from Ghana and South Africa. The aim of the gathering was to draw parallels between the impacts of tree plantations across the globe. These formal presentations and discussion went on for over an hour and people continued to share their opinions and experiences even as we broke to eat.

I grabbed my food and positioned myself with a group of Uruguayans, some of whom I knew and others whom I was meeting for the first time. A debate quickly emerged as to whether plantation forestry or monoculture soy was more environmentally destructive, a common topic during my stay in Mercedes. On this subject opinions varied as the industries' impacts on soil, water, and human health were compared. Then Ariel, who had brought me to the farm that day, spoke up with his opinion on the direction of rural development. Ariel lives in Mercedes and is not a farmer, although his father was a

rancher and passed on to him a piece of pasture for grazing animals in Soriano. Thus, he feels strongly about the changes taking place in Soriano. He began with his usual critique of the monocultures, in which he laid out the damage done to the water supply and rural labour conditions which he considered to rob people of dignified work, but this time he made one particular comment he made stood out to me: “We need to return to a more natural way of producing,” he stated several times, going on to exalt the value of cattle and sheep farming and commending the practices of a Swiss farmer he knows who is growing wheat without the commonplace reliance on chemicals.

Ariel’s commentary about “natural” exploitation of the land caught my attention for two reasons: First, this idea of a “natural” Uruguay is one that has been capitalized on by the government in recent years as a branding strategy for the country. As such, the notion of a “more natural” Uruguay seemed to come up regularly in conversations with people on all sides of the plantation debate. Secondly, its usage here suggests a particular understanding of “natural,” one that has very little to do with ideas of an “untouched” or “indigenous” environment as the generally accepted use of the term might suggest. The rural interior has always been a historically produced and socially mediated environment (Renfrew 2007:61), despite the appearance of little development, and thus it is understandable that both sides of the anti-plantation debate would embrace the “natural” environment as an asset to be commodified rather than a landscape to be left untouched by human interventions such as crop cultivation. The critique of the government’s plans to expand cellulose production, tree plantations and other extractive industries (such as soy plantations and open pit nickel mining) is thus not what could be called the usual environmentalist call against exploitation of the earth’s resources. Rather, the division

between the anti-plantation contingent and the government arises around what nature as a commodity is supposed to do and how it should be pursued.

I argue that rural development, including plantation monocultures, is an attempt to “modernize” the interior by the state in its pursuit of greater national economic development. It is an effort to further incorporate the rural into the national and global economy through greater diversification and the pursuit of technologically advanced industry. Traditional practices, such as small-scale family farming and ranching, are to be replaced in large part by cellulose and timber production with the hope of attracting greater foreign direct investment and larger returns on primary production. In turn, these profits are to be invested into the government’s social development plans, which to date have focused predominantly on urban areas.

For the farmers and activists, however, exploitation of the natural environment is about building on Uruguay’s historical strengths, while social development in Soriano should be largely about assisting small farmers as they work to profit from traditional and small-scale agricultural and livestock production. By promoting the exploitation of the natural environment through traditional pursuits, rather than large-scale extraction, these small farmers are hoping to avoid a repetition of the mistakes made in the mid-20th century, a period characterized by the collapsing of both Uruguay’s traditionally strong relationship with the state and the national economy as the following chapter will show.

As the previous chapter highlighted, there has been a lack of consensus between the Frente Amplio and the anti-plantation activists over what constitutes “progress” for rural Uruguay and how land gets mobilized as part of an agenda of progress. Building off of this discussion, I demonstrate here how “nature” acts an important terrain in the conflicting visions over Uruguay’s interior. The approach consistently taken by the state is

to see this region as an empty place in need of modernization and jobs through exploitation of its physical attributes, as witnessed through its *Uruguay Natural* campaign and growing plantation economy. It takes from nature on a large scale to do this, a practice contrary to the promises of the Frente Amplio government. Small-scale farmers, however, while also reading nature as a commodity to be used to economic advantage, pursue its exploitation differently, seeing their labour in the production of the commodity as essential to its creation, especially if economic development in the rural areas is integral to the ultimate goal.

The aim of this chapter is to contextualize how the state and residents of the capital envision “the interior” of Uruguay, and how this vision plays out in the current (post)neoliberal economic development plan that includes the expansion of pulp and timber production. Used to represent the country with its images of rolling *pampas* (plains) and *gaucho* (cowboy) lifestyle on the one hand, and portrayed as a vast, empty place in need of civilizing on the other, the interior has had a tense and paradoxical relationship with Montevideo, a theme that emerges throughout this dissertation. While traditional primary production constitutes a crucial part of the country’s economy, there is a sense among my interlocutors in Soriano that they have historically, and continue to be, ignored by the state. When the state does intervene, however, it has been with a misunderstanding of the needs and desires of the rural interior populations leading to negative outcomes, such as the establishment of industries like plantation forestry.

As noted in the introduction, state intervention into Uruguayan daily life is not itself problematic, with the country’s foundational myths placing the role of provider squarely on the shoulders of the state. Moreover, as the following chapter will illustrate, the industrial reality of the region at the end of the 20th century meant that new avenues

for economic development in the littoral region were badly needed. However, *how* the current government is intervening in the littoral region specifically, is a concern for my informants. Starting from a historical understanding of rural Uruguay as “backwards” and in need of economic development, the state has aggressively pursued alternative strategies to increase the value of the interior over the last several decades. One strategy has been to diversify rural production with the promotion of afforestation of the *pampas*, a project with historical roots in attempts to “civilize” Uruguay’s countryside; another has been to market Uruguay’s “natural” products and assets through its *Uruguay Natural* campaign.



Figure 5: Graffiti in Montevideo, 2011. Photo by author

I start by recounting the historically rooted perception of the interior of Uruguay held by the state and residents of Montevideo, noting how this has played out in the government’s development plans for the countryside. I explore the ways that forestry in Uruguay is tied to particular notions of a cultured and civilized society. I then look at the state’s *Uruguay Natural* campaign, demonstrating how its approach to “nature” clashes

with that of the small farmers. Recalling the experiences of a retired farmer who lives near Mercedes, I aim to highlight what “natural” production and rural socio-economic development signifies to those most affected by the expanding eucalyptus plantations.

The Interior in the Uruguayan Mind

There has always been a cultural gap between the interior and Montevideo, so much so that the radio program, *Tertulia Agropecuaria* (Agricultural Gathering) in November 2013 dedicated its program to “analyzing the divorce between the city and the country” and how it came to be, in conversation with Uruguayan historian and political expert, Gerardo Caetano. While Eduardo Canel (2001) has shown the increasing democratization in the neighbourhoods of Montevideo, and friends have noted the establishment of the *Ministerio de Desarrollo Social*/Ministry of Social Development (MIDES) under the Frente Amplio, many rural residents from all walks of life expressed frustration that their concerns were not being taken seriously, or even acknowledged, by the national government. The rural population’s small size is often cited as the reason that its concerns are given low priority in state policies, but Caetano suggests that there are additional reasons for this.

During his aforementioned radio interview, Caetano noted that Montevideo looks out to the Atlantic with its back to the interior, a country “with a transatlantic border and its territory behind it” (2013). While this refers to a geographical arrangement, it also insinuates a political one. This attitude is reflected, he argues, in the ways that people from Montevideo talk about the interior: “[W]hen they go to the interior, they say they are going “*para afuera*” (abroad) and they call the inhabitants of the interior *pajueranos*

(country bumpkins). Such rhetoric emphasizing a physical and symbolic separation can be seen in Vazquez's defense of the industry as he faced more than 100 residents in 2005's Villa Soriano meeting: "There is only one way to generate work and that's economic growth. The country is growing economically, there's going to be jobs, but for this it is necessary to have private investments," adding that the Frente has "*gone out to the interior* like nobody else has before" (Diario el Sol 2005; emphasis and translation mine), the terminology clearly marking the separation between the capital and the departments beyond it.

This kind of attitude was also reflected in the sympathetic looks and comments I received from friends in Montevideo before my move to Mercedes. "Why would you move there? It's so small," and "you can probably just commute in and get your interviews done in a couple of weeks," are just two examples of the reactions I received. There are several direct buses daily between the two cities and the journey averages about four hours, yet only one friend from Montevideo ever came to visit me during my time in Mercedes; no one else expressed any interest in leaving the big city, even those who had originally grown up outside of the capital. The littoral region's outward appearance of having seen little human intervention - the view from the highway being predominantly one onto rolling plains and groupings of trees with few towns or cities of any notable size being crossed - perhaps fed into friends' current perceptions of what the rural areas must be like. Even use of the term "the interior," with its inference of a homogenous space, tucked away from the rest of the external world, works to create a clear separation between this region and Montevideo and the coast, insinuating that the area is one in need of "development" and "progress," justifying economic projects like plantation forestry and the pulp mills.

While my examples above are contemporary, the idea of the “backwards” countryside is nothing new in Uruguay. Like many rural areas, it has historically been portrayed as less civilised and unruly, the kind of place people leave once they have the ability to do so; these days, it is often to attend university in Montevideo. This negative view of the countryside reveals a paradox prevalent in Uruguay: Stories and poetry from the Río de la Plata in the 19th century contain many romantic and nationalist narratives of *gaucho* heroes written by urban dwellers, such as those by Montevideo-born Bartolomé Hidalgo. However, just as common and, arguably more powerful in terms of state policies and actions, are less-than-flattering portrayals of the uncivilized rural areas. José Pedro Barrán, a Uruguayan historian writing on the country’s sensibility, describes the 19th century as “barbaric”, one in which “nature dominated man” (1990a:17). Ungovernable winters; wild animals, dogs, and cattle – the latter two left starving and abandoned - and a lack of infrastructure leading to isolation between settlements all created hardship for those in the countryside. Nature encroached on whatever building had taken place in the settlements, with “towns looking like villages, without paved roads, and grasses that had grown as tall as men,” according José L. Cuestas, Uruguay’s president at the end of the 19th century (Barrán 1990a:17; my translation).

Uruguay’s population, particularly that in the countryside, was described as being just as barbaric as the environment. Félix de Azara, a Spanish naturalist visiting the Banda Oriental in 1800 described the scene as “one not with rules, but with lakes, rivers, deserts and a few naked vagrants running behind the beasts and bulls” (Barrán 1990a:21; my translation). Violence was described as being rampant as the *Blancos* and the *Colorados* fought over power, the civil wars coming to represent the “dangerous potential of human barbarism” (Renfrew 2007:67) as a sense of lawlessness permeated into larger society.

There were also accounts of children found beaten and abandoned, labour being exploited, and recorded concerns about poor hygiene behaviours leading to water contamination (Barrán 1990a:20).

Dr. Christison, a British medical doctor studying the botany and “primitive” *gaucho* culture in central Uruguay described his surroundings during a visit to the interior in 1868, a depiction similar to the impressions held by other European scholars and Montevideo’s urban elite:

Rarely could so great a contrast be seen between town and country as at that time in Uruguay, and in most parts there has been but little change to the present day. Leaving Monte Video, we seemed to plunge suddenly from the highest civilisation of the present time into the semi-barbarism of the middle ages... beyond the few leagues of cultivation in the environs of the city lay a grassy wilderness, without roads, bridges, fields, groves or gardens, with scarcely a town or village, inhabited by a wild race of horsemen, dressed in medieval- looking costume, always armed, scarcely amenable to law, and esteeming homicide an accomplishment rather than a crime (1880:665).

Disciplining Nature, Civilizing the Countryside

By the late 1800s, however, there was a desire to “discipline” the population, moving it away from its “primitive” lifestyle and towards becoming a more “civilized” society. In order to tame the human population during this modernizing period, control needed to also be exerted over biophysical nature (Renfrew 2007:69). Green and undeveloped “wild” spaces were replaced with concrete buildings and paved roads. Individuals were encouraged to get “fresh air” for health reasons, although they were not encouraged to journey into the countryside to find it. Instead, interactions with the natural world were highly regulated and internal gardens and landscaped parks became the spaces where the elite could enjoy “nature” (Renfrew 2007:67; Barrán 1990b:17).

This period, from the late 1880s into the first decades of the 20th century, was strongly linked to the industrial revolution, the modernization and diversification of rural production, and a growing mercantile class. With the capitalization of the countryside, as nature was slowly tamed through new interventions in cultivation and the building of infrastructure, society also restrained from its previous behaviours through the establishment of an elite class in Uruguay. This class valued education and proper comportment and had an influence on Uruguayan society as a whole. Attention was given to disciplining Uruguayan bodies and the environment: health and hygiene were promoted, infrastructure was built, and wild open spaces were replaced by ordered urban gardens. Vagrancy began to disappear as *gauchos* were converted into *peones* on the large estancias and people entered the industrial labour force, requiring them to work on a set schedule for a set wage (Barrán 1990b). The countryside was also fenced and production was reorganized, “guided by expert management that represented the triumph of science, rationality, and order, tied to the economic and political power of the newly formed landholders’ associations” (Renfrew 2007:67).

Entering the 20th century, planting trees became yet another means of bringing about greater civility. Before serving as the economic drivers behind the plantation economy, cultivated trees were integrated into landscape design for aesthetic reasons, becoming a symbol of a cultured society. This was the motivation behind the creation of the decree of the Tree Celebration (*Fiesta del Árbol*) instituted by the government in 1900. The festivities entailed what Gautreau has described as the “indoctrinating” of school children regarding all of the benefits that came with planting trees, a practice that was continued well into the 1970s (2014:204). Moreover, with Batlle’s presidency, a period of social integration and secularization was also underway, giving birth to Uruguay’s

powerful identity myth as a country comprised of a sophisticated urban middle class, as previously noted. This entailed looking to Europe as a model for Uruguay's development, not just at a social economic level, but also in terms of its physical environment. As Carrere and Lohmann note,

Uruguay, a nation of immigrants, has always looked at itself as a mirror of Europe and this vision is also reflected in its forestry practices. Instead of stressing that the country is covered by magnificent pastures, many Uruguayans have emphasized its lack of European-style forests as a negative element. For example, one of the first books on forestry edited in the country (Lopez and Cussac 1943), points to an 'insufficiency of forests in Uruguay, saying that Uruguay is 'by far the poorest nation in forests in Latin America', a state of affairs which 'brings with it serious economic, climatic and soil problems'. This point of view, shared by most technocrats and the public in general, helps explain the support tree plantation has historically received in the country (1996:188; see also Gautreau 2014:202).

Perhaps no clearer example of the link between planting trees and civility exists than a 1931 report written by the then Head of the Forestry Service, agronomy engineer Rómulo Rubbo. He speaks to the urgency of promoting forestry in Uruguay in order to preserve its reputation as an advanced South American nation:

The problem with the dunes is more serious and important than it appeared at first glance. More serious for the reasons exposed, more important than the benefits that would accrue in the future, the creation of artificial forests in these wastelands is a reproach for our country that leads the way in South America on social and legislative issues, but in terms of forestry is at the rear. It is regrettable that the lack of resources has delayed monumental work; to the detriment of our national economy, its panoramic beauty, climactic/geographic idiosyncrasies and our reputation as a developed country. The relationship between human civilization and forestry is so close that there have been sociologists who have dared to judge the advancement of civilizations based on their forest wealth. One has to realize that the nature of our work does not make up for lost time. Therefore we are to not falter in our daily preaching in favour of reforestation; against ignorance and neglect, it will be our determination, our enthusiasm, persuasion by words and ideas, and the conviction of facts (Porcile Maderni 2007:94; Gautreau 2014:204; my translation).

Taking such words to heart, in 1936 the Forestry Service set aside \$100,000 as part of the "patriotic" Revaluation Act (*Ley de Revaluó*), for the purpose of providing "the

necessary momentum to put [forestation] in line with other cultural events in Uruguay,” noting forestry’s importance not only in the economic and social development of the country, but also imperative to its “moral” development (Porcile Maderni 2007:57). This report coincided with the visit of French forestry professor Guinor, who expressed during a presentation in Montevideo that, “if you'd like to know the level of a population’s civilization, observe the extension of their forests and their applications” (Porcile Maderni 2007:57). This attitude, in which particular kinds of green spaces, such as forests and woods, became associated with a cultured population and informed city design across the region. In neighbouring Argentina, for example, parks were created to meet the elites’ desire for a civilized space that could serve both hygienic and aesthetic purposes (Carter 2012:40), demonstrating the power that such a belief held in those societies that considered themselves modern.

The rhetoric around civilizing the interior continued into the period of dictatorship, this time under the guise of economic development. As part of its attempt to rebuild the economy, the military tried to move the country away from its traditional agro-industrial practices, creating a tense relationship between the state and cattle ranchers. Landholders were told to “industrialize” and “modernize” their practices. For the government, this entailed seeking out foreign investment; reducing state regulation in the commercialization of agriculture, especially in the meat industry; the selling of the National Slaughterhouse and Meat Processing business (*Frigorífico Nacional*); and the opening up of the foodstuffs market (Faraone 2008:139). This push to expand beyond the traditional industries continues with the state’s present-day economic development strategies.

However, the state's portrayal of the interior today is distinct from those of the past: descriptions of a barbaric or backwards countryside are no longer employed to represent Uruguay's interior, having been replaced by inviting images such as those used to market rural Uruguay for tourism and foreign investment, as I discuss further below. Yet there still remains an understanding of the interior as a uniform, wide empty space that lags behind the capital economically and culturally. As Coto once noted, "talking about the countryside is like talking about sacrifice and people [in urban areas] are just not interested in this." This attitude is embodied in the comments from friends I shared earlier, and even in some of my own thoughts in those moments of frustration and isolation during my fieldwork, when I wished I had chosen a project that could be carried out solely from Montevideo where all the political decision-making and excitement, including marches and social justice organizing, seemed to be taking place.

The result of this particular attitude is that the interior continues to be read as a place that needs to be incorporated into the larger state project of diversified economic development. While the growing plantation economy and the *Uruguay Natural* campaign are linked to the broader shifts in economic policy and assumptions about rural development, not everyone is in agreement about how to bring about development in the country's "natural" areas. Moreover, competing ideas of what "natural" production should look like have led to further uneasiness between the state and its rural citizens, creating a division that demonstrates a different understanding of what (post)neoliberal economic policies should achieve.

Uruguay Natural

The *Uruguay Natural* slogan, alongside the stylized logo of two arms hugging the sun, is pervasive in Uruguay, appearing on a wide variety of venues and promotional materials. From posters touting the country's carnival (the longest running in South America) to the soccer museum, from rural estancia tourism to wine country, and even local basketball courts, it was hard to travel far in any one direction during my fieldwork without encountering the words "Uruguay Natural." Branding the country as a "natural paradise" appears ironic in the face of growing extractive industry that includes cellulose production and the cultivation of genetically modified exotic trees on the open plains of rural Uruguay. The campaign's institutional video, posted on YouTube, begins with an image of sunrise over the river, accompanied by the sounds of chirping birds. A few moments later, we hear the narrator announce in Spanish, "All these sounds live in the same country. *Uruguay Natural*." The video then moves on to a series of passing images, all demonstrating the "natural" assets of Uruguay, such as its flora, lakes, rivers, and open grasslands, soon followed by images of gauchos riding through the countryside. After this, the narrator goes on to list the positive aspects of Uruguay, including its favourable climate and development indicators, noting that it "stands out for its great care for the environment" and has "one of the lowest rates of contamination on the planet."

This differs from the historically prevalent views, noted earlier, of the Uruguayan countryside as a hostile, threatening, or primitive environment (Renfrew 2009:89) that has little value. Instead, the interior is promoted as a place ripe for consumption and development. Yet many of my informants felt the government was being hypocritical through this campaign. They referred specifically to the "unnaturalness" of cellulose and

monoculture production. I also often-heard the refrain, “how can the government promote *Uruguay Natural* and then destroy the natural environment?”



Figure 6: Image used on the cover for the government’s report on the creation of the country brand¹, *Uruguay Natural* (n.d.)

The campaign was created in 2001 as a result of the United Nations’ “United in Action” program that focused on institutional strengthening. Designing strategies for economic development, the *Uruguay Natural* campaign was created as a “country brand” (*marca país*) that would attract investment to the country through tourism and investment. According to an analysis of the brand’s creation produced by the ministry, *Uruguay Natural* is meant to convey, “a country image especially directed at the corporate market sector and target segments for Uruguay that have the potential to articulate and communicate

¹ The image was likely chosen to reflect the fact that Uruguay means “river of birds” in Guaraní

the comparative and competitive advantages of Uruguayan export products and services, the quality of life for settling down, and investment in our territory” (n.d.:9; my translation). The report makes no mention about environmental protection until the 49th page, near the end of the report. However, the reference has more to do with marketing Uruguay than with conserving nature: “Today it is a stamp of quality for countries that take into consideration the care of the environment,” it states.

This is not to deny that the government has become more “green” in the last few years (Renfrew 2009:96). During my time in Uruguay, I noticed that certain issues were becoming part of mainstream conversation, mentioned in discussions over meals or *mate*: climate change, littering, and (the lack of) recycling were common areas of concern for many people including those employed by the state, both in Montevideo and Soriano. The possibility of an open pit iron-ore mine in the centre of the country provoked visible protest and resistance during my fieldwork, enough that the government decided to delay the project until there was further consultation with the community and an in-depth assessment of the mine’s impact could be carried out. As Chapter Six will show, certifications to meet international environmental standards, the use of the “best technologies” available, and a commitment to monitoring environmental impacts within the pulp and plantation industry are a key factor in the Uruguayan government’s current support for its expansion. Additionally, in the speech given by President Mujica at the Río +20 Summit that made international headlines and was referenced in the introduction, he called for a rethinking of our consumer society that threatens sustainability. The government has even created a national system of protected areas (*Sistema Nacional de Áreas Protegidas de Uruguay*/Uruguay’s National System of Protected Areas, or SNAP), under which seven reserves have been created. Thus, while it may appear that the large-scale

extractive expansion is a mirror image of the push for industrial growth in the 1960s as Gudynas (2004; 2010) has argued, this is not the case.

Nonetheless, Uruguay's "natural" environment is still seen as a valuable source of wealth. A review of a visit to the Ministry of Sport and Tourism early on in my fieldwork and a closer look at the campaigns material make this clear. Curious to know what the phrase "*Uruguay Natural*" meant to those promoting it, I met with a woman working in the public relations and press office. The meeting was awkward from the start. She struggled to define what "natural" signified in the slogan, calling it intentionally "broad and vague," going on to say that, "the environment is natural, the people are natural; *Uruguay Natural* is our country's slogan." After stopping for a moment to think this through, she clarified her statement: Uruguay's cattle are raised on natural pasture, and this campaign is an attempt to capitalize on Uruguay's natural produce, she explained. Often, representatives from the ministry will travel to international fairs, promoting Uruguay's meat and wine under the Uruguay Natural banner. It wasn't until I specifically asked about the government's commitment to the environment in the context of its development agenda, that she drew my attention away the country brand and towards the work of the SNAP.

Thus, while this emphasis on conservation and "natural" agriculture may seem contradictory in the face of extractive industry expansion, I suggest that the *Uruguay Natural* campaign should not be read as such: a push to exploit while also conserving the environment is fairly typical within a (post)neoliberal approach to development across Latin America. As noted in the introduction, the governments of Ecuador and Bolivia, for example, rely on the expansion of extractive industries to fund their social programming, while also positioning themselves as environmental leaders. Environmental conservation initiatives, while seeming to be a form of resistance against a capitalist drive to exploit

nature, at times work towards the same goal: to attract foreign investment and tourist dollars and promote green capitalism by defining nature as a managed commodity (O'Connor 1998; Prudham 2003; McCarthy and Prudham 2004; Renfrew 2009; Nevins and Peluso 2008; Gudynas 2001). Furthermore, it reflects the historical views outlined earlier in the chapter, in which the countryside and "nature" are to be enjoyed and valued, but only those aspects of it that are properly controlled. The institutional video mentioned earlier demonstrates this, moving easily between its focus on the environment and conservation practices to detailing the country's business potential, describing Uruguay as a country with "numerous opportunities for investment in production."

Such solutions to conservation and environmental sustainability provide the appealing promise of a simple solution to complex problems, in which every dilemma becomes an opportunity for economic growth and nature is protected through investment and consumption (Igoe and Brockington 2007: 434; Cohen 1999:428), an approach taken by the state as well as the pulp and timber industry (see Chapter Six). Yet, as Luke (2006) posits, a more accurate term for sustainable development would be "sustainable degradation" arguing that ecological degradation is not halted in sustainable development, but rather is "measured, monitored, and manipulated within certain tolerances" (99; see also Escobar 1996; Hartwick and Peet 2003; Renfrew 2009), constructing the environmental crisis as manageable within the constraints of capitalism. Viewing nature as a "resource" that needs to be managed to maximize value and utility (Harvey 1996: 150) leads to what Ferradás refers to as a form of ecological or green governmentality in which the state extends biopower to every form of life, including non-human (2004: 429; also Luke 1995; Prudham 2003; Renfrew 2009; Holloway et al 2009).

Interestingly, the view of nature as a managed commodity may not appear all that different from how small-scale farmers and anti-industry activists envision the value of Uruguay's natural resources. Everyone from NGO workers to farmers to volunteer activists all suggested that the land could still be exploited and should be viewed as an important resource for promoting economic growth, albeit with an understanding that it would be best to do so through small-scale agricultural production or tourism.

Nonetheless, there are two major differences between the government's position and that of the farmers and allies. First, the small-scale farmers and those in Mercedes who are equally against the government's support for the plantation economy reject a definition of "natural" that links to ideas of "untouched wilderness," a key component of the image the government is attempting to sell with *Uruguay Natural* and its SNAP initiatives, even if this wilderness is only an imagined reality. Rather, as noted in Ariel's comment at the start of this chapter, the relationship with nature promoted by individuals within the anti-pulp and plantation movement is deeply rooted in working with, or on, the land rather than being removed from it. Whereas the state sees only the physical environment and the land available within it, meaning an objective space that is "simply there," farmers see a rural landscape shaped by the tasks they perform (Ingold 1993:156). As such, any commodification that challenges a farmer or rancher's ability to work is understood as misguided at best, and destructive at worst.

Moreover, the raising of cattle and sheep, grain production, and horticulture were often mentioned as the kinds of practices that have been carried out in Soriano for generations and therefore should continue to serve as the basis of the department's rural development. "Natural" therefore was not synonymous with "native" or "non-intensive" production, as might be expected from a movement that has built an alliance with

environmental organizations. Many of these long standing practices were introduced with colonization and at times done on a large scale. And these practices often require direct intervention in the land in other ways: the use of chemicals and genetically modified seeds was pervasive amongst small-scale farmers and, although they did not boast about this, they were open about it when asked. During my entire time in Mercedes, I met only one farmer producing organic milk for sale² as well as organic vegetables and fruit for personal consumption. Sometimes my informants talked somewhat defensively about this reality, making sure to tell me something along the lines of “it’s just not possible to grow here without chemicals.” The virtual absence of organic production did not surprise me: on my many drives along the highway, it was impossible not to notice the signs plastered along the fences, advertising the name of the company that supplied the modified seeds growing in the fields. However, the dependence of almost all of the farmers and agriculturalists on pesticides clearly played into their uneasiness with the label of “environmentalist,” which they said was a label that belonged to people from the city³. Thus, their idea of a natural Uruguay was not one framed by the need to remove human intervention from the interior but to promote the kind of intervention that serves the local population.

Pablo, introduced in the previous chapter, became a member of the now-defunct *chacreros*’ (small farmers’) movement in 2000, a local group that worked in collaboration

² Marta uses a system known as biodynamic agriculture. Based in the work of Rudolph Steiner, biodynamic practice involves a holistic and somewhat mystical approach to agriculture. Although her food is technically organic, it is not sold as such because of the cost, and what she called “the elitism,” of certification.

³ I initially took “city” to refer only to Montevideo. However, I discovered that the use of chemicals by farmers created tension even with their close allies in Mercedes, leading to disagreement and sometimes conflict tensions between the *chacrero* movement and the anti-pulp mill and environmental groups in Mercedes. Interestingly, even NGO workers and members of ASODERN felt uneasy with the label of “environmentalist,” suggesting that was a label for someone who studies ecology or was interested in “defending species of butterflies.”

with ASODERN. As we visited at his home just a short distance from Mercedes, he talked about his reasons for farming and his involvement in the fight against the plantations. While no longer a farmer for profit, he still grows strawberries for self-consumption because, as he put it, “I like the plants, I like being able to eat something natural and that I grow and know what’s gone into it.” He concedes that his produce is not organic:

I’m not an organic farmer because it’s not viable. Even if I could grow organically, I’d die of hunger from the small market of people who would eat organic. Sure, I know organic farmers, but they’re near Montevideo, where there are lots of markets and supermarkets [to sell their produce]. I use very little poison and I don’t fumigate all over; it’s very targeted. I use only what I need. I also can’t afford to clear the land so that it can be considered organic.

However, he did not see any discrepancy between the use of chemicals and his claim to growing “natural” produce, as he made it clear during our conversation. The *chacreros*’ movement to which he belonged was not an environmental organization he pointed out; it was about improving people’s livelihoods that, in large part, meant supporting these small-scale traditional producers who partook in a “natural” form of production. For him, environmentalists had specific ideas of how one should behave and he felt that these ideas did not fit well with local practices: “Environmentalists have certain ideas of how things should be... It’s s like [pause], someone asks you, ‘Do you believe in God? OK, now you have to do this, this, and this.’”

Nonetheless, he said that he really identified with the idea of *Pachamama*⁴ and its emphasis on caring for the land. The air and water, he remarked, do not have owners, and they do not exist for “the service of capitalism.” Uruguay’s “marvellous soils” and “agreeable climate” were under threat as the government encouraged the growth of

⁴ A goddess of the indigenous people of the Andean region, the term *Pachamama* is similar to the concept of “Mother Earth.”

cellulose and eucalyptus production. “We have the *maldición de Malinche en nuestra espalda* (we have the curse of Malinche on our backs)⁵. We’re a very poor country and we’re easy to buy and sell and now we’re paying for it. By that I mean that with very little money, Botnia was able to buy a lot [of land].” As he told of the problems facing the Latin American region, he reminded me that, “We [Uruguay] were once known as the Switzerland of the Americas. We thought we were European, not American... All of us were of European descent, predominantly Spanish and Italian. 40 years ago we were very advanced, but the government couldn’t keep up.”

He sees this as a problem that continues until today, one that he feels is dictated by the desires of the international market. Uruguay, he lamented “is the only country that is producing nothing [for its citizens] and we’re between two monster industries, Argentina and Brazil. Our soy is harvested and sold. Our wool is sold off. The trees we grow are cut and sold.” For him, the destruction of a particular way of life and of the land is directly linked to these new, large-scale extractive industries, including plantation forestry, which drain Uruguay of its wealth as its commodities shift to accommodate foreign demands.

Pablo’s feelings sum up nicely the larger tension that exists between the state and the *chacreros* and their allies: while there are areas of common interpretation of what constitutes the natural between these two groups, namely that it is a resource that can and should be exploited for economic gain, there is disagreement about what kinds of activities can truly be recognized as “natural.” For the state, marketing campaigns like

⁵ Malinche was an indigenous (Nahua) woman from present-day Mexico, who was taken as a slave by the Spanish conquistadors. She went on to help the Spaniards defeat the Aztec Empire by acting as an interpreter and advisor for Hernán Cortés, who was also her lover. “The curse of Malinche” refers to someone being a traitor to his/her fellow countrymen. Here, I interpret the phrase to mean that the government has been disloyal to its own citizens. For another example of this phrase being used in the Uruguayan context, see Urruzola 2006.

Uruguay Natural and an expansion of technologically advanced industry represents progress compatible with the (post)neoliberal goal of expanding the economy in order to promote and support greater social development. For the small-scale producers and their allies, however, these non-traditional industries represent the opposite. They demonstrate a failure of the Frente government to sustain its promise of greater social and economic equality as plantation and pulp expansion threatens their way of life and livelihood. Thus they read the state's approach to developing the interior as one of destructive progress.

The second major difference between the state's vision of the "natural" and that of the anti-plantation movement is related to the form of exploitation. Whereas plantations are continually expanding as more land is prioritized for plantation forestry (as detailed in the following chapter), small-scale traditional practices exploit the land within certain limits that have characterized farming practices for years. Small farmers do not want to participate in a "modernization" project in the interior based in mega-industries and exports, a process that first began entering state economic policy in the 1960s; they want to continue to practice agriculture in a way that respects how rural production has traditionally been done in Soriano. Like the use of nostalgia discussed in the previous chapter, this attitude does not represent a resistance to modernization; it is a resistance to the destruction of a complex social and cultural arrangement rooted on the land. As the next chapter will further elaborate, productive practices are also social practices and therefore further industrialization creates changes to the rural landscape that small-scale farmers argue have not been properly anticipated by the government.

Resistance to plantation forestry and large-scale industry is about protecting that which the *chacreros* see as having the best long-term benefits to the community. Their evaluation of the plantation industry is that, contrary to the government's aims, it will not

serve to bring about the (post)neoliberal goal of greater economic and political equality⁶. Thus, these farmers and their supporters express resentment that the leadership in Montevideo is dictating the direction of agricultural production, rather than listening to what these producers, many of who have long supported the Frente, envision as the best form of rural development⁷. As a result, they say, Uruguay is no longer the exception it once was in Latin America, where the state could be trusted to make the best decisions for the welfare and progress of the country, also contributing to the growing chasm between the Frente and its rural supporters. This break has meant trying to navigate a new path to social development in which the state is not necessarily at the centre.

Conclusion

While (post)neoliberal development is characterized by its aim to bring about greater social equality as well as economic growth, it does not necessarily pose a challenge to the power structures inherent in neoliberal capitalism. Discussions about what constitutes a “natural” Uruguay demonstrate this contradiction. As the state pushes to “modernize” and diversify the rural economy, an agenda with a long history in Uruguay, many small farmers and anti-industry activists believe it threatens the survival of long-held production practices that many still see as integral to Uruguay’s social justice agenda and economic future: The replacement of small traditional farming practices with modern, highly technical industries like cellulose production and plantation forestry,

⁶ This is the same argument that drives many small farmers’ desire for agrarian reform, examined in Chapter Two.

⁷ This feeling of being ignored by the state in its decision-making was something I heard many times, although it was expressed in different ways. For example, I heard from a number of Soriano residents that, once elected, the Frente closed down its local grassroots offices (*oficinas de base*). While I never confirmed this with MIDES, I never encountered such an office in Soriano, either. Whether this accusation is true or not, however, the fact that residents feel they are being ignored in terms of social development is significant.

seems to run counter to their ideas of how best to develop the rural areas. This has created a sense of distrust and disappointment on behalf of these small producers and their allies, long-time Frente supporters, with their representatives in Montevideo. For them, it has become clear that Uruguay's image as an exceptional and equitable country in which the state acts as the principle provider for its citizens no longer holds. This tension is expressed over the country's resource-rich interior region and how they should best be used.

Both the state and *chacrer*os understand the "natural" world as a source of potential wealth and both participate in its commodification. However, there is a divide between the small producers of the interior and the national government in Montevideo as to what is the most "natural" and desirable way to extract this wealth. The state sees its natural resources as ripe for diversification, expanding into new industries, which will bring wealth to the rural economy. While carried out on a large-scale, these industries are seen as sustainable insofar as they can be managed, certified, and run in tandem with projects such as those of SNAP. Thus the Frente Amplio both uses the image of a "natural" Uruguay to exploit resources such as its land and waters, while also selling images of an untouched paradise through its *Uruguay Natural* campaign, a strategy carried over from previous governments. Conversely, small-scale farmers and their allies suggest that any wealth extracted from the land be done so in the most "natural" way possible, meaning within the limits and industries that have characterized rural Soriano to date. To do otherwise would lead Uruguay down a destructive path. The expansion of the eucalyptus plantations was a major catalyst in bringing this division to light, as I will continue to demonstrate. In the next chapter I examine the large-scale changes in Soriano's rural production by turning my attention to the process of land foreignization, a direct result of

the expanding plantation economy. Not only has this industry changed what is being grown, but also who own and cultivates the land. As I will show, this new farming landscape has had consequences that have reshaped Soriano's social life and brought to light some the links between the economic approach of the Uruguayan state of the mid-20th century and the present.

Chapter 4

The ‘Foreignization’ of Productive Lands: Remaking Social Relations

Introduction: Soriano’s New Reality

There were certain anecdotes and stories that constantly circulated about the pulp and forestry industry during my time in Uruguay. While opinions about the growing plantation economy varied, one commonality existed in all commentaries. In the last two decades, for better or for worse depending on who I talked to, there had been large changes in rural production, both in terms of what was being produced and how it was being produced. But perhaps the biggest shift was centred around who owned the land. As Marcelo, an agronomist born and raised in Mercedes, had told me, “A lot of people talk about the foreign-ownership of land because it’s a different way of producing. People don’t have contact with the owner, which is very strange for Soriano. It’s impersonal and sometimes people don’t know their boss or only see him once a year.”

While Marcelo, like some, did not necessarily view the changes in ownership as a change for the worse – he himself works for an Argentine who acts as the president of an investment collective – others, particularly small-scale farmers, rural families and their allies had a different perspective. This latter group all spoke of this process of land transferring into the hands of non-Uruguayans as an unequivocally negative consequence of the new plantation economy. This was rarely accompanied by an explicit account as to why foreign ownership was bad, at first; it was almost as if no further explanation was needed, as the process was understood as inherently negative. In conversations with my

contacts in the anti-plantation movement, people would often just refer to the foreignization of land as one of a list of points when talking about their opposition to the expansion of the pulp and timber industry, alongside critiques of the environmental unsustainability of the plantation industry, as if the two were equally valid. As my research progressed and I continued my conversations with people, the reasons for the opposition became increasingly clear. Yet my first impression had been that this was mostly an issue of economic protectionism and not much beyond that.

In fact, it had initially seemed strange, that land being in the hands of non-Uruguayans could stir much passion at all. From what I had observed, Uruguayans are not, in general, outwardly nationalistic except, as my friend Luz put it, “when it comes to Botnia and the World Cup.” And my overall impression during my time in the country was that, on the whole, Uruguayans did not seem to be averse to the idea of private property ownership in the least. In fact, 90 per cent of all productive land in Uruguay is privately owned, with 80 per cent of land coverage dedicated to some form of land production, including ranching. Of all of the small farmers with whom I spoke, all but one (Javier, the beekeeper), were landowners. Indeed, one of the principal reasons that foreign investors have found Uruguay so attractive is because of its well-defined property rights and fair compensation for any expropriation. Article 7 of the Constitution clearly states that, “the inhabitants of the Republic have the right to be protected in the enjoyment of their life, honour, freedom, security, work and *property*” (1997; emphasis mine). Whereas property laws in Latin America can be complicated and legal land titles are often murky (see Hetherington 2009 for an example), in Uruguay they are exceptionally clear and well defined. In terms of transparency and protection of private property, it ranks second only to Chile in the region.

Yet, the use of the term “*extranjerización*” or “foreignization,” with its implications of strangeness and not belonging, rather than, for example, “internationalization” suggested that there was something deeper than a disagreement over rights to land ownership lying behind their critiques. As my time in the field progressed, my confusion over the opposition to foreign ownership began to dissipate. The first well-defined argument I could identify in the critiques of foreign ownership was that the struggle against foreignization was an attempt to resist a typical neoliberal model of development in which “the South” was exploited for the economic benefit of “the North,” or what some activists referred to as neo-colonialism. And certainly the flow of wealth out of Uruguay as a result of this process was a key concern.

But this is only part of the story. For one, while the pulp mills and timber plantations are predominantly in the hands of European and North American companies, the Global North does not exclusively drive the foreignization process. In Soriano, most people spoke about the arrival of Argentine and Brazilian investors’ groups, as well as Chilean foresters, who have been the predominant actors in the concentration of the department’s lands. Moreover, the market logic of capitalism and a distance between landowners and daily production¹ have always extended to the agricultural sector in Uruguay and nationals and non-Uruguayans alike have long participated in the buying and selling of land. Yet people are reacting very differently to the foreign “land rush”² at

¹ Many large estancias have their head offices in Montevideo. Owners tend to be involved in the business side of running the estancia, where the management of the property and its day-to-day activities is largely left in the hands of an overseer.

² Li has argued that the term “land rush” is more appropriate than “land grab” to describe the current intensified interest in global productive lands by foreign interests because it is “the temporality and scope, not the mechanisms, processes, or impacts of land acquisition” that makes it distinctive. (2014:594). As she explains, “a ‘rush’ speaks to a sudden, hyped interest in a resource because of its newly enhanced value,” and spurs further rushes that promise high profits for and those who buy in early (Li 2014:595).

present than they did to other moments of accumulation or absentee-landlordism in the rural areas.

As I worked to unpack the arguments of the small-scale farmers who opposed the plantations, it became clear that the concern over foreign ownership was not about who owns the land but, like the dispute over the “natural” examined in the previous chapter, it is about what foreign ownership of land at such a large-scale does. The current process of land foreignization is replicating some of the negative social and economic consequences characteristic of the mid-20th century, an era of neoliberal economic reform and political upheaval. While I want to make it clear that no one suggested that the experience of living in Uruguay today is equal to that during the economic crisis of the 1950s and ‘60s or the dictatorship’s climate of insecurity and fear, the doors to large-scale foreignization of land were nonetheless opened during that period of time, placing today’s challenges in a continuum with those of the past. The result is the re-emergence of several social and economic consequences that were characteristic of that period, including social isolation from neighbours (as large agribusiness displaces small-scale farmers and depopulates the rural areas), increased challenges for those pursuing traditional rural food production, and a heavy dependence on international financing. This is the opposite of what was expected from the Frente Amplio, which was established in 1971 specifically to counter these phenomena, as highlighted in Chapter Two.

It was also in the mid-20th century that land was turned into a new kind of resource, one that could be exploited for non-traditional pursuits like timber production. This opened the door for the large-scale purchasing of forest priority lands that is taking place at present. Yet, land is an assemblage; it is irreducibly social and means different things to different people (Li 2014). Establishing land as a site for large industrial timber

expansion therefore takes work and, while they are many in Soriano who have benefitted from the change, there are others who challenge this reorganization of the countryside. Land therefore has become the terrain through which people express their disappointment with the current situation, acting as a boundary object that is remaking social relations in rural Soriano.

Knowing that the underlying concern is less about land ownership and more about the consequences of rearranging social, economic, and political relationship through its redistribution explains why landowners express a resistance to an increased presence of foreign landowners. In the following pages, I outline the economic and political reality of Uruguay in the mid-20th century that led to the 13-year military dictatorship, the arrival of neoliberal economics, and the introduction of plantation forestry. Doing so will shed light as to why parallels can be, and sometimes are, drawn between the impacts of current rural development and this particular period in Uruguayan history, demonstrating a continuum between neoliberal and so-called (post)neoliberal practices. I then highlight some of the impacts of foreign ownership on Soriano's rural landscape, including the changing face of property ownership. Throughout the discussion I draw from Tania Murray Li's work on land, showing how it can be variously understood and why it emerges as a site of contention. I end by sharing the stories of three different rural workers in Soriano and how they are coping with the changes that have accompanied the plantation economy, demonstrating that, at least for small-scale farmers in traditional industries, more has changed than just the names on the land titles or the kinds of crops being grown.

Economic Instability, Dictatorship, and the Path to Plantation Forestry

The growing concentration of productive land in Uruguay has been a constant problem in rural Uruguay and even more so in the last several decades, as Chapter Two demonstrated. Yet, even with the increasing land concentration by the end of the 20th century, foreign land ownership was still of little significance, with non-Uruguayans only owning about eight to ten per cent of land area and accounting for only four to eight per cent of landowners (Piñeiro 2012:472). This changed dramatically over the last decade and in both traditional ranching and agricultural, as well as new industries like timber and soy.

By 2011, eight timber companies possessed 720 thousand hectares of the nearly 1 million hectares of forested land, with 450 thousand of those in the hands of foreign-owned Montes del Plata (250 thousand) and UPM-Kymene (200 thousand) (Piñeiro 2011). Just six businesses, five Argentinean companies and one Brazilian, possess 357 thousand hectares dedicated to rain-fed agriculture (soy, wheat, corn, sunflower and so on) and ranching. Lastly, New Zealand Farming Systems Uruguay bought 20 large farms, totalling 35 thousand hectares, for intensive dairy production. This land now supports 19,500 milking cows and 36 dairy farms with 13 thousand hectares currently under production (Piñeiro 2011). Or, put more succinctly, one million hectares of productive land are in the hands of just 12 foreign companies. Taking into account all foreign ownership, by 2011 an estimated 25% of all arable land, that is 5.5 million hectares, was in the hands of foreigners, an area roughly the size of Denmark (Downie 2011). It is possible that this is a conservative estimate: Uruguay's Rural Association has suggested that that number could be as high as one-third of arable land (Wilson 2013).

Part of the difficulty in determining the numbers around foreign-ownership has to do with the changes to Law 13.608/67 on the ownership of rural property (as noted in Chapter Two), which allows companies and investment groups to purchase land in the same way as an individual. This makes identifying the nationalities of individual investors difficult to determine. According to official information cited in a report by the Council on Hemispheric Affairs (COHA), “only 53 per cent of the country’s working farms are owned by Uruguayans, whilst 43 per cent of them are owned by companies whose ownership the government has been unable to determine” (Lopez-Gamundi and Hanks 2011), although one can assume that many are foreign when other data is considered (Piñeiro 2012:476). According to Camilo Saavedra, who works for *Desarrollo Rural* (Rural Development), a division of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Fisheries (MGAP), the proportion of productive agricultural units (UPA in Spanish), in the hands of companies (“juridical persons”) went from 0.9 per cent in 2000 to 14.5 per cent in 2011, the most current statistical year (personal communication, February 21, 2013).

While the exact numbers are up for debate, what is certain is that foreign ownership of land is a reality in most of the departments of the interior (Piñeiro 2012:478), especially when we consider that foreign direct investment (FDI) accounted for 6.8 per cent of the country’s GDP (IMF 2012), a jump of nearly two per cent from the previous year (ECLAC 2011:5). The biggest changes in production are a decrease in sheep with a major increase in forestry as well as cereals³ (predominantly soy and wheat because of high prices), and correlate to the kind of production these companies are pursuing, that is,

³ Saavedra noted that current cereal production is at levels similar to those during the mid 1950s. However, ownership and the modes of production are totally different (personal communication, February 21, 2013).

predominantly non-food based.⁴ It is no wonder, then, that the topic was at the forefront of so many people's minds whenever the current state of Soriano's agricultural production was discussed and that almost everyone could identify at least one foreign-owned property within close proximity to their field, and even more when extending the discussion across Soriano.

While the levels of foreign ownership today are unprecedented, it is part of a process that began in the late 1960s, as Uruguay was almost a decade into a severe economic crisis, following the stagnation of its import substitution (ISI) model. The precariousness of Uruguay's economy, dependent on primary exports tied to volatile international markets and foreign prices, was first exposed during the Great Depression. However, the economy recovered briefly with the onset of World War Two, and later the Korean War, with Uruguay's wool, leather, and meat clothing and feeding the troops. It was not until 1956 that its vulnerabilities were once more exposed.

Efforts to counter the stagnation in the beef and wool markets included an attempt to diversify the country's exports through investment in manufacturing, taking the investment and economic focus from the rural areas and redirecting it to Montevideo. As part of this strategy, the government relied on an import substitution model in hopes of reducing imports and increasing employment. It did so by raising tariffs barriers and taking a protectionist approach to Uruguayan industry. Large state monopolies were converted into patronage machines of the two political parties (Weinstein 1993:84) while rural production was ignored. Just as damaging was the fact that many of these industries, including in the metal, battery, and tannery sectors, produced heavy contamination (Renfrew 2009:93). Even the *Blancos*, who favoured the agricultural sector, continued the

⁴ While soy is technically a food-based product, the vast majority is not grown for human consumption.

populist policies that privileged the urban sector when they held state power from 1959 to 1967. When the state did turn its attention to the rural areas, it was to collect land taxes, which were used to raise revenue for the urban sector. Those with industrial interests also exacerbated the situation; in an attempt to safeguard their wealth, they engaged in financial speculation and capital flight (Weinstein 1993:84).

By the 1960s, Uruguay's growth rate was the lowest in the hemisphere aside from Haiti's (Weinstein 1993:84). In 1968, there was an attempt to reduce inflation, which was skyrocketing, through the application of a "shock strategy" that included a wage and price freeze (Favaro and Bensi3n 1993:193). However, any encouraging results from these measures were short-lived and the economic situation in the country continued to deteriorate. This led to the decline of its democratic institutions, as well, as protest and unrest increased. Following the death of President Oscar Gestido in 1967, Jorge Pacheco Areco took over the presidency. Soon after coming to power he outlawed the Socialist party and other, smaller leftist groups and closed down two socialist newspapers. In the face of social protest and growing labour conflicts, Areco's government declared a "permanent state of emergency" in 1967, beginning the period of increased government repression. The Constitution was revised that same year, replacing the Collegial Executive with a more powerful, single executive. On two occasions all civil liberties were suspended, first for 20 days and then for 40, and torture had become commonplace as a police practice under Areco (Weinstein 1993:85). As a result of the increasing repression and economic crisis, there was unrest in the universities, high schools, and trade unions, with the latter becoming increasingly radicalized. On June 27, 1973, after years of unrest and increasing repression, then President Jorge Bordaberry closed parliament and granted direct rule to a junta of military generals, to whom he had already granted some

political-administrative powers in February of that year. The coup was justified as necessary in the fight against Marxist ideology and the Tupamaros.

In order to prevent groups from successfully organizing, the government repressed socializing and communication during the period of dictatorship. Perelli notes that fear under the regime “exterminated all social life in the public realm,” turning the entire country into a large prison (1994:134). New laws prevented collective activities and an extensive spying and information network supported the police in rounding up suspected subversives (Rial 1992:94). Friends and neighbours became increasingly isolated from one another.

Under the military regime, not only did social repression become commonplace but neoliberal economics also began to take hold in the country as the economic crisis continued, demonstrating the fallacy of the founding myths created during the period of *batllismo*. While Uruguay avoided the wholly unfettered neoliberal shock therapies employed elsewhere in Latin America, most notably in Chile, it nonetheless liberalized various aspects of its historically protectionist economy in order to spur economic growth. In its (ineffectual) attempts to counter the crisis, which saw unemployment as well as prices rise (the price of oil, for example, quadrupled), leading to greater economic instability, the government at the time incurred large amounts of foreign debt from institutions and loan agencies such as the World Bank and IMF (Servicio Paz y Justicia 1992:5; Renfrew 2009:89)⁵. Seeking to turn Uruguay into an economically efficient international financial centre and further diversify its exports, the military’s economic program lifted restrictions on the exchange rate; ensured the free convertibility of the peso

⁵ Between 1976 and 1987, Uruguay’s foreign debt grew from \$USD 500 million to \$USD 5.9 billion dollars.

and foreign remittances, further "dollarizing" the economy; aided in the opening of branches of foreign banks; passed a law to promote foreign investment; and tightened public spending (Hudson and Meditz 1990; Favaro and Bensi3n 1993). A second wave of reforms was carried out in 1978 with a clear focus on remaking the rural economy. Traditional pursuits were discouraged as the regime continued to try and diversify Uruguay's exports. The regime abolished domestic prices for agricultural goods; exports taxes were eliminated (as were some agricultural import taxes); imports of agricultural goods were subject to a large tariff on shipping costs (Favaro and Bensi3n 1993).

Moreover, as oil prices rose further still in the 1970s, demand for timber also increased, and eucalyptus proved to be a more economical and generally abundant source of fuel. To a degree, the move to open up of the rural markets was an attempt to further address the long-standing problem of the high cost for energy resources that preceded the coup. During the Second World War prices for fossil fuels skyrocketed, creating a shortage of them in the region. Consequently, native trees were turned to as an alternative source of fuel in order to offset the demands for oil, resulting in a rapid decrease in indigenous forest area (Normey 2012:7). One attempt to counter this dramatic deforestation saw Uruguay turn to foreign timber in the 1950s, but this made Uruguay a net importer of wood, which was economically disadvantageous. The government began to conceive of a plan to generate a national timber supply, one that would lead to the promotion of timber plantations. Wood also came to be seen by the government (and certainly by its lenders) as a more stable and dynamic agricultural pursuit than ranching.

Thus, in 1968 Resources and Forest Economy Law 13.723 was established as part of its economic recovery plan. Planting exotic species in Uruguay was first seriously

promoted by the state in 1935, with the Creation of the Honorary Commission for the Promotion of Tree Cultivation, which encouraged the preservation of indigenous forest while promoting the cultivation of the “most appropriate trees species for the nation” (Normey 2012:8), but did not gain traction until two FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) commissions came to Uruguay in the 1950s to assess the potential for plantation forestry. Their recommendations for the formulation of a forestry law, along with the promotional work of individual forestry engineers enthusiastic about the possibility, helped to spur the government along in its plan to establish a plantation model for timber. The economic potential of self-regenerating pine for wood supplies became increasingly clear and, in addition to looking to foreign sources, timber buyers also began to turn to the eucalyptus plantations on Uruguayan ranches to obtain supplies. The 1968 law did little to increase the amount of concentrated forest area until the military dictatorship substantially expanded tax exemptions for those growing wood for fuel in response to rising international oil prices. However, in 1979 the government eliminated the subsidy and the development of plantations came to a halt (Carrere and Lohmann 1996).

While initially successful in reducing inflation and increasing the gross domestic product (GDP), the military’s economic program eventually fell apart beginning in 1980. The regime deregulated the banking sector with the hopes of eliminating the pressures of inflation. This, however, destabilized the economy and sent Uruguay into a recession. Between 1981 and 1983, the country’s “GDP fell some 20 per cent, and unemployment rose to 17 per cent. The foreign debt burden, exacerbated by the quadrupling of oil prices in 1974, grew exponentially and stood at about US\$3 billion by 1984” (Hudson and

Meditz 1990), leading to the foreign debt increasing seven-fold over the period of dictatorship.

These economic woes were exacerbated in the littoral region with the closing of two major industries around the same time, the Anglo meat packing plant in Fray Bentos and the Arinsa beet sugar factory in Mercedes, which were no longer able to compete in the world markets. The impact on the region was significant, especially in Fray Bentos. In his ethnography on ruins and rubble, Gordillo (2014), drawing off of the work of philosopher Levi Bryant (2011), notes how certain objects have a stronger gravitational pull than others. Part of a constellation (or assemblage), the brightness of an object is the result of the network, rather than the object itself. Like the railroads and ships entering the north of Argentina that Gordillo studied, El Anglo likewise functioned as a symbol of progress and modernity for Fray Bentos, a cosmopolitan centre equipped with the most advanced technology of its day. It was, and to an extent continues to be, the node around which the city defined itself. As Gabriela Campodónico notes, El Anglo and the town of Fray Bentos existed in a symbiotic relationship, with the plant providing an important economic and social space within Fray Bentos while the area provided the necessary labour (2000:101).

Located to the southwest of the town centre, along the shore of the Uruguay River, the Anglo played a key role in the economic and industrial development of the area from the start. Opened in 1868 as the German-owned Liebig's Extract of Meat Company (LEMCO), the company gained notoriety from developing a process by which two pounds of beef could be condensed into one ounce of extract. Because this condensed form of meat was easy to transport and conserve, it became popular as an export. In 1924, it was sold to a British investor and became the Anglo cold storage and meat packing

plant and its corned beef products became a staple in the diet of allied troops during World War Two. At its peak, the company had around 3500 employees, coming from as many as 50 countries.

However, in 1979 the factory closed its doors due to a decrease in its exports markets. Today, what is left of the El Anglo has an eerie feel. To get to the main building, one must first pass through the Company Town, where the former employees lived. Once the cultural and social centre for the plant's hundreds of workers, it now sits virtually empty, left in disrepair. Although it is the city's biggest tourist attraction, the number of tourists wandering through the museum on the day that I visited pales in comparison to the thousands of workers who once filled its walls. What remains of the Anglo is simply its shell.

The Arinsa factory was perhaps less enmeshed with the life of Mercedes than El Anglo, having been open for a much shorter period of time and employing a smaller number of people. Nonetheless, its closure was significant. Established in 1970, it was dedicated to the production of beet sugar. Its production capacity was 2000 tons, providing permanent employment to 90 workers, plus 200 more during the 100 days of harvest (Wettstein 1975:43). If the labour necessary in the cultivation of beets is also taken into account, the number of farmers supported by the mill totalled 300 with year round work, and 1000 when counting the additional labour needed for the three months of the harvest. However, the high cost of producing sugar in Uruguay made it uncompetitive against cheaper imports entering the Uruguayan market from elsewhere. As a result, the plant closed in 1980 with millions of dollars in debt. While promises of converting the Arinsa grounds into new businesses that would provide jobs have been made by the company's former owner, nothing had yet to materialize by the time I returned from the

field. The factory and its surrounding field now sit empty on the outskirts of Mercedes, leaving once productive land lying fallow and the infrastructure rotting.

While the dictatorship came to an end in 1985, the economic situation was slow to improve. Inflation was still high and Uruguay's external debt burden, to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) among other lenders, was increasing⁶. To help Uruguay recover from the recession, the government of President Sanguinetti of the Colorado party, the first elected democratic government after the end of the military regime, put a renewed emphasis on exports, particularly on new categories of goods. This included revisiting forestry as an economically viable pursuit. Plantation forestry in its current form and scale developed as a direct result of the *Ley Forestal* (Forestry Law) 15.939 created in 1987. Building off of the 1968 law, the *Ley Forestal* was designed once again to attract foreign investment. It promotes plantation forestry consisting of large-scale monoculture plantations of alien trees in areas where the soil was deemed unsuitable for agriculture and where beef and wool production was low (see Asamblea General 1987). When created, the law promised an infinite number of benefits to the country including exports, industry, thousands of new jobs, and tax exemptions for plantations and industries.

Entrepreneurs were offered fiscal incentives and credits, including:

- 1) Subsidies of up to 50 per cent of the estimated planting costs of reforestation [sic] to be paid one year following completion of successful planting,
- 2) Exemption of land taxes for plantation areas for 12 years,
- 3) No tax on capital gains from tree plantations,
- 4) Duty free importation of equipment and supplies utilised in planting for 15 years,
- 5) "Soft" loans for up to twelve years, with a grace period of up to ten years (IFI n.d.; see also Lang 2007; Piñeiro 2012: 472).

⁶ The debt burden increased dramatically in the 1980s for two reasons. First, the value of the US dollar appreciated, which dropped the price of Uruguay's exports. The Uruguayan peso simultaneously declined in value. Second, interest rates on both old and new loans increased as the U.S. tightened its supply of money. Uruguay found itself having to take out new loans just to service its old ones. (Library of Congress 1990).

Yet, while the land was being deemed as unsuitable for virtually anything other than forestry, this does not mean that it was lying fallow. Beekeepers and cattle and sheep ranchers were making very productive use of this “unsuitable” land, as Chapter Five will show. Li (2014) notes that classifying land as unsuitable or underutilized requires discounting current uses. In reality, land has multiple “legitimate” uses, including acting as a source of food and fuel; a place to build shelter; a source of “environmental services;” a home for spirits; a ground for excavating for minerals; and a source of profit and speculation (2014:591). In Uruguay, the first two uses are particularly important to small-scale family farmers. However, the Forestry Law and a desire for foreign investment on behalf of the state have promoted land’s speculative value, suggesting that there are profits waiting to be untapped for those willing to invest in the new rural economy, a vision promoted by *Uruguay Natural* campaign explored in Chapter Three. This remade understanding of land in rural Uruguay has been remarkably successful, as demonstrated by the expansion of plantation forestry and agribusiness. The result has been a dramatic change in land value as well as the way people live on it.

Foreignization of Land and Changes in Land Value

This growing demand for productive land, as well as the timber and soy that is growing on it, has led to major increases in the amount of money paid for it. While the actual numbers varied from account to account, it is nonetheless clear that prices per hectare have skyrocketed. According to Marcelo, one hectare of land cost USD \$800 in 2001. Ten years later, that same hectare cost USD \$9000. Likewise, his cousin, Andrea,

recounted their family's personal experience with the rapid changes in the land market: "My father sold his land for \$600 and, six months later, the value was \$3000!" she exclaimed. The arrival of Argentine buyers, she said, was the cause of this price increase. Argentinean law regarding soy production certainly has played a role in changing land value. In 2008, Argentina's President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner increased the taxation on soy exports from 35 per cent to 44 per cent, leading to a series farmer-led strikes and roadblocks. A longer-term impact of this tax hike was that many farmers turned their attention to Uruguay according to many of my interlocutors, whose tax regime is much friendlier towards soy producers.

While land sold for soy production tends to garner the highest prices, forestry has also led to a boom in land prices. Washington is a vendor of land suitable for forestry. During an interview, he told me that land worth USD \$700 in 2004 now had a top price of \$6400 to \$7,000 dollars depending on what it would be used for. While prices in the country's west (including Soriano) are likely highest, as it is home to some of the country's most fertile lands and therefore good for soy, prices for productive land have increased substantially across Uruguay. Taking into account all transactions, average land prices reached a record high in 2013, reaching \$3519 per hectare, a nine-fold increase from 2002 (MercoPress 2014).

For those advocating for more intensive or "efficient" land use, or those benefitting from the increase in land prices resulting from forestry and soy production, the arrival of foreign landowners is something to be lauded, including by the government. Perhaps the best illustration of the latter is a statement from former president Jorge Batlle Ibáñez (2000 - 2005), in which he cheekily stated that Uruguay's agricultural sector "owes everything" to Fernandez de Kirchner (Perfil 2010), referencing the tax increase under

her government that motivated many soy farmers to move their production across the border and invest their money in Uruguay. (This followed on an earlier statement he had made about former Argentine president Néstor Kirchner the year before, stating that, “without a doubt there hasn’t been a president as good for Uruguay as Kirchner... because he brought the Finnish⁷ and all of the Argentines to renew Uruguayan agriculture”) (UPI Español 2009; my translation).

Certainly, there are some Soriano residents and farmers who, like Batlle Ibáñez, are in favour of the boom in agriculture, even if being stimulated by non-Uruguayan investment. Manuel Sr., the father of a friend, is a man known around Mercedes as an “innovator” in terms of agricultural production, and has a particularly positive outlook on the foreignization of land. Having worked for years with Japanese companies and their government to create alternative fertilizers, he felt that Uruguayans needed to “sell everything to foreigners,” as they have the technology, money, and work ethic to increase production levels: “New Zealand has lots of forestry, but it also produces 20 times more meat than Uruguay; we need to change how we do agriculture, but Uruguayans don’t like change. Few people are actually looking to New Zealand for the technology... The land is worth what it produces. If you want to change the value of the land, you have to change the production.”

For others, however, this moving of land into non-Uruguayan hands was undoubtedly problematic, particularly within the current economic climate. Marcelo recalled how the financial crisis of 2001 and 2002 had a big impact on Uruguay and farmers’ ability to successfully work their land:

⁷ Rumours about Argentina’s corrupt politics leading to Uruguay’s winning of the Botnia’s contract abounded during my fieldwork. For more details, see Chapter Six.

There were a number of producers with debts with the banks. When land prices went up a bit in 2002-2003, a jump from \$800 to \$1000USD, these producers sold their land, paid off their debts and bought land in other zones where land was cheaper. There was a migration of producers to the North. Concretely from Soriano perhaps people bought land in Salto or Tacuarembó.

In this anecdote, farmers had to leave their homes but were at least able to continue working in agriculture or ranching, although they could not enter the new markets. Other narratives shared with me, however, spoke of those who sold their land and, rather than relocating up north, moved to the city, usually Mercedes or Dolores, as information presented in Chapter Three highlighted. This change in rural demographics was interpreted in one of two ways. The first interpretation was that it was just a matter of people relocating their residence; rather than living directly on the farms or ranches where they worked, the new face of rural production saw people commuting in from the cities.

Yet, the more critical voices towards the changing rural landscape saw this migration as a more sinister reality, in which people were being expelled indirectly against their will from their land, predominantly through the pressure to sell or through changing designations of land use through legislation such as the Forestry Law. “The plantations were surrounding people’s farms and they felt that they couldn’t compete with the companies,” Lizzie of Grupo Guayubira explained. “They decided to leave their fields and sold their land to the companies... However, people who were used to working all of their life in the fields were now left without any work.” These stories often had a tragic conclusion, namely that, without meaningful work these individuals lost their sense of purpose and dignity, falling into deep depression. Furthermore, communities as social spaces fell apart, as the narratives later in this chapter illustrate. And, while the scale of

the rates of expulsion as a result of afforestation have been relatively low across Latin America (Borras Jr. et al 2012), it is clearly not insignificant in terms of its impact.

One such impact has been, unsurprisingly, to labour. In the case of monoculture forestry, rural workers are often incorporated into the emerging commodity chain as plantation workers. This work, however, is often seasonal and at times relies on migratory labour, which has its own social consequences. Moreover, there has been a decrease in the jobs available as a result of forestry, particularly when agriculture is displaced. Many in the anti-plantation movement referenced how the amount of labour needed per hectare in plantation forestry was much lower than that in more traditional activities in their verbal attacks on the pulp and timber complex. According to Coto, a Soriano dairy farmer, whose story is shared later in this chapter:

A tambo (small dairy farm) requires 25 people working per every 1000 hectares. A traditional estancia needs five people for every 1000 hectares. A sheep farm requires 20 people⁸ per every 1000 hectares. Vegetable production is the most intensive and requires 180 to two hundred per every 1000 hectares. But forestry only requires three people for every 1000 hectares - and that's only when there's planting.

He drove his point home by noting how the Botnia/UPM pulp mill was the biggest investment ever in the country up until this point at 1.2 billion USD, yet Río Negro is the department with the highest levels of unemployment⁹.

Like many people with whom I talked both around Soriano and Montevideo, Coto expressed a concern that most of the work is short-term in the form of contracts in construction or seasonal work and brings a number of social problems. Particularly worrisome was that the increase in migrant labour had led to an increase in prostitution

⁸ Carrere (2006) has the statistic at 10 people per sheep farm. Regardless of the specific number, the point remains the same.

⁹ According to statistics from 2010, Río Negro's unemployment rate was the highest at 9.1 per cent. National unemployment was at 6.8 per cent (INE 2011:62).

as well as robberies, the latter having been a problem during the dictatorship because of, as he explained it, “the level of impunity at the time.”¹⁰ He also observed that homelessness in Río Negro, once nearly unheard of, was a now visible phenomenon that coincided with the approval of the first pulp mill. “People had come to work for ENCE [the Spanish company that was looking to build a pulp mill upriver from Botnia], but then the plant decided to relocate and these people were left without employment,” he said. Increasing economic precariousness is not just a perceived problem: Between 2000 and 2007, as land sales soared and forestry grew rural poverty actually rose from 18 per cent to 26 per cent (Piñeiro 2011). *Asentamientos* (squatter settlements) began appearing along the outskirts of Mercedes on a scale not seen before by current residents, a reality they link directly to the decrease in rural work. According to the current *intendente*, Guillermo Besozzi, at its peak there 420 families were living in these makeshift settlements (interview July 5, 2011)¹¹.

Furthermore, some have debated whether this new form of labour is equal to the work once performed by relatives on the family farm, in terms of reliability and quality of working conditions, particularly for those working inside of the plantations.

Referring to some of the findings from her thesis, Raquel, a geographer at the University of the Republic, noted that work on plantations can pay well, if the position is considered skilled, but it is not representative of many of the jobs: “The forestry industry is very

¹⁰ The impunity practiced by the military dictatorship was used for both sinister means, such as torture, but also in more routine ways. One of the few stories I heard about the dictatorship that referred to a particular event in Soriano involved the robbery of all of Mercedes historic streetlamps by a member of the military, who then placed them in the patio of his house. In the rural areas, more general stories referred to the stealing of animals from farmers’ fields.

¹¹ It should be noted that the departmental government worked with the national government to implement its *Plan del Gobierno*, including neighbourhood improvement works. The original settlements were torn down before my arrival (I only saw the few remnants that hinted at what was once there) and replaced by small, uniform state-funded homes with proper infrastructure outside of the city centre.

mechanized, more so in the last 20 years. You see young women running machines that an old *peon* (menial labourer) can't run. The former are paid well. But there is also the extreme of precarious work and poor pay for many workers.”

Such extremes include poor quality, or a total lack of, safety equipment; lack of health or medical coverage; lack of training; and terrible working and living conditions, particularly for labourers who are residing or camping deep in the plantations during work (Carrere 2006). Part of these hazards result from the use of contractors to hire labour rather than direct employment with the company. While labour laws and protection of workers on the plantations are said to have greatly improved under the Frente Amplio government, particularly in terms of safety and workers' rights¹², the reality remains that the majority of profits do not make it into the hands of those who work the land, but stay with those who have possession of it.

When taking into account the massive changes in rural life and production, it is not surprising that debate over the benefits of these shifts has arisen. When Uruguay's not-so-distant history of decreasing support for traditional exports and an increased focus and expansion of foreign investment and trade liberalization are explored, the anxiety that foreignization of land has provoked in my interlocutors becomes even clearer. But, as land prices rise and new opportunities open, there are also those who welcome the change. Below are three illustrative accounts of how foreignization is remaking Soriano's rural socio-economic landscape and how farmers are reacting to it.

¹² During our meeting, Raquel mentioned some specifics around this. In 2005, the Frente strengthened union and bargaining rights for rural workers and they did this for all sectors. Up until then, she said, rural workers did not have strong labour rights. The Ministry of Work can now send an inspector to the fields to check on the working conditions. Of course, she said, they don't always see everything because some workers are sent up to work and camp out in the mountains, which falls outside of the work site being inspected. She also said that there is now a law that regulates companies who use contractors. The law holds the large company (i.e. UPM/Botnia) responsible for what happens to workers contracted out by the contracting company. So if a worker dies on the job, for example, UPM is held accountable.

Stories from Soriano

Coto lives in Pensé, a community of approximately 540 families, most of who work on small family-run farms. The drive into the community is scenic, with fields lining either side of the rural road as you approach Coto's 73-hectare *tambo* an average size for a farm near Mercedes.¹³ Moving to the area when he was 20 years old, he has been working on his farm for 40 years. He produces 3000 litres of milk a year, from which he makes two types of artisanal cheese, Colonia-style and Sbrinz, selling to 60 establishments around the country.

We first met on a sunny winter's day in June after Ariel contacted me following an interview I gave on the radio about my research. Ariel and his wife, a community nurse, drove me the 20 minutes on a narrow rural road (eight kilometres from Mercedes in a straight line) to Coto's farm in their pick-up truck, having arranged the meeting for me. Coto came and met us at the gate, trailing behind one of his dogs that came bounding down the lane at the sight of the approaching truck. We talked for a short while at the entrance to his farm and then he invited us in to his small but comfortable home on the property as it became clear that there was plenty more to talk about. This was the first of several informal meetings we would have throughout my time in Mercedes, sometimes in his home, sometimes while standing in his field or his cheese shed.

One of the first things I noticed during that initial meeting, as the truck descended the gravel road leading to his property, was the wall of green jutting up in the background, abutting onto Coto's field. Far from blending in with their surroundings, these trees towered over the low-lying farms we had passed on our way into the

¹³ Further away from the city, the farms tend to be bigger at about 130 hectares.

community. Thinking back on this first visit to his farm, I recalled something Javier, a beekeeper living in Mercedes, had told me when we met later into my fieldwork: “It has changed, it has changed, Soriano today is not Soriano of 20 years ago. You go to Coto’s farm and that zone there by Coto, 20 years ago it was meadow, you saw cattle, you saw different cultivation and now you see eucalyptus, eucalyptus, eucalyptus and nothing more.” The dense and towering trees close in on the surrounding fields, creating a feeling of claustrophobia for residents as the plantations are established around them. Unlike the typical fences used around farmers’ fields, which are open between the wires, the trees create nearly solid green walls, isolating one neighbour from the other: “People now can’t see their neighbour, see who’s coming down the road; they can’t read the environment... because everything’s green as far as the eye can see,” was how Lizzie of Guayubira described it. This isolation is exacerbated not just by the decrease in visibility, but also by a decrease in the number of residents.

Nick Blomley (2007) has noted the important role that material objects, such as fences and hedges, played in bounding private property and making it visually understood during the Enclosure of the English Commons. In present day Uruguay, such visual markers are not new, nor are they needed to discipline people into understanding how private property works, as private property has been at the heart of rural development for almost the entire history of the country. However, the materiality of these boundary markers is important for another reason: The rows of eucalypti in Soriano serve as a living fence signalling a new kind of ownership. Besides being highly conspicuous in an environment where everything else is low growing, they almost always announce the presence of a foreign owner when grown in large areas. (There are Uruguayan ranchers who also have eucalyptus plantations on their property, of which I met a few, but their

plantations are a few hundred hectares in size, rather than the thousands owned by the foreign companies). These trees delineate where the company employees can be, as well as the hives and cattle whose presence is paid for in rent, and where neighbouring farmers cannot. Likewise, they signal to small farmers whether or not this new landowner is one to be welcomed or viewed with caution, even suspicion. The height and density of these new boundary markers thus work to create (or perhaps more accurately prohibit) new social relations among neighbours.

Many have praised Coto for “not giving in” to the companies and continuing to hold on to his farm and livelihood. One Mercedes businessman, who participates in the anti-plantation discussions although he himself does not have any farmland, called him “the face of resistance. If the land is worth 150 thousand dollars, they could offer him 300 to 400 thousand and he wouldn’t take it,” he admiringly told me. But this kind of persistence can be lonely. Coto’s position as a first-generation farmer would have been an anomaly at some point, but it is now commonplace, with farmers selling their land off to companies instead of passing it down to their children, either because they feel pressured by the companies as the forestry closes in around them, or because of the extraordinarily high land prices thanks to the demand from foreign companies who want to grow trees or soy:

In 1974 the landscape was totally different. There used to be quite a few families living in this area, just four or five kilometres away, and I knew them all...In the road out front, there were eight different parcels of land. Now this land produces eucalyptus, but before it produced wheat, sheep, cattle, and was used for cattle fattening. There were over 8000 hectares in smaller vegetable growing plots. There used to be an *almacen* (corner store) and it was the social centre of the community, there was also a football club, horse-riding. Now I can look around and for a 10-kilometre radius and there aren’t even enough people to form a *futbol* (soccer) team.

There used to be a group of dairy farmers with whom he would meet on a monthly basis to discuss the problems and challenges that they were facing as small producers. But now, he said, there are no meetings because there are only two families left in the area with dairy farms. The rest have rented out their land to investors groups, which rent land simultaneously from a cluster of small farms to create *latifundias*. As farms get bought up or rented out, many people have moved to the city (Mercedes) where they live in poverty, unable to find work. In Cerro Alegre alone, 60 farming families have left: “That’s about 300 to 400 people. And only about 15 or 20 of them have really obtained any work in the cellulose plant or the plantations.”¹⁴ Coto later added, “Depopulation is the other grave effect of the plantations,” following the lack of water.¹⁵

This secondary “grave effect,” he argues, is directly connected to the foreignization of the land and one of his principle reasons for opposing the phenomena, as absentee investors replace family-driven production. “In Argentina there are many people with money but nowhere to put it. It’s too dangerous to keep it all in the house, and they don’t trust the banks. So they create these investment groups who invest in land in Uruguay. They don’t work on the land; they manage everything by telephone from a desk. Uruguayan land is in the hands of people from all over the world.” Doreen Massey has argued that places “can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings” (1991:28). By removing people from the places where they have built up connections over time, community relationships are broken down and

¹⁴ The physical evidence for this became clear when I did a tour around the peripheries of the city, where the *asentamientos* (squatter settlements) have been established.

¹⁵ The impacts of plantation forestry on the physical environment, such as the lack of water, will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

prevented at the expense of these new global networks of relations, namely the economic networks based around large-scale export industries, which are reshaping the landscape.

Coto has never denied the foreign investors' or companies' legal rights to purchase this land, and has often cited the laws and benefits promoted by the government to encourage this kind of economic investment. However, this does not mean that he accepts the changes in land ownership and he has found other ways to challenge their presence. The first, as noted above, is through verbally questioning the benefits of foreign ownership, noting the ways that it breaks up the social fabric of the community. The other way is through challenging the material boundaries that the company has set up.

Li (2014) has noted that, unlike minerals or fossil fuels, which can be extracted from the ground and moved elsewhere, land must be exploited where it is located. This material emplacement means that people are able to “push back” against changes in land use, if not through legitimate (legal) means then through force via land mobilizations, vandalism, trespassing, and so on. While I am confident in saying that Coto would never do (and has never done) anything to damage the eucalyptus cultivations, which are the source of the property's economic value, he and his wife have assumed the right to the unintentional crops growing within the company's property line. This became clear when, on my second visit to his farm, his wife took Veronica, me, and one of the dogs to the edge of the farm, where we hopped the fence that added another visual marker of the Montes del Plata's property line to pick some *yuyos* (wild herbs, often serving medicinal purposes) springing up in the spaces between trees for making tea. It was a small gesture, the kind of unauthorized liberty that I doubt she would take on a fellow family farmer's property, and the kind that will likely go unnoticed by the company or, even if it were discovered, may not be considered a problem; the *yuyos*, after all, are wild, and of no

economic value to the pulp company. But, like the language of “foreignization,” it nonetheless functions as a protest to the presence of Montes del Plata’s when the law leaves little room for this.

Renán, at the time a 32-year old contract farm worker living in the small city of Dolores, Soriano’s second biggest city after Mercedes, has also experienced these shifts in ownership, although from a different position. We met in the middle of a 100-hectare field he was sowing near the town of Villa Soriano, approximately 35 kilometres in a straight line from Coto’s community. Renán’s family has been involved in ranching and farming “*para siempre*” (always), with a 40-hectare farm mainly for cattle ranching in Concordia, outside of Dolores, although he is the first to move to the city and participate in agriculture as a contract labourer rather than as an owner. Today most contract labourers live like Renán in the city, travelling into the *campo* during the day for work. He has been doing this kind of labour for eight years, and his job is to manage the machinery. When we met, he and his coworkers were planting corn as part of the crop rotation with soy (wheat is grown in the winter months in place of corn). He and his colleagues work eight hours shifts, with two or three people per shift, and they sow the land “almost all day and night” - a change for the rhythm of work typical on family farms. Working these long hours it takes just two full days to completely sow a 100 hectare field, during which time they plant a corn seed approximately every 25 centimetres, totalling 73 thousands seeds per hectare on the summer rotation, and even more wheat seeds in the winter with a rate of one seed every 20 centimetres.

“There are many people doing this kind of contract work and, nowadays, most farmers use contractors,” he told me. (A friend’s father, who runs a family farm beside where the field Renán was sowing, elaborated on this point, explaining that this is

because the machinery is quite expensive and, moreover, there are not a lot of people around to do operate the machines with Argentines predominantly planting soy in this part of Soriano, rather than local farmers)¹⁶. Currently Renán works with 12 different clients, primarily in cereals, doing everything from sowing, fertilizing, applying the insecticides, “essentially everything that goes into harvesting and growing crops.” His boss, who runs the contracting firm, owns all of the machinery. “We’re different from the traditional farm worker, who would’ve worked only for one family and lived out in *el campo*,” he explained. Up until recently, farm labour was not carried out by wage earners but, rather, by the family. In 1980, for example, two-thirds of the 160,000-person agricultural labour force was composed of landowners or their relatives; only 57,000 workers were salaried (Hudson and Meditz 1990).

The arrival of many Argentine investors has been in a big factor in this shift in farm work. “These changes have been good for some, not for others,” he noted. For him, they seem to be the former. Renán enjoys working as a contractor and offered that, when he has children, he would be happy to see them to continue in this line of work. For him, the economic opportunities brought about for those individuals working on the plantations outweigh the rearranging of the rural communities and he enjoys living in an urban centre. His only concern, in fact, was that there was increased insecurity around the urban centres, a growing concern among many Uruguayans in both urban and rural areas (previously noted) at the time of my fieldwork. He pointed out that there is little work and this has led to other social problems, including increases in drug use, which have led to the problems of insecurity.

¹⁶ As of 2011, “Argentines own almost all of the 500 thousand hectares of Uruguayan soil designated for soy cultivation” (Lopez-Gamundi and Hanks 2011).

But this perspective of an improved rural industry differs from many of the small-scale farmers of an older generation who lived through the political and economic crises of the 1960s and 1970s and who view this shift as a destructive path for traditional farming and ranching, both financially and socially. For these individuals, access to land is about more than an economic transaction; it is about what was supposed to happen at the end of a period of repression and a return to democracy that saw a progressive movement come to power, namely the kind of support for rural workers and reform outlined in Chapter Two. It is also about a dignified livelihood. José, the retired vegetable farmer and leftist militant from Dolores, was one of the first people to contact me after I gave the interview on the local radio in Mercedes describing my work. We met two weeks after my arrival in town and he was determined to share his story about the difficulties he faced as a farmer. José is a slight man but fit for his age; he travels everywhere by bicycle, and rode the 36 kilometres in the cold of June between the two cities to meet with me. As we sat in the ageing lobby of the *hostería* I was temporarily living in, he began by telling me about his attempt in the 1980s to form a cooperative of artisanal tomato farmers at the end of the dictatorship. José shared his experience with me with very little prodding; it was clear that the struggle he has gone through as small-scale producer was something he felt compelled to explain. “It was a very hard fight,” he told me about his experience in the ‘80s, but through his participation in the *Movimiento Nacional de Aspirantes a Colonos* (National Movement of Aspiring Colonists) they managed to get land granted to them by the government.

He described how the post-dictatorship period saw an increase in social mobilization and he had become quite militant, participating as a member of the Frente Amplio. It was through this work on behalf of rural political organizations in the area that

he and others were successful in receiving the land; at the time, he said, it was difficult to get funding from the bank for horticulture outside of the main zones of production in Canelones and Salto. Today, farmers still face hardships, he said, but now he sees the challenge as very different than that of the post-dictatorship period:

The base of agriculture was the family, which lived right in the field, but this is disappearing now. I can see these changes when I ride my bike around. I ride everywhere and I can see the disappearance of the family farm. 95 to 98 per cent of the small farmers have disappeared. There's no support for the small vegetable producers... Many Argentines have planted in Uruguay. Argentines come with their money and destroy the small farms. They buy all the land.

At one point, beginning in the early 1980s, he was able to earn a living off of his few hectares of land. "I started with nothing but after one and a half years I had made enough to be able to invest in my land," he recalled. But now, with the extensive plantation agriculture, many local small farmers are being affected by the agrochemicals. They are also being pushed out as demand for productive lands increases. "At one point there were 300 to 400 fields of about six to 10 hectares each, but it has been very hard for us small farmers here. *Es muy embromado hacer cosas acá* (It is really hard to do things here)." There had been hope that the election of Tabaré Vázquez in 2005 would bring positive change; instead he refers to it as "traumatic," criticizing Frente's policies towards to the interior. "He [Vázquez] treated us very badly. We didn't get a lot of support from the people in Montevideo. It was like a very bad divorce," he lamented, an expression of pain on his face. He acknowledged that there was certainly more money circulating around Soriano since the expansion of the plantation forestry and agribusiness in the region, but not without a cost. "The bureaucracy and big business speak a different language than us [rural workers]," one that has excluded people like himself from seeing any tangible benefits for their industry. Feeling abandoned by the part he long supported, José has

since given up his political work with the Frente Amplio, resigned to instead be disappointed with how things have unfolded in Soriano.

Conclusion

Foreign ownership of productive lands in Uruguay has increased significantly over the past decade, and the merit of this transformation has been up for debate in Soriano. While the widely used term of land “foreignization” references the changes in ownership, the biggest concern for many small farmers and their supporters is what this change in ownership does. Absentee landlordism and land concentration are not new phenomena in Uruguay. However, turning rural land into a site of value speculation and an ideal location for plantation forestry has brought additional changes that have remade social networks and community dynamics.

As Dubois notes, a look at the past helps to explain how previous structural processes, like development and dictatorship, play out in people’s everyday lives of the present (2005:13) and it is hard not to see a link between the economic policies of the mid-20th century and today’s foreign land rush, perhaps explaining why many of my interlocutors have had strong reactions to it. It was in the 1960s that forestry was first promoted as an economic alternative to traditional ranching and agriculture. As the state worked to diversify its markets and stabilize the economy, traditional rural pursuits were devalued. That this approach has continued even after a dramatic change in the political landscape with the Frente Amplio’s victory has been a difficult reality for some of my interlocutors to accept.

In 2011, while I was in the field, Uruguay was the second highest recipient of foreign direct investment in relation to its GDP in South America for the second year in a row, falling just behind Chile (World Finance 2011). In 2012, the flow of FDI into the country reached 2.8 billion dollars. Obvious critiques of the process focus on the economic factors that are leading to capital flight from the country, especially as land for pulp and timber production was heavily located in free trade zones. However, many of the concerns over foreignization of land focused more on the daily realities that small farmers are facing as the pulp companies' eucalyptus plantations displace small farms once used for food production. Depopulation, dismantled social networks, insecurity, and economic challenges resulting from the changing industry were some of the most frequently noted concerns.

Mujica acknowledged that the growing foreign ownership of land is a growing preoccupation, particularly in reference to food security. The government began debating a bill that would limit land ownership by foreign governments while I was doing my fieldwork, and by the end of 2014 the law passed, creating a complete ban on land ownership by companies owned wholly or in part by foreign governments¹⁷. For my interlocutors, however, this has come too late. Not only have some of them tried to “push back” against the plantation economy and the new social, political and economic relationships that they bring; the land has also started to rebel against it. How the land

¹⁷ The law, however, does make exception to this ban if the business production plan includes “the use of innovative technologies for the region's development, creates jobs, and contributes to an increase in production and productivity of the economic sector involved” and the foreign entity is a minority partner (Rodriguez-Ferrand 2014). The law doesn't seem to say anything about private foreign entities without links to government.

has reacted to the presence of the eucalypti plantations will be the focus of the following chapter.

Part Three: More-Than-Human Actors

Chapter 5

Following the Trees: Plantation Eucalypti and the Making of Green Deserts

While man sleeps, the tree grows.

-From the bulletin of a Uruguayan tree nursery, circa 1950
(Porcile Maderni 2007:87).

Fast food, fast wood. Man-made forests grow overnight and are sold in the time it takes to say amen. Source of hard currency, triumph of development, symbol of progress, these wood farms suck the land dry and leave the soil barren.

No birds sing in them.

People call them 'forests of silence.'

- Excerpt from *Voices of Time* (2006), Eduardo Galeano

Introduction: On the Paper Trail

It is rather obvious that the arrival of plantation forestry has changed the face of Uruguay. Montes del Plata, the company that was building Uruguay's second pulp mill during my period of fieldwork, had purchased nearly 250 thousand hectares of land for plantation forestry in 2011, of which over 150 thousand were already supporting monoculture forestry (138 thousand on its own property, the rest on leased land), leaving over 11 thousand hectares still available for planting¹. Of this, 30 thousand hectares are located in Soriano department and, according to the head manager of seven of Montes del Plata's forestry sites with whom I spoke, there are two main zones for plantation forestry in Soriano: the first is off of Ruta (Highway) 14, on the way to Flores. The second is south of Mercedes on Ruta 2, where Cerro Alegre and Pensé are located. Heading just

¹ Only 11 thousand hectares are available for plantation forestry because some of the company's property is used for other purposes, such as native forest conservation, as required by the law. See Montes del Plata's website for more details.

east of there one will find another 8,000 hectares. This is in addition to a number of smaller forested areas scattered across the department. While Soriano is not one of the most heavily planted areas in the country, its impacts have nonetheless been dramatic.

On the day we met, Coto said to me, “I have spent 15 years without the forestry and 15 years with it. On two sides of my farm there are plantations owned by ENCE/Stora Enso²” and over the years he has noted many of the changes brought by the plantations. Because of his proximity to the eucalypti and experience living with them, Coto feels that this has made him somewhat of “an expert” on their impacts, and the conversations we had over my time in Mercedes led me to agree with this evaluation. His personal experience has also led him to become one of the leading anti-plantation activists in the area.

One of the major changes to his farm, he tells me, has been the availability – or lack thereof – of water since the arrival of the plantations. Over the years, Coto has had to drill four different wells, with his watermill first, and then his wells, each drying up. He demonstrated as much as we walked around his field, making a stop at the well he can no longer use. “The tree planting began in the 1990s, and the first water shortage in the wells began around 1993 or ‘94. This well (Figure 7) gave water from 1973 to 1994, and now it’s dry.” He then pointed to the land on the other side of the fence we were standing by, and told of how this land out in front of his field used to be full of water and acted as a reserve for him in emergencies, but does so no more. It now looks the same as the dry grassy pasture on which his cows currently graze.

² These companies are part of the group that comprises Montes del Plata.



Figure 7: The dried up well on Coto's farm. Photo by author 2011

Coto's experience is perhaps one of the more dramatic ones in the area, but he was not the only one experiencing these changes. Whenever I talked to farmers, ranchers, activists, (and even on occasion the general public) about the impacts of the eucalyptus one commonality was the way that the tree would be talked about as a key player in the changes taking place to the interior's environment. "*Chupan toda el agua*" (they suck all the water) was an all too common refrain. Many accused the plantations of "stealing" land from cattle, bees, and the people who kept them, as well as jobs. The trees were also assigned personalities: Ricardo Carrere of WRM, for example, has been quoted saying that the eucalypti are "selfish trees," consuming more than their fair share of resources. Other times they were seen as being either "good trees" (when planted in small quantities to protect the soil and livestock) or "bad trees" (when planted in monoculture

plantations)³. These were not metaphors; what people were doing consciously or otherwise, was acknowledging the active role that the non-human play, understanding them as unpredictable in behaviour and with the ability act in a way that may affect other actors (Kortelainen 1999:237).

The previous chapters outlined the state policies and actions that have allowed the plantation forestry industry to expand. This chapter now looks at the other side of the story: how the trees themselves are boundary objects that are changing the countryside. Drawing inspiration from Timothy Mitchell's work on oil and carbon democracy (2009) and Jane Bennett's work on thing power (2004), I argue that the plantation eucalypti and the assemblages to which they belong are as important as the national politics that established them, rather than simply a by-product of them. The characteristics of these plantation trees, human interventions into their growth, the way they act upon the land, and the way other species respond to them all have an impact on how different social worlds, from forestry workers to anti-plantation *chacreros* and their allies, react to them. I thus turn to the multispecies literature and emerging work on affective ecologies, which looks at the charged moments in the in-between of species (Edbauer 2005; Hustak and Myers 2012; Singh 2013), to highlight the entanglements of humans with their environment, a situation well understood by those who work the land. I treat the eucalyptus trees in this chapter as actants in the Latourian sense, taking them seriously as non-human agents that modify other actors through a series of actions (2004:75), just as humans have the ability to modify inanimate objects and non-human species.

³ Anthropologists, environmental historians and geographers have studied similar responses regarding invasive species (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; Coates 2007; Robbins 2004; Neely 2010; Kirksey and Helmreich 2010) and their work has informed my thinking on the topic of exotic species plantations. However, the plantation forestry presents a different case, in that their spread has been deliberately encouraged through human intervention.

To be clear, this does not mean simply providing a materialist account in the place of a state policies' analysis, which would suggest that nothing has changed about eucalyptus over their 160-year history in Uruguay (see Mitchell 2009:401) or that politics are outside of the discussion. The problems associated with plantation forestry are not solely the result of a single node of networks linked to state and industry powers (Mitchell 2009:400). They are also linked to the specific history and life of plantation eucalypti themselves, which has seen them transformed. It is why people like Ariel and Lizzie, among others, insisted that their fight is not against eucalyptus per se, but rather “against this model” of plantation forestry and the trees that have become part of it. It is therefore important to also understand the inputs of those planting and modifying the species in Uruguay.

Hustak and Myers have worked to counter the narrative that casts plants in the role of static subjects, “relegated to the background against which the real action of the world plays out” (2012:80). Plants are constantly entangling with their surroundings, be it the wind, soil, or other living creatures. Drawing on the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987[1980]), Schrader (2010) and Haraway (1997), they urge their readers to “follow the plants... One immediately finds oneself in the thicket of interspecies relations, an affectively charged tangle of ‘beings and doings.’ Plants’ distributed, decentralized bodies can be seen to form a “node of durable action” around which other relations turn” (2012:81). As I will demonstrate below, such relations are both embodied in the plants themselves as well as in their interactions with the world around them.

In telling this story about the eucalyptus trees, small-scale farmers, and the changing environment resulting from plantation forestry, I draw from the rich body of literature on interspecies interaction, showing how the non-human and human

populations influence and depend on each other in the farming communities of Soriano. Moreover, by acknowledging that the eucalyptus trees are important actors in the tensions over monoculture forestry, I demonstrate the ways that local interspecies relationships are an important to, and entangled in, the larger political negotiations taking place across the country. I begin with a brief history of how the eucalyptus tree arrived in Uruguay and their changing role over the last century and a half. I then go on to explain the changes that the eucalyptus trees and their cultivation have undergone, particularly in the context of cellulose production, and the consequences of these changes. While the Forestry Law was meant to diversify the rural economy, relieve a dependency on other fuel sources, and bring about economic opportunity to a large number of Uruguayans as discussed in the previous chapters, the plantation eucalyptus has also brought many unexpected consequences for its human and non-human residents through technological inputs into the trees and their resulting ability to alter the environment. I thus argue that those against the industry read the eucalyptus as a kind of state agent kind rogue, bringing unintended challenges to the rural populations who were supposedly set to benefit from the expansion of this non-traditional industry.

A Brief History of the Eucalyptus in Uruguay

Journey from Australia

Recognized as a member of the evergreen hardwood genus and myrtle family by modern botanists a little over 200 years ago (Doughty 2000:1), the eucalyptus has since travelled wide and far from its native home of mainland coastline Australia and

Tasmania⁴. Its ability to adapt to a variety of altitude and biophysical zones has made it possible for the species to grow outside of its original habitat. Arriving first in Western Europe, and then spreading to Northern Africa, India, the United States (California, specifically) and arriving in South America in 1823 via Chile (Foelkel 2006) where seedlings were brought on a British sailing ship (although other accounts suggest that they were in Brazil as early as 1788, having been brought by British ships bound for Australia that stopped in the country's ports on their way south; see Doughty 2000:97), the eucalyptus tree quickly expanded in terms of both its uses and location. Its spread is directly linked to the ease with which it can grow in a variety of environments and to the technological advancements that make its pulp ideal for a variety of paper products.

The genus of eucalyptus first came to world attention when Joseph Banks, who went on to become the director of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew in London, and Carl Solander sent dried samples back to England while participating in a Royal Navy expedition led by Captain Cook (1768 – 1771). Yet, while Cook's men are credited with bringing the plant to Europe, they were not the first Europeans to encounter it. There are stories that Dutch and Portuguese explorers also collected samples of the trees' seeds and residues, with the latter group possibly having brought the plant to Brazil before that country's independence. Moreover, almost a century before the eucalyptus was "discovered" during Cook's expedition, English navy officer and adventurer, William Dampier, also spotted "gumlike" extrusions from trees he saw in Australia. However, he had confused them with the dragon tree and thus did not document them as a new discovery.

⁴ It is also native to Indonesia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka, but was brought to Europe and the Americas via Australia and is most strongly associated with this latter country.

Early interest during the 19th century came mainly from aristocrats, merchants and collectors who were captivated by exotic plants, and initial importation and cultivation was for ornamental purposes (Doughty 2000:28). It was clear from the beginning that the eucalypti were quite hardy and grew well and was able to withstand the mild winters of England. By the 1860s and 1870s reports began circulating that sung the praises of the eucalyptus for its medicinal purposes, moving from an ornamental to a utilitarian species. It was said to destroy outbreaks of a range of fevers, including dengue, yellow fever, typhoid, dysentery, cholera as well as malaria itself. Papers were presented in front of important scientific societies around the globe explaining as much and cases were constantly being reported about its effects against the diseases, noting that its “suction powers” acted as a sponge that could drain marshy areas thus possessing, according to Professor Bentley of King’s College London, in a paper from 1874, a “most beneficial effect in neutralizing and improving the malarious influence in marshy districts” (Doughty 2000:41). This was the first evidence that the trees’ could be valuable beyond their attractive appearance.

Around the same time, the species was being transported to Europe’s colonies. As in other parts of the Southern Cone, exotic species forestry in Uruguay began with the arrival of Spanish settlers who first planted seeds they brought from their home continent primarily for ornamental reasons, as well as their utility. The first trees introduced were oak, olive, poplar, pine, as well as other exotic species, some as early as the 16th Century when passengers on the boat, *Nuestra Señora de la Encina* (Our Lady of Holm Oak), arrived in Uruguay from the Canary Islands carrying seeds from their native land (Porcile Maderni 2007:22). Their height contrasted with the *monte indígena* (native forest),

comprised of small trees like the ombu, carob, indigenous palm, nandubay, or quebracho, as well as numerous species of bushes, little of which could be considered high forest.

Nonetheless, the impact of the exotic trees on the landscape and land was small, being carried out by individual landowners on a minimal scale. It remained this way until the 20th century, even as species from ever more distant lands were introduced, including various types of eucalyptus (introduced in 1853 by English businessman Thomas Tonkinson⁵) and the maritime pine (in 1890), which would become the two species employed in the country's plantation forestry scheme. The initial planting of these two species by the colonists was a kind of "spontaneous agroforestry system," consisting predominantly of the planting of small clusters of various eucalyptus species on cattle ranches to provide shelter and shade for the livestock that provided the country's economic base (Carrere and Lohmann 1996:186; Polla 1997:244), aiding in the growth of the country's traditional industries. Very little preparation was necessary, as trees were planted directly into holes, nor was technical management, as there was no use of fertilizer. As such, the negative impact of the plantations on the soil was negligible. Furthermore, by using a variety of different species in the same area, the ranchers avoided devastation of the plantations from pests and diseases and soil balance was kept in good condition, building confidence in eucalyptus as a species suitable for Uruguay. This practice of planting small islands of eucalyptus to counter soil erosion and shelter livestock is still common today, and those against the industry are quick to emphasize that these practices are not the object of their protests.

⁵ In 1850, Tonkinson was walking by the port in Montevideo when some wooden beams that had been recently taken off of a ship caught his attention. The beams were made of eucalyptus, coming from Australia via Uruguay. Tonkinson soon after reached out to a friend at the Nueva Esperanza Botanic Gardens to bring him seeds, which he then planted on his 10-hectare farm, named "La Selva" (the jungle).

Exotic Species and Forest Conservation in Uruguay

The eucalyptus took on yet another role in Uruguay in the early 20th century before becoming the key input for cellulose production, with the establishment of the Forestry Service and the National Nursery of Toledo in 1911 (Normey 2012:9; Porcile Maderni 2007). The former in particular was created as part of Uruguay's efforts at environmental conservation; concerns over the loss of native forests grew as the pace of immigration at the end of the 19th century increased alongside demand for wood-based fuel and, to a lesser extent, construction materials. Testimonies from the first half of the 20th century show popular support for addressing this problem through an increase in exotic species.

Manuel Quinteros, for example, was an agronomy engineer who became an active national promoter of forestry in Uruguay. According to him, exotic species were key to the preservation and advancement of the country's forests:

It might be thought that our National Forest could only be enhanced with indigenous trees. However, this is not our belief. We know the lifecycle and production of native trees, thus they can be just a part of a new artificially created forest. The original native forest has made the area favourable for all types of forest trees. The best performance and protection comes from riparian native forest...It is the last barrier for grasslands before reaching the watercourses and will be the primary protector of the productive forest with exotic species, which will complete the national forest. We must conserve the Native Forest if we want to realize an ordered reforestation, feasible, and with considerable national consequences. We will be happy when the national forest is filled with exotic species recognized for their longevity and productivity, and has a coverage the same area and location of the native forest we inherited from our ancestors (1934; translation by Normey 2012:19).

Taking up this call, the National Forestry Service, then under the Ministry of Agriculture, began planting extensively in state-protected areas and parks, with a particular focus on the 21 islands pertaining to Soriano in the Uruguay River. Between 1920 and 1937 the government continually dedicated money to growing “thousands and thousands” of

hectares of forests in order to protect the sand dunes (Porcile Maderni 2007:94).

Dedicating itself to countering the “poverty of forests in our country and the urgent need to populate grass-steppe and repopulate our devastated forests,” (Porcile Maderni 2007:96), 100,000 introduced species of trees were planted in the first year alone, including 25,000 eucalypti.

While these aforementioned uses of eucalyptus trees may seem removed from their role in today’s industrial pulp production, it is important to note how the original acts of planting the species undertaken by colonists, farmers ranchers, and forestry promoters allowed people to become accustomed to the presence of this exotic species and regard its presence as beneficial. Like the pine planted to stabilize the dunes along Uruguay’s beaches, eucalyptus trees, as Carrere and Lohmann argue, became “naturalized” in the Uruguayan consciousness (1996:187), meaning that people came to accept these trees as part of, rather than foreign to, the landscape. This naturalization made the transition to plantation forestry much smoother, with the lack of protest around the industry’s expansion resulting at least to some degree from a widely held belief that these trees belong in the landscape.⁶

Moreover, like the push to plant more exotic species as part of the conservation movement of the earlier 20th century, much of the environmental praise for plantation forestry at present centres on the idea that any increase in tree coverage is environmentally beneficial. The discourse used by the forestry industry, for example, portrays each tree as making a contribution to the mitigation of climate change, through

⁶ A friend and fellow anthropologist, Carlos, at the *Universidad de la Republica* in Montevideo made this particular argument when I asked him why he thought the protest against the plantations was so small compared to that which was underway at the time against a potential open pit nickel mine. He suggested that the establishment of tree plantations, much like the planting of soy, did not have the same visual impact as a pulp mill with its towering smokestacks or as an open pit mine, and argument also forwarded by anti-plantation activists like the late Ricardo Carrere.

the incredibly simple formula of: “there is too much carbon in the atmosphere; trees absorb carbon; therefore trees fight global warming” (Cohen 1999:427). Such an attitude was reflected in the response of one independent tree farmer who, when I asked what she did to protect the environment, answered, “I plant trees” (interview June 20, 2012).

It was also reflected in the industry’s message as a whole in Uruguay. One just has to look at the leading article for the June 2011 edition of the magazine, *Forestal*, produced by the *Sociedad de Productores Forestales* (Forestry Producers’ Society), to see the pervasiveness of such a perspective. This particular article concerns itself with World Environment Day. It begins by discussing how “in the last decades, human intervention in the environment has been very pronounced” (Cardozo 2011:2; my translation). It then goes on to state that it is necessary to take “urgent measures in order to be able to reverse this situation that, to the contrary, can provoke situations even more risky for the life of the planet” (Cardozo 2011:2). One of these measures, it declares, would be to protect *and increase* planted forest, as trees can “decelerate climate change thanks to their capacity to absorb carbon dioxide⁷ in their most vigorous state of growth” (Cardozo 2011:3; emphasis mine). The National Forestry Association is not shy about promoting this position: A sign posted in front of the Forest Association’s booth at the Expo Prado held in Montevideo in September 2011 stated that,

Forestation adds forests to the planet. And it adds native species of flora and fauna that see favourable development through the planting of trees. And it adds shelter and shade for cattle through plantation forestry. *And most important of all, it adds trees.* And for every tree harvested, the forestry sector plants at least one more. (emphasis and translation mine).

⁷ Grupo Guayubira argues that this is a false assumption for Uruguay’s environment. Grasslands act as carbon sinks, capturing large amounts of what is called stable carbon. However, tilling, agrochemicals and planting exotic species disturb this reserve and carbon is released into the atmosphere. Furthermore, the short lifespan of the trees means that they store only carbon for a short period of time before it is released back into the atmosphere (2008).

This idea of trees as a necessary part of any healthy environment informed the government's decision to consider plantation forestry as viable option for sustainable economic growth throughout Uruguay's grassland ecosystem. The Forestry Law was designed and implemented in Uruguay with data compiled by the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), in cooperation with the World Bank, the latter of which supplied the resources to back JICA's proposed ideas.⁸ Takahito Mikami, now 87 years old, first came to Uruguay nearly 50 years ago and was integral in developing the government's Master Plan on forestry which came out of three months of research carried out in 1986. It became the principal catalyst for both the development of Uruguay's *Ley Forestal* in the same year and the development of industrial plantations in the country.⁹ Upon arrival in the Uruguay, Mikami was struck by what he described as the excessive lack of trees¹⁰ (interview, April 17, 2012), echoing the sentiments expressed by Charles Darwin when he arrived in the country on the *Beagle* in 1932: "There are very few trees in the Banda Oriental; to the point that one could say that there aren't any and this is a very notable fact"¹¹ (1968:123; Porcile Maderni 2007:26). As Mikami pointed out with his comments, this "lack of trees" had not changed much at the time of his arrival in the 1960s, when only three to four per cent of the country was covered in natural forest, a smaller percentage of forestation than any other South American country – "and the best

⁸ The World Bank provided a US\$65 million loan for the Second Agriculture Development Project, of which US\$27 million was designated to help create 100 thousand hectares of eucalyptus plantations for the export kraft pulp industry and 60 thousand hectares of planted pine for the sawmill and chemi-thermomechanical export pulp industry (Carrere and Lohmann 1996:191).

⁹ Anti-plantation scholars and activists have accused the report of being too narrow and biased, as it focused almost strictly on the viability of industrial pulpwood and pulp production and was carried out in cooperation with Uruguayan counterparts in the industry.

¹⁰ Paul Greenough has described this obsession with flora in environmental narratives as "vegetal bias" (2001).

¹¹ I took this quote from a Spanish text, as I was unable to find the original quote in English. As such, this is my translation and therefore may not match what Darwin wrote verbatim.

was being cut” he said - with no large plantations established. The average country at the time, Mikami told me, had 20 to 30 per cent forestation. This “barren” landscape caught the foreigner’s eye, leading him to support the forestry industry and the use of foreign species already planted in Uruguay, predominantly eucalyptus, but pine as well.

Furthermore, the aforementioned process of naturalization, in which all trees and forests are treated as equal, denies difference between the plantation systems of the past and present. One major difference, as shown above, is in the scale of eucalyptus planting taking place on productive rural lands. The other has to do with the trees themselves. Today’s eucalyptus trees may be exact copies of each other but they are significantly altered from the original eucalyptus planted in Uruguay: To guarantee that it is producing trees of the highest quality for pulp production consistently, UPM has intervened at the trees’ genetic level. Taking tissues from its existing trees with the most desirable traits to produce others, plantation eucalyptus are all “genetically identical”, a fact lauded in the video shown by at the beginning of all of the company’s Orion mill site tours¹². These “cyborg” trees (Haraway 1985) exhibit different behaviours than naturally occurring and unmodified eucalypti. For one, they grow more quickly, increasing not only pulp production but also their ability to impact their surroundings all year round, a reality that had not escaped the attention of the farmers living near by. “What a marvel it is that these trees grow so well even in the winter,” Coto drolly commented at the beginning of our very first meeting, as he nodded towards the property across the road from his. The saplings had recently been planted to replace those recently felled even

¹² The company’s video is also posted on YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=nL4VIQsvZhQ

though it was winter at the time. “Trees that should take 30 years to grow now only take 10.”¹³

The plantation trees are also planted in tightly packed, homogenous spaces. In Uruguay, 1000 to 1200 trees are planted per hectare, without the undergrowth that would accompany them in naturally occurring settings. As one NGO worker noted the first time we met, there is something not quite right about these plantations. “These are not forests. What forest have you seen where all the trees look the same and grow in perfectly straight rows?”

The ability of these trees to impact on the world around them is what Jane Bennett refers to as thing power (2004). Noting that “all matter has life,” she argues that the power of a non-human entity derives from the fact that there are a “variety of materialities constantly engaged in networking” and self-organizing, constituting the very property of an assemblage (2004:353). The non-human, in this case the plantation eucalypti, develop a relationship with the others around it, not only with the people who tend to them or reside beside them, but also with the sun, the soil, the air and so forth. These additional relationships have their own consequences and thus “things” often have an agency that go beyond the context set out for them by humans. It is this “curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects both dramatic and subtle” (Bennett 2004:351) that expands the impact of the eucalypti beyond their intended role in pulp production and carbon dioxide filtration. While the trees are, on the one hand, inanimate, they are also very much engaged in a lively energy exchange, one influenced by their material properties. Thus the consequences of the monoculture plantations

¹³ A Mercedes couple, who found much needed work as maintenance workers in the plantation forests, told me that new genetic modifications allow trees to grow in less than seven years, a fact corroborated by the industry (Rosendahl 2013).

grown for pulp production are as much about the trees as they are about the policies that brought them into being, as the experiences below demonstrate.

The Eucalyptus in Soriano Today: Changing the Land and Productive Practices

The explosion in plantation forestry in Uruguay has been rapid over the last 25 years: afforestation between 1989 and 1992 in Uruguay was eight times greater than the average annual rate from 1979 to 1988. Between 1990 and 2004, tree plantations in Uruguay increased by 515 thousand hectares (Achkar et al 2004:151; Achkar et al 2005). Currently there over 970 thousand hectares of artificially forested land (Solari et al 2011), or more than half of the country's total forested area, of which eucalyptus monoculture makes up 80 per cent. At present, eucalyptus trees can be found flourishing in 10 of the country's 19 departments. The blue gum, *E.globulus*, has been particularly widespread overseas and, along with the *E.grandis*, *E.dunnii*, *E.maidenii*, *E.viminalis*, *E.saligna* varieties, has made its way to the country. It is a change that is easy to spot, but only if you are looking for it. Driving into Pensé for the first time, I could see the way that the trees towered over the back of the fields like a solid wall of dark green in contrast to the brighter green of the pasture as we came closer to Coto's farm.

Referring specifically to these complex relationships between human and non-human species, Donna Haraway acknowledges "the cat's cradle games in which those who are to be in the world, are constituted in intra – and interaction," suggesting that, "to be one is to become one with many" (2008:4). By this she means that the contact between people and their environment and all the biological objects each contains is an interaction that alters both parties, connecting to the history and content of each one, as the

experiences of the *chaceros* show. Pablo told me about the changes he began seeing over the last two decades one afternoon after picking me up from my lodging in Mercedes and driving me to his place on motorbike:

I first began to notice problems from the eucalyptus in 1996. My neighbours and I began talking: ‘Hey look, there are problems with the water levels.’ ‘Yes, I’m also having this problem.’ ‘What are we going to do?’ We talked to the OSE (*las obras sanitarios del estado*, state sanitation works)...The *intendencia* (departmental government) brought trucks to fill the cisterns of nine neighbours in the area; this was 1997. But we didn’t know what had caused the lack of water; the eucalyptus plantations were ten kilometres from here. The same thing happened in Pensé and that’s when we noticed. They were 100 metres from the trees and seeing a lack of water. This was around 2000. We saw that the problem wasn’t one or two eucalypti; it is the mass of trees together that are changing the land and taking the water (interview, Oct. 22, 2011).



Figure 8: A “wall” of eucalyptus owned by Montes del Plata juts up behind Coto’s field, 2011. Photo by author

These anecdotes above do not speak to isolated incidents that could be dismissed as exceptions; the issue has been well documented by environmental organizations such

as Guayubira. By 2006, the organization had already verified that 146 families were without water in the farming communities along the highway leading to and from Mercedes, a pattern of impact noted across the country where large concentrations of the trees were being grown for cellulose production. Such behaviour on behalf of the eucalyptus plantations earned them the nickname “green deserts.”

Despite all of the challenges that he has faced with the growing plantation of monoculture forestry, Coto admits that some farmers have been harder hit than he has been. He feels that he is one of the lucky ones; he is still able to make a living from his farm. “There’s a moment where things are going wrong and you need to find a solution because the situation is precarious, but once a solution is found things continue to go as normal,” he stated, although he then admitted that it has been more difficult because of the diminishing availability of land. What has made his survival as a farmer possible is that he has the financial means to dig new and deeper wells; some of the other producers in the area – there are around 150 families in the community – do not, and have had to abandon their production and even their land: “You need to have water to live, not only to farm. You need it for *mate*, for cooking, for washing. So the lack of water is very serious. To have water, you now have to pay. It’s no longer just there.” He noted that politicians have given a credit or loan for digging wells but many people, in the end, had to sell their land to pay off the loan. “Small farms have different costs and economic situations than large farms. And those who couldn’t get loans are fully dependent on the *intendencia* to bring water by trucks to the community.”

The lack of water has impacted more than just the human population; it has also impacted the populations of non-human animal species. “The ecosystem is broken,” is Coto lamented. Stories about humans and nature frequently focus on the former’s

dominance and mastery over the latter, ignoring how such interactions are actually part of complex relations of dependency and interdependency and thus also impact and alter people (Tsing n.d; Bennett 2004: 348). As previously noted, the plantations are not just complying with the foresters' goal of growing trees quickly for pulp, encouraged through genetic modification and active management or chemical inputs and continual planting and harvesting; they also are in constant interaction with their environment. Their ability to respond positively to the climactic, latitudinal, and physical conditions of Uruguay has brought the plants success. But this achievement has come at the expense of other actors, such as the farmers and the soils they work, the crops they grow and the animals they raise. Thus focusing on the moment of contact between elements and their abilities to react or reply to one another, what Haraway calls the response-ability of all actors to the current situation (2008; Hetherington 2013), allows for a more complete understanding of the relationships that constitute rural livelihood practices and why changes to the landscape can be so devastating.

Coto, for example, explained how the lack of water has reduced frog and other water-based animal and insect populations, leading the local poisonous snakes to come looking for food elsewhere, arriving at the farmers' fields where they encounter cattle. The result has been a larger number of cows being killed from snakebites, which has economic implications for the farmers. Along with the increase of snakes on the farm, the fox and deer populations have also exploded, a phenomenon recorded by Guayubira and agronomists across the country where plantations are established (Pérez Arrate 2000). These animals do not live in the plantations, Coto said, as there is not the diversity of species found in forest and needed for their survival, but they do take shelter among the concentration of trees, which keep them hidden. This alliance with the trees has given

them an advantage on the once open fields. The foxes have wreaked havoc for some farmers, as they steal chickens and knock over beehives. Deer have also become a plague: “They’re pretty to look at, but they eat all of the wheat,” Coto told me. Other farmers expressed similar complaints about the parrots. In recent years, the parrot population in Uruguay has exploded as the height of the eucalypti – which grow taller than indigenous species – make it easier for these birds to avoid their predators. This has an impact on the farmers and their yields as the birds, regarded as a pest, eat the crop seeds. The trees are thus seen as allies to a farmers’ enemies in the natural world, making their presence near productive lands that much more sinister.

In addition to the increased health risk to cattle from snakebites, these animals have also had their grazing patterns altered as the forestry encircles the pastureland: “Cattle usually move great distances in the course of grazing. [The companies] plant the trees and cut the trees, but never thought about how the forestry would affect cattle movement,” referring to the tight spaces between the monoculture trees planted on mixed-use land. Cattle often need to move around from one area of pasture to another in order to prevent overgrazing. With their movements constrained by forestry, farmers are concerned about exhausting the pastureland, lowering its production value. Some, as Ariel pointed out as we past a series of farms on our way to Coto’s place, have turned to using feedbags to counter the loss of good pasture.

Yet arguably one of Coto’s biggest concerns, following the lack of water, is security. As families sell their farms and move from the community, Coto and his wife became more and more isolated, as noted in Chapter Four. He talked about a concern over increasing cattle rustling as a lack of eyewitnesses and plenty of trees to hide amongst

facilitate such robberies. There is also the worry, one shared with many others, of living so close to so many trees when fire is always a possible risk:

There's a watchtower to keep an eye out for fires, but there's never anyone in it. It's 50 metres tall, freezing cold and without a toilet... the Forestry Law states that there's an obligation to have a parameter of unplanted land of 25 metres¹⁴ [to prevent the spread of fires] but people don't comply. Here, in spots, the forest is only six metres from my land. And no one's working to enforce this law.

In short, the trees are understood as a hazard by Coto, posing a threat to the livelihood of both human and non-human populations in the area.

And there are other concerns, as well. There is worry that forestation is a threat to food security, displacing ranching and other farming activities. "You can't eat trees," argued Delia, noting how large swathes of land once dedicated to food production now grow soy (almost entirely exported to China for animal feed) and plantation forestry. "The government is leading Uruguay's destruction... our food system is at risk." In Soriano, one of the hardest hit food industries is apiculture, which has been displaced by both the forestry and soy production. The department is home to 40 per cent of the nation's honey production¹⁵, and its product is considered to be of the highest quality. However, beekeepers often work in areas where soil is less fertile and these soils, as noted above, tend to be the areas of land designated as forestry priority. This has obviously had implications for apiculture. According to a draft factsheet given to me by a member of ASODERN, displacement is only one of the complications that forestry causes for the honey industry: additionally, there is also the loss of hectares of diverse flowering plants;

¹⁴ According to Title 4, Chapter 1, Article 35 of the Forestry Law, "Forest wilderness of any kind, public or private, shall be at a minimum distance of twelve metres from the boundary line. On the south side, the minimum distance shall be fifty metres" (General Assembly of the Oriental Republic of Uruguay 1987).

¹⁵ In total, the country is home to approximately 3 thousand beekeepers working 400 thousand hives.

high density of beehives in a particular area; and the increase in wild boars and foxes that destroy the apiaries found in enclosed spaces (ASODERN n.d.).

Members of ASODERN with whom I spoke, as well as beekeepers in the area, had noticed that number of people practicing apiculture had dropped significantly since the plantations came to Soriano, many abandoning the practice altogether, or turning to other economic activities to supplement their income as a result of these added challenges. I was able to meet a couple of people in just such a position while in Mercedes. One concerned individual was Javier, a Mercedes-based beekeeper, who has produced honey for twenty years. As we sat in his living room watching a basketball game on the television, he described how everything changed for him when the monoculture came to Soriano. The biggest transformations started about ten years ago.

Before that, he said, the land was all used for agriculture and cattle ranching, and there were a variety of crops being grown: “There was wheat; sunflower; the prairies used for cattle had lotus, alfalfa, clover. And with the monocultures, both forestry and soy, there’s just the monoculture, nothing else... they burn everything, nothing is left.” Many beekeepers, like him, rent land, rather than purchasing their own. However, a number of ranchers have sold their pastures to the forestry companies: “They plant their trees and then kick all of the beekeepers out because they don’t want anyone on their land.” This has left many beekeepers looking for alternative locations in which to work. Yet raising bees outside of the plantations does not mean that there are no side effects: When I asked Javier about what he thought was the biggest challenge facing Soriano today, he stated that, for beekeepers, it was contending with the impacts of genetically modified eucalyptus

and soy¹⁶:

Germany [one of Uruguay's three top importers of honey] has now closed the buying of honey, it will not buy any honey that has genetically modified origins and I suppose that, going forward, this will become even stricter. And not just – everything that's in the soy, and the same goes for the eucalypti, it's of genetically modified origin, you see? It's all genetic manipulation... The honey, you see, comes from everything, the bee gathers the nectar and pollen and there's always - and there's ways they categorize the honey, you see. And if you'd like to know of what botanical origin it is, the little grains of pollen are taken out... and you can see precisely if it's genetically modified. This is the big problem that we have, that we're going to have in the future.¹⁷

There is a bitter irony, however, in the situation: Pollination with flowers from eucalyptus trees actually produces some of the tastiest honey. Raúl, a part-time beekeeper for over 20 years who comes from a long line of beekeepers, is a representative in the agricultural cooperative, Calmer, and is trying to work out an agreement with Montes del Plata for the country's co-op members¹⁸. He said that grandis eucalypti flower in February, March and April and provide a prolonged season, giving the possibility of greater honey production (interview October 24, 2011). However, Javier noted that the 15 thousand hectares of eucalyptus trees nearby [predominantly globulus] where he raises his bees do not flower like the ones planted further north in Paysandú and Salto (mostly grandis, saligna and dunnii, the former two being key) and are therefore not as good for

¹⁶ While soy is not the focus of my research, it should be noted that its growing presence, and the use of pesticides that accompany it have been directly linked to the steady decline in bee populations in the region since 2002 (Pareja et al 2011).

¹⁷ At an international meeting of activists in Montevideo in September, the topic of honey production arose. One Uruguayan attendee referred to a report, which stated that 70 per cent of Uruguayan honey is now contaminated by genetically modified materials; another suggested that it was closer to 100 per cent. Various blogs dedicated to Uruguayan apiculture have dedicated space to the topic. The blog of Uruguay's first raw food company argues that 20 million dollars in sales were lost in 2012 and that 14 million tonnes of honey could not be sold to European markets as a direct result of traces of GM in their product (Aviva 2012).

¹⁸ Raúl said that there are already beekeepers that have made agreements with Forestal Oriental, but they are individual agreements, not ones negotiated through the cooperative.

honey production¹⁹. These plantations are also “full of plagues, foxes, snakes, a lot of things... In the winter [the foxes] break the beehives to eat the honey and the kill the bees, I suppose they do this in the night. And the quantity of the fox population increased together with the eucalypti.”

Furthermore, he argued that the monetary costs of keeping a hive on plantation land would outweigh any benefits:

If you're a beekeeper, Forestal Oriental will come up with a proposal of how much to charge you per hive. So you have to pay. You have to get your beehive into the location, and cover those costs, and pay to have your beehive there, and you don't know if it will produce anything because, let's say in five years there might be one or two years where you get 30 kilos of honey but in other years in might not produce anything, either because it rains too much, or it doesn't rain, or because the winter comes earlier and with the cold you make nothing. So you pay all the costs of moving the hive and there's another problem with the pollen in that it's only one type and they accumulate a lot of it at the end of the season and 50 per cent of bees that bring this pollen die... I'd rather pay 100 times more to work in an open field in normal times, in the spring and summer, where you don't have the problem of just having one kind of pollen and there aren't eucalypti and they wouldn't charge me to use the land.... I'm worried for myself; beekeeping is a way of life. But I've had to reduce my production because of all the problems.

Javier's resistance to working on plantation land does not necessarily represent that of all his fellow beekeepers; others, like Raúl, have chosen to work with the forest companies realizing the need “to adapt in order to survive.” Cattle ranchers have also signed agreements, renting grazing land from the forestry companies in areas left unplanted, rather than abandon the practice altogether. What cannot be denied is that producers who continue to try and derive a livelihood from the land, in cooperation with the forestry companies or not, are contending with a new reality dictated by the growing presence of modified eucalyptus trees destined for pulp production.

¹⁹ According to Raúl, the *duunii* species of eucalyptus flowers after harvest time, and therefore is not useful in the practice of apiculture.

This new reality impacts more than just the productive landscape; the roadways are also vulnerable to the trees' materiality. Originally, when approval was given to the Orion pulp mill project, the assumption was that the timber would be transported by the national rail system. However, the government does not have the funds to reopen the railways to move cargo between the interior plantations and the ports, nor do Uruguayans support the privatization of the rail system²⁰. As such, all the wood is transported to the ports via the highway, a weight that the roads were never meant to carry. This is exacerbated by the fact that eucalypti are a particularly dense, and therefore heavy, species. The burden of this damage is once again most strongly felt by the local populations living near the plantations. As Coto describes it: "The companies break the roads with their trucks, especially when the road is wet, but they don't pay any taxes [as per the forestry law]. Instead, it's the citizens that pay. So every seven to eight years, society pays to rebuild the roads".²¹

The lifespan of the roads, he said, should actually be closer to 20 years, making the transportation of wood costly to Uruguayans taxpayers. Moreover, the vast number of trucks travelling along the routes is a major safety issue. Uruguay's road system is only two lanes, with the exception of the stretches linking Montevideo to historical Colonia and the wealthy beach town of Punta del Este, the latter both being popular destinations for foreign tourists. The large timber trucks take over the lanes, clog up the roads, and

²⁰ In a plebiscite held in 2004, 60 per cent of Uruguayans voted against the privatization of water and other public services. This followed on other votes that had similar outcomes: A citizen-initiated referendum in 1992 stopped the privatization of the state phone company and, in 2002 citizens rejected the privatization of the state-owned cellphone operator (Activating Democracy 2012). However, I've heard rumours as to other reasons why the train may not be nationalized, such as pressure from the trucking lobby and, conversely, from the railroad workers' union, which is against any privatization.

²¹ An article in the national newspaper, *El País*, in October 2011 stated that the Ministry of Transportation was looking into implementing a user fee of \$0.30 USD per ton of cargo for every 50 kilometre stretch of road travelled to help with maintenance costs, and that the president considered this an "urgent" matter.

also block the view of what lies ahead, making any attempt at passing on the left risky, something I personally witnessed with nearly every journey I took along the highway. Countless people I met worried that the number of accidents on the roads had increased sharply as a direct result of the steady number of large trucks travelling along them. The vast number of trucks needed to transport the wood also led to a decrease in the availability of trucks for moving agricultural products to the ports and markets of Montevideo, leading to the loss of crops as they were left to rot.

It is also why anger directed over the presence of eucalyptus trees is a phenomenon of the last few decades, even though the trees have been part of the Uruguayan landscape through human-driven intervention for over a century and a half. When Ariel, for example makes an explicit distinction between the eucalyptus grown by UTE (the national electricity company) to make utility poles and those grown for large-scale pulp production, as he did one day as we travelled through the streets of Mercedes, he is making clear two things: First, that the trees' associations and networks of power are important and, secondly, how they are grown (in what quantities and with what inputs) determine how he and other anti-industry advocates react to them. This distinction is made verbally over and over again by reference to this particular "model" of planting. This model means fast growing trees, genetic inputs, greater concentration of land, and new interspecies dynamics. Or, to put it another way, it means that the eucalyptus plantations' impacts on the rural landscape are dictated as much by the "thing power" of the trees as it is by the policies implemented by the state. In acknowledging these new dynamics, my interlocutors in Soriano are recognizing the trees' entanglement with the world around them and the role they play in the country's future directions.

Conclusion

Kirksey and Helmreich note the importance of tracing migrations of species, as “anthropological accounts ramify across places and spaces, entangling bodies, politics, and ecologies” with the movement of invasive species (2010:555) and I would add, cultivated non-native species. In the case of Soriano, following the eucalyptus tree to its current role as an important primary resource grown for export provides key insight into how current economic policies and development plans supported by the state are enacted on the ground by the plantation trees, having repercussions that were not the initial intention of the Forestry Law in the daily lives of the region’s small-scale producers. Operating like agents of the (post)neoliberal state’s plan for development, carrying out laws and policies signed into existence decades ago inside the government buildings of Montevideo, the large plantations exhibit behaviour that is unique to previous small-scale agroforestry systems, eliciting new reactions and responses from the human and non-human populations who cross their path.

Cultivation of exotic forestry in Uruguay has a history spanning over a century, yet these more recently promoted, large-scale monoculture plantations are remaking the landscape in new and, often complicated, ways. Certainly for some, this latest trend in agricultural pursuits has brought with it new economic possibilities. For others, both human and otherwise, the presence of plagues, the absence of water and security, and the scale of monoculture development have been devastating. It is these impacts that make the new “model” of plantation development and the trees that comprise it unique, albeit an extension, to earlier attempts at afforestation. It is thus not eucalyptus trees in general or their status as a non-native species that are the problem; it is the scale of the plantation

forestry and the materiality of the plantation eucalypti and the assemblages that have emerged around them that are troublesome.

Once allies in the struggle to protect Uruguay's vulnerable shorelines and livestock, these eucalypti have taken on a new role as economic actors. However, while the trees continue to work as agents of the state, carrying out its policies "on the ground," they have gone off script, bringing devastating environmental changes that fall beyond their duty to diversify Uruguay's economy and function as "nature's lungs." These unintentional consequences have pushed anti-plantation activists to challenge the government's support of the pulp and timber industry, hoping to put a stop to its expansion. However, this is no small task. The hectares of plantation forestry continue to expand and, as of 2014, the government announced its approval for the construction of a third pulp mill, to be owned by UPM. The approval was based largely on the industry's scientific reports and monitoring schemes that provide "proof" of their low impact, creating a powerful narrative that is difficult for affected local community members and activists to counter. It is to this latter challenge to which I turn in the following chapter.

Chapter 6

Science versus Sentiment: Mapping the Boundary between Conflicting Social Worlds

What truly calls my attention is that this technical report [by DINAMA regarding ENCE'S mill proposal] has calmed people, because it has caused us [activists] to tremble.
-Delia of MOVITDES, Fray Bentos

Introduction: Bounding the Debate

In an April 2007 article published in the weekly Montevideo newspaper, *Brecha*, the vice-minister of the Ministry of Housing, Land, and Environment (MVOTMA) presented “scientific arguments” in support of the official policy on forestry (Bacchetta 2008:188). Addressing concern over the high intake of water by the eucalyptus plantations, he presented a chart showing the water consumption of various crops, including sunflower, potato, wheat and soy, corn, and eucalyptus. The chart revealed that eucalyptus trees have the lowest levels of water consumption, at 350 litres per kilogram, while sunflowers consume an impressive 3250 litres per kilogram produced (Bacchetta 2008:188). The vice-minister presented this argument as evidence that the plantations were not depleting water supplies as alleged.

The anti-industry advocates published a counter-argument in the same newspaper the following week stating that the chart failed to illustrate that the lifecycle of corn is much shorter than that of eucalyptus; the latter takes eight to ten years to grow while corn takes only several months, meaning that the pressure on water supplies over the course of the plant's life was much smaller. This use of what journalist Víctor Bacchetta calls “science fiction” (2008:185) by the industry and government was designed to, in his words,

“devalue the political debate, as if these [environmental] issues were exclusively for specialists or scientists” (Bacchetta 2008:191), and not for communities experiencing the phenomenon.

The previous chapters examined the ways that the eucalyptus trees have reshaped the Uruguayan landscape over the last several decades, with a particular focus on the social and physical impacts on the land and environment such as the shortage of water. This chapter builds from that discussion, bringing the discussion of boundary objects back into the realm of scientific (or “expert”) versus non-expert knowledge, focusing on the role that scientific discourse plays in framing the environmental debate and legitimating findings. While the emergence of a hierarchy of “expertise” in arguments around UPM/Botnia’s mill and the plantations is not surprising or particular to this case, what is unusual is the ways that it intersected and overlapped with discourses of nationalism, giving territorial and conceptual boundaries an important place in any discussion around the pulp industry.

These seemingly disconnected discourses became linked because of the role played by the Uruguay River. The river, along whose banks Botnia/UPM’s Orion pulp mill was built, became the central site of anti-industry protest from 2005 to 2010 because of a disagreement over the terms of the joint river management agreement (CARU) signed by Uruguay and Argentina. The three-year blockade of an international border crossing led by ACAG (*Asamblea Ciudadana Ambiental de Gualguaychú*; Citizens’ Environmental Assembly of Gualcuaychú) and the legal case brought against Uruguay in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) became the most visible battle against the pulp and timber industry. The dispute focused on whether Uruguay had violated its agreement with Argentina and permitted a pulp plant that was causing environmental damage. While the Uruguayan

government argued that the levels of contamination were negligible and thus it was meeting its environmental responsibilities, the Argentine government argued that they should have been consulted before any structure was to be built on the river. The blockades persisted until The Hague ruled in Uruguay's favour in 2010.

Marking part of the western boundary between these two countries, the river starts in the Serro do Mar mountain range in Brazil, at the point where the Caroas and Pelotas Rivers connect. Together with the Paraná River in Argentina, the Uruguay River flows into the Río de la Plata estuary, which begins south of Soriano near the department of Colonia. The Río Negro (Black River), which cuts through Uruguay and divides Río Negro department from Soriano, also feeds into the Uruguay River as its main tributary, stretching approximately 500 kilometres from Brazil through the centre of Uruguay before the two are joined. Thus, while often talked about as a single body of water travelling along the space between two national territories, the Uruguay River is actually the result of various intersecting water flows, crossing numerous boundaries before reaching their destination and heading south as a single waterway. In short, it is a complicated, multi-faceted entity that, while acting as a static, singular territorial boundary (a historical and cultural artefact), “naturally” flows in ways that can be unpredictable, often ignoring the very boundary it is expected to respect and preserve.

This unpredictability led to complications when the Orion mill was built. One of the biggest concerns of the Argentine protestors was that the movement of the wind and the water was carrying contamination from one side of the river to the other, ignoring the invisible political line that had been drawn between the two nations. There was a push from anti-mill activists and the Argentinean state to address the impacts at an international level as a result, despite the insistence of the Uruguayan state and its general

population that this was a national issue. The discourse of the protests and blockades around Botnia were framed as environmental, and this was certainly a large part of the protest movement against the mill's construction. However, like most disputes along territorial boundaries or those over environmental issues, this was also a dispute about politics. The company and the Uruguayan state worked hard to distance any trace of politics in its rhetoric around the evaluation of the mill in order to legitimate that the project was scientifically and objectively proven sustainable. However, as I will demonstrate, this separation was never fully completed.

In this chapter I draw mainly from this dispute over the construction of the Botnia pulp mill with some reference to the plantations in order to demonstrate the ways that conceptual and territorial boundaries converge in this context, with boundaries in this case referring to both a political demarcation as well as “socio-cultural difference leading to a discontinuity in action or interaction” (Akkerman and Bakker 2011:133). Despite the ways that consensus-building works to separate them, science and politics actually inform each other (Carter 2013), and further exploration of the conflict reveals how scientific debates unfold along political boundaries, blurring the distinctions between them. This moment of convergence between national politics and technical and environmental debates on both sides of the river is significant because it explains how a bias towards “objective” science and away from affective nationalist sentiments, particularly in Uruguay, reinforced this blurring of the scientific and political boundaries. First, with the governments coming to a consensus to end the conflict with an agreement to measure and monitor the quantity of river contaminants, a process of purification (Latour 1993; cf. Jasanoff 2003) was initiated, fortifying the division between technical experts and the opponents of the mill. Secondly, as a result of the conflict, the generally cooperative

relationship that had characterized the dealings between Argentina and Uruguay became strained despite efforts to address the dispute through international mediation, leading to greater reinforcement of the territorial boundaries through protest and government policy.

I begin by outlining the discourses that emerged in Uruguay as a result of the three year blockades, highlighting the ways that the industry and state's reliance on technical knowledge in support of the industry helped it to build consensus around standards of sustainable development through an illusory separation of politics and scientific "fact." Such a separation imbued technical reports with legitimacy while simultaneously opening space for opposing views to be dismissed as irrational and clouded by political motives. I then examine how the arguments of anti-Uruguayan activists were framed in contrast to those of the industry in Uruguay. My aim in engaging in this discussion is to show how the divisions that have emerged within the Botnia conflict left vocal opponents of the industry with little chance of success in mobilizing the larger population to join their protest, even as environmental NGO workers and local anti-industry volunteer organizations also provided technical and expert evidence of environmental damage in hopes of steering Uruguay away from what they saw as a destructive path to development.

As controversies in science and technology often become framed as moral issues (Kelly 2003:341), in this dispute, too, the language of rights and belonging became important. Thus, while those mobilizing against the industry saw themselves as advocates for the future welfare of the Uruguayan nation by attempting to move the management of the environment away from the domain of the "post political," which is the "perceived inevitability of capitalism and the market economy as the basic organizational structure for social and economic order" (Swyngedouw 2010:215), they nonetheless found

themselves being labelled as anti-Uruguayan and perceived as belonging “*al otro lado.*” (on the other side).¹ It simply became impossible for the industry’s opponents to challenge the scientific reporting that had already been widely and enthusiastically accepted by the Uruguayan state and most of the general public, even when they relied on scientific arguments of their own to support their claims.

Quantifying Environmental Impact

Throughout my fieldwork, a frequent topic of conversation that arose when I mentioned my reasons for being in Uruguay was the debate and discussion around whether the eucalyptus plantations destroyed the availability of water supplies, as discussed in Chapter Five, and whether Botnia’s mill (now UPM’s) was polluting the river. There had been disagreements on the topic since its initial proposal and many people I encountered still appeared to be searching for some sort of final consensus on which everyone could agree. While the ICJ had ruled in Uruguay’s favour a year previously, there was still some palpable resentment over the blockades that had been sustained for years by and large through the efforts of the ACAG. Just the mention of “Botnia” during my time in Uruguay would provoke commentary on the dispute, and not just from anti-industry intellectuals or expert agronomists and scientists. Everyone I met seemed to have an opinion on the issue.

Those directly involved in the forestry industry consistently dismissed the idea that water levels were dropping and followed their dismissal with their “expert evidence” from

¹ This phrase is often used in specific reference to Uruguay, which lies on the other side of the river from Argentina. Here, I play with this term and reverse it, to show how Uruguayan activists have been categorized both as on side with Argentina and also as being on the other side of the debate.

their Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification to the findings of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). Alternatively, they would remind me that Botnia was using the “best technology possible in its mill,” and that contaminant levels were being monitored through laboratory analysis of water samples, making the mill’s production practices superior to those of Pamer, the corrugated cardboard factory that has historically been a large and welcome source of local employment in Mercedes, even by those against the mill and plantations. “Black liquor is stored and then transported to UPM, where they burn it to produce heat for the mill. But in the past, paper plants like Pamer would’ve tossed the black liquor into the water,” a forestry engineer working at *Laboratorio Tecnológico del Uruguay* (LATU) informed me. The work of this engineer is to test the quality of the timber produced in Uruguay, excluding that of UPM who tests their products on-site. Explaining the contamination while also calling into question the anti-mill activists, he went on: “Nobody talks about Pamer because of economic interests. But if you look at what happens downstream from this paper factory, a pulp mill really, the fish upriver are fine, but fish downriver from Pamer are dying. Botnia levels of contamination are much lower by comparison.”

Meanwhile, those few people sympathetic to the anti-plantation movement were equally forthright with their opinions, often directly countering the arguments made by the scientific community through their own observations and research. Many Uruguayans I met early on in my fieldwork as a result of my daily routine, from hostel workers to waiters to bookshop owners and fellow occupants where I had been renting a room, were quick to tell me about the impacts of the eucalypti on the water supply or the mill’s effects on air and water quality when I mentioned my interest in the pulp and plantation economy, sometimes making references to other countries where they had seen or heard

of similar problems. Such claims were identical to those I would go on to hear from NGO workers and *chacrerros* in Soriano later in my fieldwork. Sometimes direct references to UPM's environmental reports were made, with their findings being called into question. Lizzie, for example, felt that the reports were not sufficiently objective, as the National Directorate of Environment (DINAMA) accepted the company's original project proposal based on its claims of sustainability. She called for the government to carry out a "more objective" study.



Figure 9: The Orion Mill, 2011. Photo by author

While these two sides had little in common, often presenting data that directly contradicted the other, there was a common theme connecting them: Quantitative measurements, backed by scientific reports, were important in how people expressed their opinions of the pulp/forestry industry. It was clear that information disseminated by expert science had a major influence on how most people approached the topic of the pulp mill and plantation forestry as well as on how they eventually positioned themselves in the debate. These measurements were referenced in discussions we had regarding the

impacts of both the plantations and the pulp mill, which tended to focus on *how much* water was being consumed, *how much* pollution was the mill depositing in the river and air, or *how many* trees were being planted in one area. The national media was no exception, engaging in such quantifying whenever the pulp mill was reported on. For example, media accounts in Uruguay's biggest newspapers, the Montevideo-based *La República* and *El País*, frequently focused on the amount of toxicity or composition change measured in the Uruguay River in parts per million (ppm) and whether UPM was surpassing its agreed upon limit. The frontpage headline, "Argentina's New Offence against Botnia: Prepares claim that a higher level of alkalinity has already been detected; could be fined," which appeared in *El País* on December 7, 2011 is but one example. More commonly, Uruguay's paper used numbers to defend the company, as is illustrated in an October 2013 article published in *La República*, which argues that the contamination from UPM is at "lower levels than those found at the mouth of the Gualeguaychú River," responding to new Argentinean concerns over contamination that were rising to the surface once again.

While anti-industry activists and environmental NGO workers were wary of how technical knowledge gets mobilized by industry and were adamant that they feel a focus solely on quantitative data is inadequate, they nonetheless understood the importance of engaging technical knowledge in any debate around environmental sustainability. This understanding was embodied in a conversation I had with Lizzie. She made it clear that she rejects the label of "environmentalist" because it connotes a focus on science and ecology. However, she also referred to scientific studies carried out by the university to support her claims. In other words, she was seeking the kind legitimacy that a technical

document produced by an “expert” third party could lend to Guayubira’s position that the pulp and plantation industry is not environmentally sustainable.

Many anti-industry proponents shared Lizzie’s contradictory desire for, and distrust of, expert knowledge in the conflict over Botnia. While groups like Guayubira and REDES – Amigos de la Tierra spent time in the rural communities most impacted, collecting testimonies and observations as evidence, they also understood that the only way to have a voice in the debate was to rely on scientific reports that supported their claims. One such report was produced by researchers at the University of the Republic’s Faculty of Science (Panario et al. 2006). The authors, while not outright condemning the industry, listed a number of areas where there was the possibility of environmental damage and laid out a series of recommendations. One of the authors, Ricardo Cayssials, described the report as sounding “a very loud alarm” around the impacts of cellulose production. In a radio interview that year, Cayssials explained his position: “The report brings to the table a series of questions about the impacts these ventures could have...we have an obligation to inform the Board about these doubts” (2006). His concerns centred on the impacts of the effluents on the biological system of the Uruguay River. For Cayssials, the impacts of forestry on the soils were the most worrying concern.

Even the Argentine protestors, accused of being carried away by emotion and relying on a non-scientific discourse to gain attention for their anti-industry position (as I discuss later on), drew on technical reports. For example, the governor of Gualeguaychú, a vocal supporter of the blockades, commissioned a technical report by agronomy engineer, Hugo Benavidez. The report led to conclusions legitimizing the protestors’ concerns that Botnia would harm blueberry, honey and fodder production, as well as the livestock and tarpon fishing industry (Río Negro 2007). As a result, many of the calls from

the Argentine state focused on “monitoring” and “measuring” contaminants in the River, which they felt would prove the validity of their claims.

The need to engage so directly with quantitative and expert data resulted from the important role that the Environmental Impact Assessment, and additional technical reports, played in legitimizing the project. The EIA provided the evidence that the government needed in order to approve of the Orion mill project. As such, it became the principal tool in building general consensus around the sustainability of the project. In order to have a chance of being recognized in the debate, the anti-industry participants needed to engage with scientific and expert knowledge to counter the seemingly objective and authoritative results of the assessment.

Environmental Impact Assessment and the Approval of Botnia

The 2005 authorization granted to Botnia by DINAMA to build its Orion pulp mill was based on the Environmental Impact Assessment and Socio-Economic Study produced by a team of local and Finnish specialists (IFC n.d), who collected data and carried out consultation for the project in 2003 and 2004. Botnia’s report, which included work by “Uruguayan experts in all areas of environmental study,” including water, air, noise, biology, soil, hydrology, geomorphology, underground water systems, and socio-economic impacts (Faroppa and Annala 2004), evaluated potential physical, biological, socioeconomic and symbolic consequences of the proposed mill project. It also included plans for risk management, environmental efficiency, and continual monitoring. The report’s conclusion states that:

Mitigation measures have been described in their corresponding sections. Through them it is hoped that negative social and environmental impacts will be minimised. Nevertheless, despite all of the mitigation methods previewed there exist a certain number of residual impacts that may persist during the periods of construction or operation of the Plant” (Faroppa and Annala 2004:98; my translation).

Impacts listed include disturbances during the construction period such as irreversible changes to the landscape once the plant is in place, and lack of infrastructure to deal with temporary workers needed for construction. However, once built, the report concluded that, “[w]ith relation to the considered impacts of the plant’s operation, although there will be some social and environmental impacts of a certain magnitude, the necessary management and mitigation measures have been clearly defined to eliminate or noticeably minimise them” (Faroppa and Annala 2004:100). With this, the final verdict of the report was that, “[u]ltimately, one can consider that the balance of the impacts of the Botnia plant have been strongly positive. It can be anticipated that the new plant in operation will trigger a process of economic growth in the zone and in turn new basis for new investment will be created” (Faroppa and Annala 2004:102). Weighing the pros against the cons, the experts argued that the sum total of positive benefits were enough to negate any negative impacts resulting from the mill.

While the EIA was sufficient for approval from DINAMA, the International Finance Corporation (IFC) required another impact study before offering any financial support to Botnia mill as per its procedure. Its decision on the project was based on a “more comprehensive” Cumulative Impact Study (CIS), which had to “clearly demonstrate” that the mill would be compliant with IFC and the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA)’s² “respective environmental and social policies and

² The IFC and MIGA are both members of the World Bank Group.

consistent” with Best Available Techniques (BAT) in the pulp industry (World Bank 2006). The CIS differed from the EIA by examining the cumulative impact of the Orion mill along with the pulp mill proposed by the Spanish company, ENCE. This report was carried out in response to the concerns expressed by Argentina’s government and the protesters over the cumulative impacts of two large mills being so close together (Pakkasvirta 2008:424).

During the appraisal process, the IFC took into consideration the following aspects: public consultation; development impacts; impacts of air emissions and effluents, including downstream impacts; source and sustainability of raw material; and, compliance with IFC policies on involuntary resettlement, international waterways, forestry, natural habitat, and cultural property (IFC n.d.). Public consultations on the draft CIS were held in Uruguay and Argentina in early 2006, with written comments also solicited over a two-month period. Following the creation of a first draft in December 2005 by a team of local and Finnish “specialists,” the CIS was reviewed by an “independent *expert* panel,” which provided their recommendations in April 2006. (IFC n.d.; emphasis mine). Simultaneously, the IFC selected Canadian consulting firm, EcoMetrix, to revise the draft CIS, as part of the final phase of the IFC’s due diligence process. Like DINAMA, the IFC’s findings were positive overall.

In terms of the mills potential threat to the environment, the report found that the mill was expected to generate 1.7 million tonnes of CO₂ per annum, but emissions would be “monitored by the IFC” (IFC n.d.). Water rights and usage were seen as unproblematic because they followed the Uruguay River Executive Commission (CARU)’s guidelines for water extraction and effluent discharge. Furthermore, the liquid effluents would be treated via a biological Wastewater Treatment Plant using an activated

sludge process, with treated effluent being channelled to the river via diffuser vents that meet CARU standards, while atmospheric emissions are collected and treated via incineration, precipitation and a scrubber gas washer (IFC n.d.).

The company's approach to environmental management as a whole was seen by the IFC as "comprehensive," having plans for emergency responses as well as the handling of hazardous materials. Expert knowledge regarding the tree plantations stated that they were sustainable because "no natural habitat will be destroyed by the establishment of new plantations"³ (IFC n.d.). Furthermore, more than 80 per cent of the wood obtained by the plant would come from plantations that are FSC certified (63.7 per cent) or from plantations that had developed an approach to achieving certification within three years of the publication of the CIS report. This level of environmental management would be ensured through the company's certification to ISO 14001 and OHSAS 18001 standards. It was concluded that the mill was designed to meet the European Union's IPPC (integrated pollution prevention and control) recommendations and best practices, thus also meeting Uruguayan and IFC guidelines for pulp and paper mill, and would be monitored throughout pulp production to make sure this remained the case. In short, quantifiable conclusions reached by the people assumed to be best suited to the task, that is technical experts, became the key evidence on which the entire project rested.

³ As plantation forestry in fact does replace grassland and prairies, I can only assume that "natural habitat" refers only to indigenous forest.

Building Consensus

Fougère and Solitander, Finnish economists writing on the Botnia conflict, point out that the dependence of technical and scientific knowledge inadvertently leads to confusion and omission of key information. While the thick documents produced for the EIA give the impression of “rigorous objective reporting,” they argue that the reports are really “masquerading for accountability” (2009:223). As they note, “[t]he assessment draws on insights from different sciences (such as biology, geology, hydrogeology, social sciences and economics) making it hard even for individual scientists to fully understand all implications. As a result, reviewing the assessment requires close examination by several experts” (Fougère and Solitander 2009:223). Such “technological rationality” can work to side track ethical concerns (such as the impacts of pulp and forestry industry on local farmers and communities) and depoliticize the process by deferring to a technical, formulaic analysis of issues (Fougère and Solitander 2009:224). By removing the ideological bias that guides the reports’ conclusions, scientific findings are read as neutral and therefore more legitimate (Fougère and Solitander 2009:224). Thus, while the state’s role in the approval and support of the Botnia project was obvious, scientific findings scientists and officials engage in “boundary work” (Latour 1993; Jasanoff 1990; Guston 2001) in order to keep the politics behind the quantitative testing, evaluations, and monitoring hidden from view.

Access to scientific (or global) knowledge is also about access to power, and therefore it is no surprise that politics is always lurking in the background. In reality, what is accepted as expert knowledge is far from neutral; it results from a process of co-production, which, at its core is “the proposition that the ways in which we know and

represent the world (both nature and society) are inseparable from the ways in which we choose to live in it” (Jasanoff 2004:2). That is, knowledge can only exist as the result of social actions as much as society can only function as a result of knowledge. Scientific “facts” are thus not so much a reflection of a true or objective nature, but rather are the cultural possession of specific groups of professional knowledge producers (Fuchs 1986:126). Starting her analysis with the premise of co-production highlights the political work that takes place “in order to bring about actionable consensus [amongst experts themselves within the general public] on scientific facts” (Jasanoff 2010:239). When any relationship between politics and science is acknowledged, it is assumed to take place at a distance from the examination of “objective fact finding,” with the government or state acting as nothing more than a vehicle for transmitting established facts.

Thus, while there is normally no recognition of the influence of politics in the production and acceptance of scientific fact, “democratic governments are presumed capable of discerning their citizens’ needs and wants, and of deploying science and technology effectively to meet these” (Jasanoff 2005:247) and Uruguay was no exception. DINAMA approved the project because it concluded that the mill would contribute to sustainable development in the country, bringing economic opportunity and minimizing damage through scientific monitoring: “From the analysis of the proposed pulp mill and related structures, no residual negative impacts that could be inadmissible were found on the grounds that the impacts can be prevented, mitigated, or compensated if the activities are carried out as planned and take the necessary precautions” (2005:28; my translation). DINAMA based much of its decision on a report produced by the company, which calculated the company would directly employ 300 people (Faroppa and Annala 2004:8), with even more indirect employment. By bringing the argument back to numbers and

facts (technical reports; quantitative measurements, predicted numbers on job creation) it positioned the mill's approval as a "common sense" decision, rather than a political one.

Yet, this quantification of the data does not fully explain why the "expert" reports presented by the anti-industry contingent were not taken seriously. The activists, after all, relied on findings from scientific experts, working with professors and researchers at the University of the Republic's Faculty of Science. As noted above, they produced formal reports that used what anthropologist William Roseberry called the "language of contention" (1994:364), addressing the same concerns as the official EIA and using the same technical language (Panario et al. 2006), even as environmentalists openly questioned the over-dependence on science in examining environmental concerns. Thus, this is not a case of two distinct ways of framing the issue coming to a head (Rademacher 2011:58) or a clash between what Scott (1998) refers to as *techné*, technological scientifically-based knowledge, and *mētis*, defined as skills and understandings held by local community members (Sjölander-Lindqvist 2005:226). Moreover, while many in the anti-industry movement self-identified as being "on the Left," their technical reports were careful not to engage with discussions over whether or not the government's politics were appropriate beyond a review of the environmental issues presented, giving their reports the important veneer of political neutrality.

There was, however, a clear difference in the understanding of what "sustainable" production meant to the state and industry versus to the anti-industry movement. Whereas the former felt that some level of contamination was acceptable as long as it could be monitored and controlled, the industry's opponents felt that the river and surrounding area would be damaged by any amount of pollution. Sergio, for example, a Mercedes resident who was not convinced by the industry's insistence that it was

sustainable whispered the following to me one night as we attended a concert at the city's *Casa de Cultura*, careful to avoid having his comments heard by the city's majority pro-industry attendees: "They could claim that the amount of contamination is .001 parts per million, for example. Maybe that's a lot, or maybe it's a little. The point is that it's still more than before [the pulp mill]." Yet, while this explains how each side was able to produce technical documents supporting their positions at opposite ends of the debate, it still does not explain why environmentalists' concerns were so easily dismissed. I never heard anyone say, "Those anti-Botnia activists are just too stringent in setting their environmental standards," for example. I did, however, hear a number of comments suggesting that those supporting the protests against Botnia were unable to comprehend the reality of the situation, as I illustrate later in this chapter.

Thus a more convincing argument might be to think about the management of the project, including the use of EIAs, in terms of producing scale. Swyngedouw (2007) argues that all socio-environmental projects are grounded in scalar tactics and strategies. His position rests on the assertion that "parts of nature become enrolled in and reconstituted through 'networks of power'," and thus whether or not a socio-natural project is achieved is based on whether a sufficient number of allied groups and elites are mobilized (Swyngedouw 2007:10). This is done by making a project one of national, rather than regional concerns, through the creation of national and transnational economic and political scalar relationships. Concerns that are successfully mobilized around water management move beyond the scale of the river, and are brought up to the level of national concern. Building on this argument and focusing specifically on the role of EIAs in producing scale around issues of water governance, Lamb (2015) shows how such assessments work to disconnect local populations from the decision-making process

by situating them within the scale of the national whilst containing any potential drawbacks at the local level.

This scalar argument is certainly productive and speaks to the assemblages of power that emerged throughout the controversy over the mill's construction on the river. The Uruguayan state, in conjunction with Botnia, framed the project as one that would boost the national economy and help invest greater foreign investment through its investment friendly policies, while keeping what little damage there could be contained and controlled at the "local" site of the plant. This portrayal of the project as one that had benefits at a national scale without drawbacks at this same large scale undoubtedly helped it to garner support from the Uruguayan public.

However, this argument is limited in that it still rests on the assumption that activists were made up predominantly of "local" residents with "local" concerns, that is, they produced information relevant only to those at the local scale. This simply wasn't the case. First, activists were not limited to those living near the mill's location of Fray Bentos and their reports focused on both the impacts of the country's water systems as a result of the pulp mill *and* the far-reaching plantation forestry (something the EIA did not do), meaning that their concerns were also framed at the national level. In fact, this "scaling up" was so entrenched in their process that it turned many local residents against the movement, as they felt that the activists would deny them the right to employment in what promised to be a technologically advanced and rather large operation. Secondly, the anti-Botnia movement also tapped into networks of national and transnational power, receiving support from national and international organizations as well as the Argentinean state. Therefore, their lack of traction in the national discussion was not the result of producing knowledge at a limited scale. I argue that, in fact, the biggest obstacle

facing anti-plantation activists, including NGO workers, volunteers, and *chacreros*, was their association (both real and perceived) with the Argentinean blockades and protests. As I will show below, the Argentinean response to Botnia was read as an irrational and emotional one (and thus, unscientific) in both the Uruguayan press and general sentiment⁴. The association formed between the blockaders and national anti-industry proponents meant that any attempt to question the sustainability of the industry on their behalf was viewed with suspicion.

Uruguayan Responses to the Anti-Industry Demonstrations

As noted above, the perception of political neutrality and rationality provides the foundation on which the pro-industry arguments rest, giving their position legitimacy in the debate. By contrast, the blockades and any response in Uruguay against the mill were read in Uruguay as being driven by subjective motives and thus without merit. This became clear when various Uruguayans I met, unsupportive of the Argentine blockades, complained to me that “these were political, not environmental protests,” a refrain often repeated. Being “political” in this context meant a number of things. Most commonly, Argentina’s protests were interpreted as motivated by jealousy or political showboating, rather than any real environmental concern by those who disapproved of the blockades, whether or not they strongly supported Botnia. I lost track of the number of times Uruguayan friends told me that Argentines protested the Botnia plant not because they were concerned about pollution, but because they wanted the cellulose plant to be built in

⁴ Finnish academic, Jussi Pakkasvirta, found the Finnish media similarly framed Argentine protestors as irrational in its reporting on the blockades (2008).

Argentina. Botnia had originally been looking to construct the mill in Argentina's Entre Ríos province, they said. However, the company decided that there was too much corruption in Argentina ("unlike in Uruguay" the story went), and it became clear that Uruguay provided a more stable climate for investment⁵.

Sometimes, other details were added: The governor of Entre Ríos had purchased a lot of land around where he thought the pulp mill would be built. When the mill moved to Uruguay he lost his investment and thus joined in on the protest against Botnia. My friend Beatriz, a dedicated *frenteamplista* from Montevideo who now lives in Mercedes, told me another version of the story. While her narrative began with the same information, she added that she also suspected the protesters in Gualeduaychú of receiving pay from the Argentine government to continue protesting, suggesting that they were demonstrating out of self interest, rather than a commitment to the cause. This was not the first time I heard such an accusation against the Argentine protesters. Only a few months earlier, when I was living in a hotel in Mercedes as I looked for more permanent accommodation, I met a man from Montevideo in town for a work contract. While preparing dinner in the hotel's communal kitchen, we began chatting, and ended up having several long conversations about politics during his stay. During one such talk, he came onto the topic of protests in Argentina⁶, and he noted how every time he went into Argentina, he encountered a street protest. He recalled one protest in particular:

⁵ This story was very common and I was told that it was fact, not rumour. While I never found any written information to support this claim, it was so well accepted amongst many Uruguayans with whom I spoke that I do think it necessary to take it seriously. Functioning as social fact, this rumour was more than just a series of individual stories; it began to influence how Uruguayan society as a whole began to understand the blockades.

⁶ Argentina is well known for its street demonstrations, and I myself witnessed several on the occasions that I crossed the border. The volume of protests taking place perhaps fuels this perception in Uruguay.

I was with some friends in Buenos Aires one time and we saw a huge march go by. So we asked one of the participants what the protest was about and the guy said ‘I don’t know.’ Argentines often don’t even know what they’re protesting about; they’ll get paid 10 pesos [at the time equal to about \$2.50 USD] to come and participate and add numbers to the protest and they just walk along, maybe drinking a *mate*, in order to earn a few dollars.

I inferred that perhaps he saw the blockades as not being immune to such tactics.

Money as the key motivation for the Argentine resistance to Botnia was expressed in other ways. Gualeguaychú is a beach resort city, reliant on summer tourism to sustain its economy. As such, there was speculation that the city’s residents, who made up a majority of the blockaders, were concerned more about the economic consequences of the mill, rather than the environmental. This was an argument I first heard during my initial arrival in Montevideo. I was having dinner at a friend’s house with his family and a handful of their friends. One of the guests, a pilot, enthusiastically began to engage me in a conversation about the blockades when I mentioned that I was interested in Botnia. While sympathetic to the anti-industry movement, noting the impacts of the plantations and the failure of the mill to provide a lot of high-skilled jobs locally, he nonetheless questioned the motivation of the protestors: “When the Argentines first went and complained to The Hague about the contamination from the plant, it wasn’t even up and running. There was no contamination being produced. Their real concern is *visual* pollution because the mill is located across from the beach [in Gualeguaychú].” He went on to joke, “You know what real visual pollution is? Having to see Buenos Aires not just from the beach but even from the streets of Colonia [the historical town in Uruguay across the river from Argentina’s capital].”

This assumed lack of ideological commitment when it came to the protests was also used to challenge the blockaders’ environmental commitment. Several friends in Uruguay and Argentina did not waste time in pointing out that there are plenty of pulp

mills in Argentina (15 in total, of which 11 are considered significant) that use much older technology and were environmentally more damaging than the Orion pulp mill, and yet no one was protesting these mills. Actions on behalf of Argentina's government in February 2012 only added fuel to the fire, when protests broke out in Argentina's north against an open-pit mine, with partial ownership by the national and some provincial governments, accused of using cyanide that was contaminating the water, and the government responded by violently dispersing the protestors (WW4 2012). As I sat on the local beach with my friend Susana the week of that incident, a friend of her son's who had joined us made reference to the event while discussing the pulp mill with me: There have been other environmental protests in Argentina and the government intervened and ended them. Why couldn't they do it in this case?" he asked, suggesting that there was some underlying politicking involved around the blockades. Regarding Botnia specifically, the rhetoric used by Argentina's president at the height of the conflict, Néstor Kirchner, took on strong nationalistic tones leading many Uruguayans to dismiss its neighbours concerns. Referring to the protests in Uruguay as a national cause," one that, "concerns the entire nation of Argentina" (Infobae 2006), and poses a real threat to its health and vitality (a tradition carried on by his wife and current Argentine president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner) only furthered the belief that the Argentines were not really concerned about the environment, but rather were hoping to promote their own self interest by intervening in Uruguay's economic development.

In the end, these rumours and questions led a majority to see the political positions or opinions that opposed the mill as equivalent to taking an irrational, emotional, nationalistic or hostile position embraced only by those who do not understand globally applicable technical science or choose to ignore it, whether or not this was the case. It is

no surprise that scientific argument holds a privileged position in both decision-making and discourses of environmental impact. However, what makes the Botnia case unique is the way “scientific rationality” became interchangeable with “Uruguay,” overlaying the ideological divide between scientific expertise and non-expert knowledge onto a national border that was geographically defined by the river. Suggesting that most of these unreasonable protestors were also Argentines fit nicely with a typical Uruguayan portrayal of their neighbours in the context of the conflict (and for some, more generally), in which they have been described by many of my friends and acquaintances as “*quilombos*” (shit-disturbers) or, on one occasion “a country full of teenagers,” who go around saying “I want this now, I want this now’ and then if they don’t get what they want they’re out in the streets yelling about it.” I’d heard many of these same individuals say that Argentines are politically unfocused or confused, unsure of what they stand for, which is why Peronist⁷ politics have been so successful in that country.

This polarization of the argument over Botnia’s impacts also allowed, perhaps unconsciously, for the reinforcement of old stereotypes of the “ignorant interior,” described in Chapter Three. These stereotypes dismissed *chacrer*’s concerns on the grounds that they did not align with the official government and industry reports produced by scientific rigour, or because local residents’ experiences simply did not provide enough “proof” to counter the reports’ conclusions. Anecdotes such as those

⁷ To put it in simplistic terms, Peronism refers to a form of populist politics established under Juan Perón and his wife, Evita Duarte, in the 1940s, and revived by the party of the current president and her late husband. Several Peronist political parties have splintered from the original one, each with its own take on the Peronist ideology. What can be said is that Peronism doesn’t fit nicely onto a Left-Right spectrum. For example, former President Menem, who pushed through numerous IMF reforms that helped to create the economic crisis of 2001, was from a Peronist party, even though Peronism President Fernandez de Kirchner takes a radically different approach (that is, a more leftist and protectionist stance) on economic issues. It has been both a fascist and a democratic party. For many Uruguayans, who are quick to tell you where the three major parties fall on the right-left scale, Peronism is a political enigma they struggle to define and has been a topic of fascination for academics, as well.

describing the drying wells (Chapter Five) were written off as being without merit, resulting from a lack of technical knowledge about what was really going on, even though the impacts of eucalyptus on water supply in Uruguay and beyond are well documented (Cruz Rivera 1983; Malik and Sharma 1990; Saxena 1991; Cuenca Berger 2005; Farley et al. 2005; Pérez Arrate 2007).

Interestingly, such stereotyping at times came from residents of Soriano who had welcomed the pulp and timber industry, and not just from people I met in Montevideo. The individuals making the disparaging comments were generally well-educated, occupying upper-middle and upper class positions in the area. They distinguished themselves from those that they saw as the uneducated residents by providing commentary on resource use that placed the blame on the “ignorance” of the anti-industry individuals, who would rather receive government help than work the land themselves. The comments made by Mario, a German-Argentine rancher in Soriano provide the strongest illustration of this:

It is bullshit that the water is drying up. Uruguay actually entered a drought period six or seven years ago so there's not the same amount of water around. It is ignorant to talk of a water shortage [because of the plantations]. The shortage is due to the fact that people have these open water holes and wells that they've only dug 15 metres deep. Because people are lazy and stupid, they went to the government and made noise and said that the trees were at fault.

Mario has lived for more than 30 years in the region and has dedicated 520 hectares of his 736-hectare ranch to forestry. During our time together he spoke with a disturbing passion against what he saw as a lack of work ethic amongst Uruguayans and a resurgence of “stupid nationalism” that was focused on keeping property and industry out of the hands of foreigners. I found it striking that Mario's characterization parallels that of the *quilombero* Argentine who constantly complains to the government about every small

thing, allowing him to dismiss those associating water loss with the plantations as irrational and incapable of providing expert commentary on the issue.

These kinds of associations created a particularly difficult situation for the Uruguayan anti-mill activists, something they understood well. While anti-industry individuals and groups worked closely with Argentines at the beginning, coordinating a “bridge hug” between thousands of Uruguayans and Argentines who were against the mill (see Figure 10), they also clearly identified themselves as being separate and autonomous from ACAG. Lizzie, for example stated that she shared ACAG’s concerns about the level of dioxins being emitted into the air on both sides of the river,⁸ but plainly stated that the two organizations were not officially working in collaboration for logistical reasons: “At one point ACAG had 5000 people involved; how do you coordinate with that many people?”



Figure 10: Bridge Hug, 2005. Photo by Jorge Iannandrea. Used with permission

⁸ One of ACAG’s biggest concerns was that the westerly wind was bringing the majority of the pollution to the Argentinean side of the Uruguay River.

Others, including Coto and María Selva of REDES – Amigos de la Tierra, mentioned that they supported ACAG and the movement but also offered a critique of it. They suggested that the Argentines' goal was only focused on stopping Botnia, whereas in Uruguay the anti-pulp mill activists were taking a broader focus that included the plantations and the pending Montes del Plata mill. As María Selva put it, "Argentina celebrated when [the ENCE pulp mill, now part of Montes del Plata] was moved downstream from Fray Bentos. But it's still affecting the river, and [the new location] is actually worse" in environmental terms. "Pepe," a Guayubira supporter and owner of the Ecological Centre and Bookstore in Montevideo, felt that the blockades were not taken seriously, since they were temporarily lifted so that fans could cross the border to watch the soccer game between an Argentinean and Uruguayan team competing in the Copa Libertadores. Most surprisingly, one NGO worker critiqued ACAG for making some wild claims about the health impacts of the mill that her organization did not support in order to make a very real point about contamination.

Yet, even though anti-industry Uruguayan activists critique ACAG, they have also been at odds with pro-industry Uruguayans who put their faith in the impact assessments that led to the mill's approval, leaving them without a clear place in the discussion. Rather than their carefully compiled evidence being heeded and thoroughly considered, Uruguayans protesting the industry ended up being framed as traitors in order to invalidate their position. This sentiment became stronger as Argentine protestors began to get more involved in issues perceived to be threatening to Uruguay's sovereign decision-making rights, leading to portrayals of Argentina as continually acting like Uruguay's "big brother," always trying to push its younger sibling around to its own benefit while

ignoring the political boundary Uruguay was interested in protecting as the Botnia conflict increased.

The tensions over sovereignty came to the forefront when Argentine protestors gathered in the central plaza in Montevideo in 2007. In response to the protestors' politicized presence, a group of approximately 100 pro-Botnia Uruguayans insulted and physically attacked them, chasing them out of the plaza by throwing eggs and verbal abuse at the group. The pro-industry actors taunted the protestors, yelling "Pig protesters, out of Uruguay. Uruguay is a free country, you're better off cleaning up Riachuelo" (La Nación 2007; my translation), making reference to the highly contaminated Matanza-Riachuelo River that runs through Buenos Aires. At the time of this encounter in the capital, ACAG had already been blockading the General San Martín Bridge, as well as the other two Uruguay-Argentina border crossings, on and off for nearly two years and tensions were running high with pulp production scheduled to start that year.

While the violent response was an isolated incident, it spoke to a larger sentiment held by many Uruguayans: that they have a right to make decisions about their industrial growth without the interference of their neighbours. The rhetoric of "you're with us or you're against us," emerged in the country making it very hard for anyone to oppose Botnia and the plantation economy without being treated suspiciously. With emotions running high, those in Uruguay who collaborated or supported the Argentine protesters had their loyalty questioned even after the blockades were over and I was well into my fieldwork.

Activists explicitly expressed how they met active resistance any time they spoke critically about Botnia as a result of this perception of their work. María Selva argued that Botnia is a topic that "cannot be touched in Uruguay" because "it's seen as unpatriotic"

(interview February 16, 2011). Lizzie at Guayubira noted how the media seemed interested only in locating them on one side of the division line or the other. “During the blockades, the media would phone and ask, ‘are you with the *piqueteros*⁹ or not?’ They weren’t interested in hearing any of the real critiques we were making, just whether we supported the Argentines,” she told me. Raquel, also of Guayubira, reinforced this point: “You can’t talk about the plant or forestry in the news, but if you ask someone if they’re for or against the mill, the people will say ‘yes [I’m for it]’ because it’s like a game of *futbol* and we’re playing against Argentina¹⁰. It’s all or nothing, you’re either for or against the mill. This is a challenge [for us].” Likewise, Delia, who founded and is currently the sole active member of MOVITDES in Fray Bentos said she is viewed as “being against the people” by many in her city who enthusiastically welcomed Botnia and its promise of much-needed jobs to the area.

And attacks were not limited to NGO workers; I heard comments made that also blamed members of volunteer groups like ASODERN and the *chacreros*’ movements for hurting Uruguay’s national economy and the local communities. These groups, and Coto in particular, had been labelled as “radicals” whose views were highly unorthodox. As such, I was told to keep vigilant (“*pon un ojo*”) about things I was told by these individuals, since the environmental impacts they insisted were real did not line up with the evidence presented in the official reports. These sentiments were sometimes so strong that my association with the activists in Soriano occasionally had an impact on my ability to build

⁹ “Piqueteros” is a term from Argentina referring to people who stage a protest or demonstration (usually political in nature) by blocking a road or street. This form of protest became popular in Argentina beginning in the mid-1990s, made popular by the lower classes. At times, the term can carry a negative connotation, as there is sometimes an association of *piqueteros* with the use of violence.

¹⁰ As I noted in Chapter Four, my Luz friend listed Botnia and soccer as the two things that bring out signs of Uruguayan nationalism. Thus it’s interesting to note that in the Botnia dispute in Uruguay, only Argentines were portrayed as irrational nationalists. Uruguayans, by contrast, were simply reacting to Argentina because the latter was interfering with their sovereign rights.

trust with informants. As is the case with foreign owners arriving in Soriano (see Chapter Four), there were those likewise wary towards anyone meeting with those in the anti-planation movement. There were times when I wondered if those working in the forestry industry, and who knew with whom else I had been talking, were giving me the full story during our talks. And on one occasion, during a chat with a couple who worked in forestry maintenance, I feared that I would be ejected from their home after I mentioned in passing that I had been to Coto's farm. While this never did happen (the result, I am certain, of an intervention by my acquaintance, Luisa, who had made the introduction between us, in which she quickly insisted that I was interested in the topic as a student of anthropology and not actively engaged in the protest), the conversation nonetheless ended soon after my "confession."

With all of these negative associations being made between participants in Uruguay's anti-industry movement and what was understood as an overblown response by the Argentinean protestors, most of the scientific evidence produced to support their claims fell through the cracks, never given the space to engage on equal footing with the EIA and industry reports. As such, the quantitative analyses carried out by the state as part of the river's joint monitoring plan continue to provide the necessary "proof" that The Hague's ruling in favour of Uruguay was the correct one. Meanwhile, those in Uruguay working to challenge the industry continue to fight to find a space outside of the formal state system, in which their voices can be heard.

Conclusion

The case of Botnia/UPM's Orion pulp mill near the city of Fray Bentos illustrates that, despite its appearance, the separation between science and politics is an illusory one. While scientific and technical knowledge allowed for consensus and gave legitimacy to claims that the Orion mill and the plantation forestry are sustainable, the outright dismissal of the technical evidence presented by the activists shows how factors beyond simply an engagement with expert documentation were at play. The Botnia/UPM's mill on the Uruguay River, a dynamic waterway that was also expected to act as a static international boundary, complicated attempts to separate science from politics, as Argentinean involvement in the anti-mill movement coloured perceptions as to the true motivations of the resistance.

While 'networks of power' certainly played a role in building consensus for the project, particularly with the alliance being formed between a large multinational country and the Uruguayan state, it was not the only one, nor the most significant. I have argued that the association of the anti-industry actors in Uruguay with ACAG and the Argentinean state's anti-Botnia sentiment in the minds of many Uruguayans effectively worked to silence any meaningful debate over how to evaluate the sustainability of the industry in Uruguay. This has had implications for the future growth of the country's pulp and plantation industry, which continues to expand with little resistance across the country.

Conclusion

Reflections on a Changing Landscape

Within my first couple of weeks in Mercedes I was introduced to the founder of the local amateur drama society, Hugo, who was in the final stages of preparing the troupe to perform the classic Latin American tragedy, *Barranca Abajo*, written by Florencio Sánchez, a well-known early 20th century Uruguayan dramatist. A three-act production written using a *gaucho* dialect, the play follows the story of Don Zoilo, an aging rural patriarch and *estanciero* who loses his estate through the scheming of city lawyers. Left without his ranch, Don Zoilo loses the respect and affection of his wife, sister and eldest daughters, a pain exacerbated by the loss of his youngest daughter, who falls ill and dies. Abandoned by his family and left with nowhere to go, Don Zoilo decides to end his life. While the play first premiered in Buenos Aires in 1905 it arguably still resonates at some level with many people today, made apparent not only by the director's choice to stage it, but also by the full house in Mercedes' largest theatre on opening night. Like the meddling city lawyers who take away Don Zoilo's land, leaving him without a reason to live, state plans for economic and social development that do not account for the impacts on Soriano's traditional ranchers and producers is read by them as misdirected and as the result of urban-based politics that cannot truly understand the lives of its rural citizens. In the worst of cases, this imprudence has been devastating, bringing an end to communities and livelihood strategies.

Over the last two decades, the presence of pulp production and the plantation forestry that feeds it has dramatically rearranged the landscape of Uruguay's interior. The

country's seemingly endless rolling plains are now fractured by large swathes of tall, exotic trees, changing how people live and interact with and on the land. My goal in examining competing understandings of the industry's impacts has been threefold: First, I wanted to show how state formation and market logics were changing the physical and social landscape of Soriano. Secondly, the aim was to demonstrate how such processes affected the relationships between local populations, their physical environment, and the state. Finally, I wanted to understand how neoextractivism varies or, conversely, remains unchanged, from earlier neoliberal extractivist projects. My research asserts that socio-political contexts are entangled with ecological practices and thus need to be considered together. Exploring how and why local populations respond to these entanglements in the ways that they do, I note that anti-industry activists make logical arguments based on their particular interpretations of economic development, natural production, and progressive politics, which clash with the state's technical and reformed approach. As such, my research contributes to our understanding of the ways that social and political relationships and state formation projects take shape within in the context of large-scale neo-extractivist projects.

In order to explore these issues, I turned to the concept of boundary objects as defined by Susan Leigh Star. Because of the flexibility of boundary objects, which allows them to have diverse meanings for different actors, they can act either as a connection point for different social worlds or, conversely, create a division between various groups who interpret the object differently. My focus has been on the latter. Although members of the Frente Amplio government, *chaceros*, anti-industry activists, and even those working in the industry, are concerned with the development of the interior (both economic and social), thus creating a space of overlap between these different groups, how each group

envisions such development is variable. In this particular case, there are multiple boundary objects that function as hubs of contention in the context of the pulp and timber industry. From productive land to Artigas, from forestry and the natural environment to the Uruguay River and the pulp mill it supports, and even the state itself, those who support the industry and those that have fought against it have different understandings of what these boundary objects do and how they inform projects of “development.” As such, I chose to explore how these competing social worlds have formed around these boundary objects as the Frente Amplio has come to lead the Uruguayan state and, moreover, how these objects work to create a divide between the different groups, an analysis often missing in the boundary object literature. I did so by asking what circumstances lead some individuals to read the pulp and plantation industry as a precarious path to development while others to see it as representing progress.

As I argue throughout this dissertation, the emergence of these two competing positions cannot be understood without considering the country’s historical and political context. I have therefore situated my ethnographic research within broader discussions of Soriano’s history and the state’s approach to conservation and development in the interior. Chapters Two, Three, and Four turn to the past to understand contemporary concerns over the “foreignization” and concentration of productive land as a result of the expanding plantation forestry. The impacts of both of these phenomena have greatly changed the social relationships of Soriano’s rural farming communities. The social isolation and depopulation of rural Soriano that has resulted from the changing patterns of land ownership and economic policies have parallels to the neoliberal strategies that were employed in Uruguay in the mid-20th century as an answer to the growing economic crisis. A similar economic approach on behalf of the Frente Amplio was

unanticipated by many of my interlocutors, who saw the coalition as representing a break from the past. Thus, as I showed, talking about “foreignization” is thus less a critique of who owns the land than it is about what this new pattern of land ownership does.

Invoking national hero, José Artigas, in a critique of the pulp and timber industry and the resulting concentration of productive land into fewer and fewer hands does just the opposite by bringing the past into the foreground. Past promises of land reform are used by the anti-industry contingent to highlight the current lack of action from the state (or, more accurately, its counterintuitive action) in discontinuing land concentration and to push for change, as explored in Chapter Two. Current state policies encouraging plantation expansion are running counter to promises of reform, suggesting that the Frente Amplio has abandoned some of its foundational beliefs. Yet, rather than accepting the Frente’s version of Artigas, as a reformed revolutionary whose desire for social justice has been removed from its rural roots, looking to the past and Artigas’s call for land reform in the early 19th century provides anti-industry individuals the means to envision an alternative future for rural Soriano. This is not a call to revolution, however: as a country where social projects have historically filtered through the state, the use of nostalgia for the past is used to compel the Frente Amplio to take the concerns of its rural supporters seriously.

Understanding the past, including the roots of Uruguayan independence and the period of dictatorship and neoliberal policy, is also important to comprehending how the pulp and timber industry emerged as a force in Uruguay: The 1987 Forestry Law, and state policies of the early 20th century which laid the groundwork for it, may have been the catalyst for the large-scale planting of eucalyptus, but the industry has deep historical roots going back to the 19th century. As discussed in Chapter Three, tree planting was

initially carried out as a way to civilize the interior and bring it up to the standards of Europe. This idea of improving the “natural” world and bringing development to the interior through the expansion of tree coverage continues to undergird the state’s support of the plantation economy, albeit without the same explicit moral thrust. It is these particular ideas of nature and development, and how they are understood as working together, that the anti-industry farmers and activists aim to counter, even as they agree on viewing nature as a commodity ripe for economic exploitation.

However, a historical perspective on its own would not have been sufficient: new actors have emerged that complicate the process of state-led social change and I therefore needed to expand my investigation beyond a look at the co-constitutive relationship between the state and civil society. Actor-network theory, developed in the work of Latour, Callon, and Law, provides the means for taking non-human actors seriously by paying attention to moments of interaction. As Chapter Five shows, to understand a number of the negative impacts that eucalyptus plantations have had on Soriano’s land and communities, I was required to “follow the plants” (Schraeder 2010; Haraway 1997). While expanding tree coverage is still treated as beneficial by the state as its policies on the matter demonstrate, the trees themselves are a modified version of the original eucalyptus trees brought over during the period of colonization. Today’s trees still work as agents of the state, but ones with an unexpected agenda, doing more to the physical environment than what the national policies that support their expansion intended for them to do, including modifying the habitat and behaviour of the area’s wildlife, degrading the soil, and restricting livestock mobility.

Likewise, the Uruguay River, over which the international battle regarding the UPM pulp mill was fought, behaved in ways that took the industry’s impacts beyond

Uruguay's borders, situating the mill itself as yet another boundary object. The dynamic nature of the river - and therefore that of the physical boundary between Uruguay and Argentina - created fluidity between various social world categories. Recognizing the ways that the state has engaged in boundary work (Latour 1993; Jasanoff 1990), thus denying the co-production of science and politics, explains how the state was able to dismiss the anti-industry activists in Uruguay in any discussion around industry's environmental impacts. In particular, framing the anti-industry arguments as irrational and political, allegedly like the majority Argentinean protestors who were making them, worked to delegitimize their claims, regardless of the fact that, they too, relied on "expert" findings and were concerned with Uruguay's economic development.

Using theory from science and technology studies throughout these chapters without abandoning a more traditional analysis from a political economy perspective opened up the possibility of considering non-human actors and the nuances of this particular case without completely abandoning the notion that structures of power play a role in how landscapes - both physical and political - are shaped. Treating plantation forestry in Uruguay as part of an assemblage (Tsing 2005; Collier and Ong 2005; Collier 2006), rather than an endpoint of a presupposed process (for example, dispossession by accumulation), made such an approach possible. Engaging with these distinct bodies of literature also allowed me to participate in the growing field of STS studies in Latin America without abandoning my more traditional interest in state and civil society relationships in the region: I was drawn to probing the expansion of extractive industry specifically in Uruguay because of the country's particular political history and place within Latin America's so-called "pink tide" and thus a desire to understand how power and politics plays out in the daily lives of rural residents shaped my approach to this

research. Considering the process of state formation under the Frente Amplio government was therefore an equally important part of analysis.

Not much appears to have changed regarding the Uruguayan state's development strategies since I finished my fieldwork in 2012. On November 30, 2014, the national run-off vote¹¹ took place. Working with a campaign of "continuity, not change" (Haberhorn 2014), the Frente Amplio captured over 56 per cent of the total votes, giving the coalition its third consecutive victory. Part of this promised continuity includes strong state support for large-scale, foreign owned and/or financed projects as an integral strategy for economic development in Uruguay, stretching well beyond the littoral region.

Construction on UPM's second mill, to be located in the northeastern department of Cerro Largo, likely near the Tacuarí River, is expected to begin in 2017. Legislation has been set to regulate the possibility of large-scale open pit mining, bringing the proposed Aratirí iron mine one step closer to realization. A deep-water port is being built in Rocha along the country's Atlantic Coast to transport large volumes of pulp and potentially iron. I returned to Uruguay twice since completing my fieldwork, noting how environmental activists, in cooperation with community members near the proposed port and mine site, have been very vigorous in their opposition. The anti-extractive activism taking place the past couple of years seems to have gained the visibility that had virtually disappeared around the pulp and timber industry in Soriano and Río Negro by the time I arrived in the field. Voices coming from the rural interior communities appear to be gaining traction.

¹¹ In Uruguay, a party must have a minimum of 50 per cent of the votes to be elected. If no party achieves this, then a second round of voting is held for the two parties with the highest percentage of the votes. In 2014, the Frente came out of the first round with 47.2 per cent of the votes and the Blanco party with 30.6 per cent, leading to a run-off vote between these top two parties.

However, in spite of everything, support for the Frente remains strong among its traditional allies, with prominent members of *REDES - Amigos de la Tierra* and *Grupo Guayubira* even campaigning for Frente Amplio candidates when I was back in June 2014. There may be greater scepticism, but the myth of the Uruguayan state as the agent for social justice and development remains strong. For Soriano's *chacrer*os, this had led to a waiting game: waiting for land reform, for social justice, and the fulfilment of promises of rural solidarity on which the Frente Amplio was founded. What boundary objects emerge in these circumstances and whether they act as points of cohesion or division is yet to be seen.

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