

UC San Diego

UC San Diego Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

The Use of Coffee Ideology by Costa Rican News Outlets During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5m571643>

Author

Lopez Montealegre, Gloriana

Publication Date

2021

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

The Use of Coffee Ideology by Costa Rican News Outlets During the COVID-19 Pandemic

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree Master of Arts

in

Anthropology

by

Gloriana Lopez Montealegre

Committee in charge:

Professor David E. Pedersen, Chair
Professor Saiba Varma
Professor Rihan Yeh

2021

The thesis of Gloriana Lopez Montealegre is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

University of California San Diego

2021

Table of Contents

Thesis Approval Page.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
List of Figures.....	v
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Abstract of the Thesis.....	viii
Introduction.....	1
Understanding Coffee Ideology.....	5
History and Political Economy of Coffee Production in Costa Rica.....	6
Coffee, COVID-19 and Media Portrayals	26
“The Fall of the Last Bastion”: Dota as the Costa Rican Ideal.....	26
In Other Coffee News.....	33
Conclusion.....	41
Works Cited.....	44

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Poster designed by Pricilla Aguirre	1
---	---

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis was written during a pandemic. That is no small feat. Isolation, uncertainty, and confinement to a 275 square foot studio apartment in Graduate Housing are not conducive factors for writing. No work is completed alone and in these particular circumstances, I am eternally grateful for the support of the many people who were instrumental for the completion of what sometimes felt like an impossible task.

I would like to acknowledge David Pedersen as the chair of my committee. His patience, flexibility, and willingness to talk for hours about coffee were invaluable. I would also like to thank Rihan Yeh as my first reader. Her meticulous comments always pushed me to dig deeper into my ethnographic data and were incredibly helpful in sharpening my arguments. David, Rihan your perspectives were the perfect balance between exploration and conciseness, and this thesis would not be what it is without your valuable input.

A special thanks to Suzanne Brenner for her kindness, assistance, and guidance through the master's practicum and for also helping me schedule time for writing. I would have never completed my first draft without your help. I also would not have completed any drafts without the help and structure provided by the Writing Hub's writing retreats. To the facilitators of these retreats, Matt and Lauren, thank you for providing a safe and productive space to write and for showing a more compassionate approach to writing. To all attendants in these retreats, thank you for making me feel less alone in this dreadful journey.

I would also like to thank all the people who have read or heard any iteration of this thesis: my fellow cohort mates at the master's practicum, and fellow graduate students who attended the AGSA symposium, thank you your positive feedback and encouragement. Being able to share my work with my peers and receiving such caring and productive comments was an edifying

experience. A very special shoutout to Damini, Fatimah and Nathaniel, for being my cheerleaders and believing in me especially when I didn't believe in myself.

Lastly, I would like to thank my mom, Patricia, and my siblings Carolina and Carlos, for looking for books in Costa Rica, scanning them and sending them to me. Thank you for supporting my research even from afar.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The Use of Coffee Ideology by Costa Rican News Outlets During the COVID-19 Pandemic

by

Gloriana Lopez Montealegre

Master of Arts in Anthropology

University of California San Diego, 2021

Professor David E. Pedersen, Chair

At the onset of the pandemic, Costa Rican news on coffee-related issues increased. Reports touched on the impact the pandemic has had on coffee farmers, the demand for coffee pickers and the possibility of lowering national unemployment rates by hiring domestic work, in spite of the fact that coffee is not the country's greatest export nor is it the largest source of income. Coffee has been an important symbol in the Costa Rican imaginary, but why does this increased coverage arise during the pandemic? To understand this turn to coffee, I look first at the history and political economy of coffee to identify why coffee is important to Costa Rica, how that importance was

consolidated into an ideology, and how coffee lost its economic priority over the years. Then, I analyze news sources, in the form of newspaper articles and news reports, to identify the ways coffee ideology is used and reflected during the pandemic and why. I am focus in particular on a TV news report on Dota, the last canton of Costa Rica to remain without transmissions for 5 months, which highlights the area's reputation as coffee growers as one of the main motivators to keep transmissions low. I argue that media coverage of coffee in 2020 reveals a crisis in Costa Rican identity, which has been constructed around coffee. Issues of nationalism, political power, and the accuracy of coffee ideology in the present (and the past) seep through the invocations the media and the general population make.

I. Introduction

Coffee is a central aspect of Costa Rican identity. As a Costa Rican, I only drink Costa Rican coffee, and usually bring several bags of coffee back every time I visit and, in my apartment, I have a poster of a coffee plantation. In it there is a young woman, a white woman with long brown hair flowing with the wind, a basket of coffee over her head, wearing the Costa Rican national costume of a *campesina*, or peasant, (which is never used other than for patriotic holidays), picking coffee. In the lower quarter of the poster, you can find the phrase “Café de Costa Rica” (Coffee of Costa Rica). In the background there is a coffee plantation, empty of people working and picking coffee, simply the plants, a lone red tractor, and a *beneficio* (where the coffee grounds are stored). Flying over the woman are various birds: a quetzal, a *yigüirro* (Costa Rica’s national bird) and another indistinct bird. All of this is accompanied by a beautiful sunset painted in warm colors. In this picture we see two national symbols, the *yigüirro* and the national costume, and a picturesque landscape with the sunsets, the birds, and the green of the coffee plantation (Figure 1).

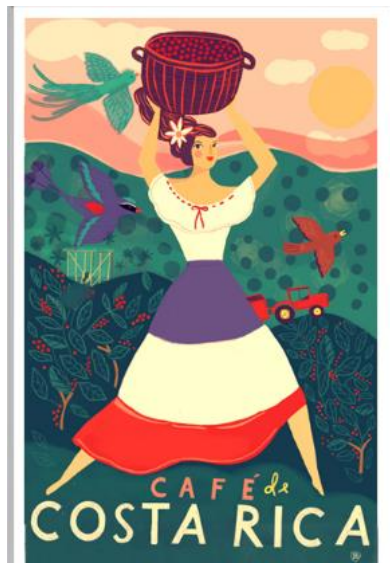


Figure 1. Poster designed by Pricilla Aguirre (photo taken from <https://holalolashop.com>)

On a Facebook post, the illustrator of this poster, Pricilla Aguirre comments that she wanted this poster to be “...emblematic. As if one day, it could become a postcard, something that made us proud of our coffee culture, our *grano de oro* (golden bean)”¹ (Holalola 2020).

On August 18th, 2020, I was sitting with my parents watching the news report program 7 Días, when a segment came on about Dota, the last of 81 cantons² in Costa Rica to report COVID-19 cases. The report lauded the efforts of the canton to prevent COVID-19 infections, which included alliances among churches, private medical practices, and cooperatives, as well as the creation of networks of care that allowed for the strict adherence to health measures such as wearing face masks and coverings as well as identifying and closing sites that could lead to possible outbreaks. The report emphasized that it was the humility of the town and the knowledge that they were not immune to the grasp of the virus that helped Dota become the “last bastion” in the fight against COVID-19. A priest from the Church of Santa María (a town in Dota) stressed the importance of minimizing the impact the virus has on the town, “*por el tema de la cosecha [de café], que es un tema muy importante*” (“The topic of the [coffee] harvest which is a very important topic”). The news reporter then explained that many people from around the country and from the neighboring countries of Panama and Nicaragua had come to work in the coffee harvest during the months of October and November. Dota, being a “coffee region by excellence”, was faced with the challenge of hiring enough people to partake in this endeavor to not lose the harvest while also keeping rates of transmission low.

¹ “¡Hola! Tenía muchas ganas de hacer otro póster sobre café, pero que fuera todo emblemático, digo yo. Como que un día fuera una postal de correo, algo que nos ponga orgullosos de nuestra cultura cafetalera, nuestro grano de oro. Este póster lo empecé en febrero y lo había dejado olvidado por ahí, hace unas semanas lo retomé para terminarlo. Me lo imagino ya en mi cocina, ¿adónde se lo imaginan ustedes?”

² The word canton is used here as a translation for the word in Spanish cantón, which is a “a subdivision of a country established for political or administrative purposes” (Oxford English and Spanish Dictionary)

Towards the end of the report, Luis Madrigal, General Manager of the coffee cooperative CoopeDota stressed that the safety mechanisms put in place are to make sure that coffee production remains the priority, to make sure that it will be able to be exported and thus keep a stable economy. This means in other words, that the exceptional efforts of the people of Dota to keep COVID-19 transmissions down is not only about the community but about coffee.

I was baffled by the sudden focus on coffee. Why did a news report whose focus was on the prevention of COVID-19 shift its attention to coffee? Why did it go into so much detail about the coffee harvest? On one hand, it makes perfect sense: as previously mentioned, coffee is a big part of the Dota economy, and protecting the harvest means also maintaining economic viability. The interesting aspect of this, is how coffee is tied to the exceptional efforts of the canton to keep a low level of transmissions, and to remain free of COVID-19 cases for 5 months.

This focus on coffee was part of a bigger trend of an increased interest in coffee harvesting and production by the media. For instance, on July 28th, 2020, the Costa Rican news site CRHoy.com published an article that informed the public that the Costa Rican legislative branch had passed a law declaring coffee the fifteenth national symbol in the economic, social, and cultural development of the nation. The article quotes the Costa Rican minister of education, Guiselle Cruz: “Coffee is an element of identity whose importance is unquestionable for the constitution of our nationality, since the dawn of our nation [coffee] was the dignified job of all the people dedicated to the planting, harvesting and commercialization of our *grano de oro* (golden bean), not just a form of subsistence but a source of justified pride³” (Staff, 2020).

³ “El café es un elemento identitario de incuestionable importancia para la constitución de nuestra nacionalidad, desde los albores de nuestra patria fue el trabajo digno de todas las personas dedicadas a la siembra, recolección y comercialización de nuestro grano de oro, no solo una forma de subsistencia sino una fuente de justificado orgullo.”

However, coffee is not the main source of income, nor is it the main export product of the country. Why is then, coffee still so important in Costa Rica, given its declining economic contribution over time? How is coffee tied to ideas of exceptionalism in Costa Rica? Why is it that coffee ideology is being drawn upon during the pandemic? How have Costa Ricans, not only the government, but also the media and people living in coffee towns wielded the symbolism of coffee?

Many anthropological works (Rausch 2005, Smith 2007) have focused on Costa Rican coffee in its exemplarity: in the ways the government has made coffee a priority by fomenting fair trade initiatives and how it has been able to successfully place itself in the global market. Others (Loría Bolaños et al. 2008; Luetchford 2008; Sick 1993, 2008; Fischer 2018) have aided in the demystification of coffee by revealing the exploitative labor policies in the reliance on migrant labor and poor organization practices by coffee cooperatives and small farmers and have also evaluated how coffee producers have responded in the face of changing (and often declining) coffee markets. How then do these two narratives—one of elite and successful coffee production and one of declining economic prosperity—affect each other and how do they manage to coexist? What is being hidden or ignored for coffee to maintain its power and influence? How have “official narratives” from the government and media been appropriated and taken a life of their own in the hands of minds of ordinary people, like me? How do these dynamics play out in the news, a site for circulation of ideological discourses, especially during a state of exception such as that of the COVID-19 pandemic?

To explore these questions, I look at the history and political economy of coffee to identify why coffee is important to Costa Rica, how that importance was consolidated into an ideology, and how coffee lost its economic priority over the years. Then I return to the news report about

Dota to identify the ways in which coffee ideology is used to highlight the exceptionality of the canton and its approach to prevent COVID-19 infections. I also look at news sources, in the form of newspaper articles and news reports, to place the story of Dota into the bigger conversation and analyze the ways in which coffee has been presented in 2020 throughout the course of the pandemic (from March 2020 to December 2020).

A. Understanding Coffee Ideology

By coffee ideology, I am referring to the discourses, values, symbols, and national narratives of coffee's role in nation building that circulate widely and pull people in. This concept is intimately related with what Topik and Wells (1998) have termed "The Second Conquest of Latin America". After independence, many Latin American countries sought to establish themselves as separate from their conquerors, which for more countries was Spain. This, together with an increased demand for raw materials in Europe, provided the opportunity for Latin American countries to enter the global market. For most countries this meant organizing all technological, economic, political, and social efforts around a single product, which in the case of Costa Rica, it became coffee. As such whole cultures around these single exports were created. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, illustrates the extent of these cultures in terms of sugar in Haiti:

Sugar was not simply the major source of revenues. It has acquired a *social culture* [original emphasis]: the socially drawn monopoly to subject to its refraction all other commodities and human beings themselves. Socially selected, socially identified, it became the principle around which human life was organized. Towns were built because of its proximity. Time was marked by its harvest. Status was linked to its possession. In Saint-Domingue [Haiti] there was a...ramified *sugar culture* [original emphasis] (Ibid, 3)

Out of this totalizing endeavor—which also came about at a period where countries, like Costa Rica, were establishing their identity as independent nations—emerge ideologies that conflate the product that allows them to insert themselves in the global economy with the nation itself.

Coffee ideology in Costa Rica, thus is tied to its exceptionality as a nation. Costa Rica is exemplary in its reputation as a one of the stable democracies in Latin America, and in being one of the few countries in the world to not have a military force. These endeavors are intimately related to coffee, as it will be shown in the history section. Costa Rica's coffee industry developed differently than it did in other Central and Latin American countries in its "democratic" nature and its rapid growth. Coffee also paved the road to the modernization of the country and its economic prosperity. As exemplified in the poster I mentioned earlier, coffee is also related to the image of the *campesino*, the hardworking peasant whose work in the coffee plantations helped build the country.

Hence, values such as hard work, humility, community, democracy, and progress —associated with coffee ideology and the formation of the nation— become important as a means to prevent more COVID-19 infections but also as a way to find meaning during the destabilizing pandemic. Unemployment rates have increased as a result of the pandemic, especially because tourism, an important contributor to the Costa Rican economy, has declined due to border closings. Coffee ideology also points to the erasure or dismissal of contradictions or inconsistencies present in the formation of said values and their practice. Issues of nationalism, political power, and the accuracy of those values in the present (and the past) seep through the invocations the media and the general population make.

II. History and Political Economy of Coffee Production in Costa Rica

In order to understand how coffee became a national symbol for Costa Rica as well as why this symbol has been mobilized in the media the way it has throughout the pandemic, it is important to look at the history of coffee's development in the country, together with the social, political, and economic transformations that accompanied it. Coffee was brought into Costa Rica in 1769 and

was not farmed for economic gain until 1808 (Pérez S. 1977, Pan American Union 1901). This means that in terms of colonial history it was quite a recent development. It was not until 1820 that the country exported coffee for the first time—a total of two sacks to Panama (Canet Brenes, 1993). Furthermore, Costa Rica did not start exporting coffee expansively until the 1840s, 20 years after its independence in 1821 (Gudmundson, 1983).

Coffee was primarily farmed in the province of San José, where the capital is located, between 1830 and 1850. It was in its expansion in the 1840s that it began to be farmed in other areas of the country, mainly the Central Valley (comprising parts of the provinces of Alajuela, Cartago, Heredia, and San José). It was precisely at this moment that coffee prices were on the rise as a result of a world increase in the demand of coffee. This marks an early and rapid introduction into the coffee market in comparison to other Central American countries (Samper 1993, 51). From 1840 to 1848 coffee exports grew from 8,341 quintals⁴ to 96,544 quintals, comprising 90% of the total value of all exports from the country in 1848 (Molina Jiménez 1993, 62). Furthermore, part of what helped in its growth was the coexistence of small- and large-scale productions, where both peasants and merchants alike had a stake in the coffee market.

Coffee was thus initially visualized as a socially “democratic” crop as it was a means of economic subsistence for a rural middle class, the *campesino*, whose coffee production relied mostly on a familial workforce (that is, family members were usually the ones who participated in the collection and farming of coffee), which was occasionally complemented by salaried workers (Samper 1993, 50). Writings of foreign travelers who visited Costa Rica in the 1850s pointed out that every person in Costa Rica aspired to be a landowner. Such observations seemed to be almost

⁴ A quintal is a unit of weight equal to 100kg.

a reality as two thirds of the population owned land (Molina Jiménez 1993, 61). This became an important component in the narrative of Costa Rica's exceptionalism as coffee plantations throughout Latin America were usually sites for the creation of an elite landholding class, and the concentration of economic and political power (Samper 1993, 50). The democratic component of coffee production lies in the fact that regardless of the size of the production, every coffee producer could participate in the economy.

It is important to point out the reasons why it was possible for so many people to be able to have land in Costa Rica. First, the low population density allowed for land to be readily available for anyone who wanted it, but this did not come without a history of indigenous dispossession. It was possible for the country to be able to privatize communal lands (owned by both the Catholic Church and indigenous populations) by 1860 because of the implementation of liberal reforms (Ibid, 55). The relatively low indigenous population did not have the resources to contest the dispossession of their lands, which were particularly attractive for coffee plantations (Ibid). Thus, land was available the expense of the indigenous peoples who were in addition excluded from participation in the coffee economy, and land acquisition.

However, the concentration of coffee wealth still remained in San José, which led to the rise of a coffee elite and the eventual creation of a coffee oligarchy, which ruled the country from 1850-1870 and whose power declined between 1879 and 1889 (Molina Jimenez 1993, 66). As such, the prevailing narrative during those years was influenced by positivist thought, which suggested that Costa Rica was underdeveloped and primitive before the introduction of coffee, but that thanks to coffee and the bourgeois influence of foreign investors, Costa Rica was able to grow and prosper. This narrative differs, but also overlaps with that of Costa Rica as a democratic

country of small landowners. The reign of the coffee oligarchy and the introduction of liberal reforms and privatization led to the creation of a rift between larger coffee producers and the small and medium coffee farmers.

The consolidation of the coffee oligarchy was the product of many factors, including the control over exporting, credit, and means of coffee processing: the wet *beneficiado* or wet coffee production plant (Ibid). Coffee beans usually need to be washed to take the hull off and let dry before it is toasted and prepared to export. This process was the most expensive and technologically advanced at the time which meant that only large producers could afford it. As such, these big companies would get loans from British investors to acquire the technology. In turn the larger producers became the *beneficiadores*, who would process the beans for medium and small coffee farmers in exchange for the total share of the harvest, whose export would pay the larger debt contracted from abroad (Ibid). This led to unfair treatment and abuse from the part of larger producers to small and medium coffee farmers. Thus, although small and medium coffee plantations predominated in Costa Rica, therefore a more democratic coffee growing endeavor, it was the control over the means of production that allowed for the creation of an oligarchy.

From 1840 to 1890, coffee was the only export product in Costa Rica (Canet Brenes, 1993). It is not until the end of the 19th century that banana exports and other agricultural and industrial production start taking over the Costa Rican economy (Samper 1993, 52). Interestingly enough, these dates coincide, for the most part, with the rise and fall of the coffee oligarchy. The impact of the coffee oligarchy does not stop with the realm of the economic and its relationship to small and medium coffee farmers, but it also had cultural and political implications. These families occupied positions in the government and when they were not in these positions, other civilians and military

were only able to enter government positions with the approval of such coffee families (Molina Jiménez 1993, 67). Although the government had invested in the development of coffee since its introduction (Canet Brenes, 1993), it was not until the 1850s that coffee, figuratively and literally in the form of the oligarchy, took over the government.

The cultural transformations that took place during the rule of the coffee oligarchy were mostly because of the foreign origins of most of the large coffee producers. Since many of the large coffee investors at the dawn of its expansion came from Europe and other countries in America, by 1935 about one third of the beneficiadores were either foreigners or descendants of the initial foreign investors who came to the country in the 1830s (Ibid, 63). In addition to economic capital, these investors brought with them Enlightenment ideals and the adoption of political economy and liberalism as the predominant ideology. The presence of foreign capital in Costa Rica, thus was not quantitatively significant, in terms of the number of foreigners present in the country, but it was qualitatively impactful. It led to the *extranjerización* (foreignization) and more specifically the Europeanization of Costa Rica, and the replacement of peasant ideology. Peasant ideology was associated with a Catholic Spanish past and represented hard work and a more artisanal way of life (Ibid, 65). By contrast, a more European, non-Spanish Costa Rica was focused on the replication of non-Spanish ways of life, as exemplified by the construction of the National Theater (*Teatro Nacional*) that was modeled on the Paris Opera House ("Teatro Nacional De Costa Rica" 2014), which was built with the money that came from coffee exports, and consumption of European goods such as jam from Westphalia, cheese from the Netherlands and eventually the consumption of coffee itself (Ibid, 64). Coffee was initially meant solely for European consumption, but it was in the effort to replicate European ways of life that the product of Costa Rican labor was to also be enjoyed by Costa Ricans (Vega Jimenez, 2004).

As previously mentioned, the prevailing narrative during those years was one where the introduction of coffee and the bourgeois influence of foreign investors ushered in the entrance of Costa Rica to the world. Such a narrative still remained 100 years later as Canet Brenes, in his 1993 report about the evolution of coffee and its current state in Costa Rica, writes: “We can express that our *grano de oro* helped consolidate the way to peace, coexistence and development⁵”, despite the fact that such development was only possible due to foreign influence. Furthermore, it does contain some truth. It is important to point out that such ideologies were most predominant in San Jose, the country’s capital, and the center of coffee production. It is also in San Jose that the country begins its process of urbanization, and the creation of an urban culture that contributed to the creation of the rift between smaller peasant farmers and the *beneficiadores*.

Small and medium coffee farmers, however, start gaining more prominence and become an important contributor to the formation of the collective imaginary of Costa Rican national identity in the 20th century (Molina Jimenez, Acuña Ortega). Victor Hugo Acuña (1986), looks at major movements and conflicts small and medium coffee farmers participated in from 1900 to 1961 and identifies 5 key movements: the first one emerges from 1932-1936, then in 1933, 1944, 1951 and finally in 1961 (140). These major conflicts are mostly either against the *beneficiadores*, who were a monopoly or a trust that had to be disbanded, or against the Costa Rican government, who according to farmers was not efficient enough and levied too many taxes on coffee production. It is important to point out that in the fights against the latter, small and medium coffee producers did unite with the *beneficiadores* as they shared similar interests, and they also expected the government to intervene and arbitrate any disagreements that rose with the *beneficiadores* (Ibid).

⁵ “Podemos expresar que nuestro grano de oro ayudó a consolidar el camino de la paz, la convivencia y el desarrollo”

This means that the relationship between these three entities was not fixed, but they relied on one another to accomplish their goals and further their interests, thus pointing to the initial idea of coffee being a “democratic” crop. No one entity was imposing their vision and in the case that any of the interests were jeopardized, alliances would be created in order to restore a balance of power. Coffee was then a field of tension in which power struggles between the *beneficiadores* and the smaller producers were played out, yet these struggles were also shaped by ideological discourses around peace, democracy, and economic prosperity.

Acuña Ortega writes that from 1900 to 1961 some sign of social tension emerged almost every year in the coffee world (1986, 140). He also locates one of the first larger instances where these power struggles play out in anti-fiscal movements against the government in 1922. Although he does not provide any additional information about it, Molina Jiménez also points out that in 1920 the fight for an 8-hour workday began in urban contexts, which would be a possible reason for the dissatisfaction from the small and medium coffee farmers (1993, 67). Shortage of laborers as a result of Costa Rica’s small population allowed for small and medium coffee farmers to rely mostly on family and community ties to carry out the labor of the plantation (Cardoso, 1978). However, they also increasingly started to also depend on hired labor or *jornaleros*. Between 1864 and 1892 the percentage of *jornaleros*, who were part of the economically active population, grew from 24.9 to 36.5% and grew to 40% by 1927 (Molina Jiménez 1993, 63), and in 1883 there were 18,278 *jornaleros* for 7,479 estate-owners (Cardoso 1978, 178). Using the 1883 data would place the number of available *jornaleros* at 2 for every estate-owner in the country, driving prices for labor from 7 *pesos* in 1844 to 25 to 30 *pesos* in 1869-70 (Ibid). As such, attempts to regularize working hours for *jornaleros* meant a financial burden for the small and medium coffee producers which would also be exacerbated by increased taxation.

For small and medium coffee producers, the dissatisfaction was also caused by the lack of recognition of their importance to the success of the *beneficiadores*. In 1920, the Coffee Farmer Union of Cartago expressed: “The public knows well that until now, the farmers, or rather, their labor, have been the steps by which the exporters have climbed to the pinnacle of their wealth⁶” (Acuña Ortega 1986, 142).” The coffee exporters, otherwise known as the large producers or *beneficiadores*, reaped the majority of the wealth from coffee leaving the smaller producers to face the burden of increasing labor costs and lack of true recognition. It is also important to point out that the union speaks about the backs of the farmers, *los agricultores*, and not the *jornaleros* that the *beneficiadores* climbed to reach the top. The labor of the *jornaleros* here has been obscured in favor of that of the producers. Ironically, some small coffee farmers also worked as *jornaleros* to supplement their income in the few neighboring large coffee plantations (Cardoso 1978, 181). This means that although some small producers were also laborers, the most valuable identity for them was that of the *agricultor*, which also shows the porous nature of class structures in Costa Rica.

In the 1930s, as the world faced an economic crisis, coffee farmers organized against the larger producers against the abuses they were subjected to by the *beneficiadores* and to demand for more just coffee prices (Molina Jiménez 1993, 67). This period marks the beginning of a more formalized organization from the part of small and medium coffee farmers as a more solid ideology becomes apparent (Acuña Ortega 1986, 140). Part of their strategy relied on identifying family farms and the small coffee farmer with democracy and the future of Costa Rica (Molina Jimenez 1993, 68). Molina Jimenez argues that such an ideology was led by the most prosperous and educated circles of coffee producers who were able to become professionals and intellectuals. It is

⁶ “...bien sabe el público que hasta ahora han sido los agricultores, o más bien ha sido su trabajo, la escala por la cual los exportadores han subido al pináculo de la riqueza”.

from such circles that the main leaders of the movement that began in 1932 that lawyer and major spokesperson, Manuel Marín Quirós, and lawyers and politicians Andrés Venegas and Juvenal Fonseca emerged (Ibid). These intellectuals, using the existing discourse of small property as the bulwark of society, argued that with the encroachment of the *beneficiadores*, the country was facing the threat of the disappearance of small property. It was in small property that lay the equality among Costa Ricans, as Marín Quirós said: “land was divided in almost as many parts as there are inhabitants” and thus they rely on democratic institutions to guarantee the conservation of these small plots of land; the division of root property, [is] the base and secret of social coexistence in this country⁷” (Ibid).

Such efforts led to the creation of the *Instituto de Defensa del Café* (Institute for the Defense of Coffee) (Canet Brenes, 1993) in 1933, which aided in regulating and protecting the coffee industry. The creation of the *Instituto de Defensa del Café* shows the importance of coffee as expressed by Marín Quirós in 1932: “Coffee is everything in Costa Rica, we cannot live without the coffee industry. From the most unhappy *jornalero* to the President of the Republic and the most opulent millionaire, we all depend on that industry⁸” (Acuña Ortega 1986, 150). These ideals were later adopted by young intellectuals and politicians in the late 1930s and early 1940s, especially important in the development of one of the current main two parties in Costa Rica, the *Partido Liberación Nacional* (PLN, National Liberation Party) (Molina Jiménez 1993, 68).

⁷ “Es casi desconocido el terrateniente [y] tenemos la fortuna de ver dividida la tierra casi en tantas partes como pobladores hay... apegado a esa heredad más o menos grande, más o menos reducida, vive el costarricense... preocupado... de la existencia de las instituciones democráticas que le garantizan la conservación de su pequeño predio... la división de la propiedad raíz [es] base y secreto de la convivencia social en nuestro país...”

⁸ “El café es todo en Costa Rica, sin la industria del café no vivimos. Desde el más infeliz *jornalero*, hasta el Presidente de la República y el más opulento millonario, todos dependemos de esa industria”

Following these efforts, another roadblock for small and medium coffee producers arose. Although up to 1940 small and medium coffee farmers constantly asked the government for intervention to resolve coffee pricing and financing issues, the government became the main source of conflict during this decade (Acuña Ortega, 1987, 143). The 1940s in Costa Rica were known for the introduction of revolutionary social reforms, including the implementation of a work code and minimum wage for salaried workers or *jornaleros* (Ibid, 144). It is under these circumstances that coffee farmers allied with beneficiadores in order to fight these reforms. According to newspaper articles in 1944 compiled by Acuña, all coffee producers protested in front of the *Instituto de Defensa del Café*, claiming that they could not sustain more expenses such as a minimum wage for *jornaleros* and that paying them more than 0.4 *colones* per day (which amounts to around 12 *colones* per month) would lead them to bankruptcy⁹ (Ibid, 156). Furthermore, more than 100 letters were written by more than 3000 producers to the government pointing out the economic stress that a salary increase would cause (Ibid). To the coffee producer's dismay, the social reforms remained and were extended to the creation of government entities such as the *Caja Costarricense del Seguro Social* which provided free healthcare to all workers, and the founding of the country's first public university, the University of Costa Rica.

Two key components of small and medium coffee producers' ideology become salient as a result of these reforms: antibureaucratic sentiments as well as anticommunist ones. Social reforms meant the growth of the Costa Rican state bureaucracy which Acuña argues was frowned upon by coffee producers as it represented the encroachment of the urban and technical into the rurality of coffee production. Public employees were considered parasites of the state who abandoned the countryside to "sell out" to easy work. Thus, it was considered that the only true

⁹ Minimum wage in 1944 was set at 100 *colones* per month (Cerdas Albertazzi, 1995)

source of work and social mobility was land and the production of coffee as it provided economic independence from the state. This connects to their anticommunist sentiments, as they believed that the key to Costa Rica's exceptionalism and equity lied in the people's ability to have their own land and work on it. Small and medium coffee producer's principles of equity were rooted in a mercantile utopia in which they were allies and partners with the *beneficiadores* and there was a "rational distribution of earnings and equitable compensation of all human effort as well as the disappearance of the troglodyte systems of overwhelming and impious capitalism¹⁰" (Acuña Ortega 1986, 148). Thus, if their land were taken away from them by larger coffee producers, the threat of becoming communists was more prominent as they would become proletarianized. This rationale was used throughout the 30s and 40s as a means of scaring the *beneficiadores* out of taking their lands and at the same time, call for the government to reduce the fiscal load and social responsibilities of smaller coffee producers.

Why is this important? The president in power at the time was Rafael Ángel Calderón Guardia, who was backed up by the coffee oligarchies (Paige, 1997), yet later decided to focus on creating policy support the less fortunate with the social reforms. In order to pass these reforms, Calderón Guardia allied himself with the Catholic Church and Communist Party leader Manuel Mora Valverde. As previously mentioned, this did not please coffee producers in general. General discontent as a result other moment of political unrest led to a civil war in 1948 which lasted a few months yet was an important moment in Costa Rican history that also marked the introduction of coffee ideology into the government. Although the coffee oligarchy had previously been involved in government affairs, it was the ideology of small and medium coffee producers that made its way

¹⁰ "Antes que adversarios los productores cafetaleros preferían ser socios de los beneficiadores en un plano de 'distribución racional de las ganancias' y sobre la base de la 'equitativa compensación de todo esfuerzo humano y la desaparición de los sistemas trogloditas del capitalismo avasallador e impío'".

into politics both in terms of political representation and the consolidation of the belief that made them (and coffee) instrumental to the social stability and progress of the country. José Manuel Peralta, a coffee farmer, and Municipal President of the canton of Grecia declared: “I believe that fighting for the coffee industry is equal to fighting for the tricolor flag or the shield of our nation, since coffee is the basis of our economy and without our economy there is no freedom¹¹” (Acuña Ortega 1986, 150). As the coffee industry (and by extension the Costa Rican economy) went, so did the country and the reinforcement of its democratic values of freedom.

José Figueres Ferrer seized power after the civil war, drafted a new constitution, which ushered in female vote and abolished the army, and thus marked an important shift in Costa Rican politics and the creation of the Second Republic. He created the National Liberation Party (PLN), which as previously mentioned, had been influenced by the thoughts of coffee advocates Manuel Marín Quirós, Andrés Venegas and Juvenal Fonseca. A new narrative of the formation of the country and the role coffee had in it was introduced with the new government and the new republic. In opposition to the liberal, oligarchic narrative of progress, whereby coffee developed Costa Rica, the new narrative was centered around the small landowner whose values of equality and family were overpowered by the coffee oligarchy, which corrupted politics and the general Costa Rican way of life (Molina Jiménez 1993, 69). It was also in 1948, the *Instituto de Defensa del Café* was changed into *Oficina del Café de Costa Rica* (Office of Costa Rican Coffee), a semiautonomous organism ascribed to the Ministry of Economy with the mission of direction and controlling national coffee activity. This change in name and its connection to the Ministry of Economy point

¹¹ “Yo considero que luchar por la industria cafetalera es igual a luchar por la bandera tricolor o el escudo de nuestra patria, pues el café es la base de nuestra economía y sin economía no hay libertad”.

to a series of transformations that were ushered in with the Figueres government and subsequent PLN governments.

Figueres and the National Liberation party sought to create a new Costa Rican agroexport and industrial economy, which also initiated a profound transformation of the coffee economy (Paige 1997, 258). Credit was diverted to small and medium coffee producers and a program for the systematic research of coffee was initiated in 1950, under the direction of the Office of Coffee and in conjunction with the Ministry of Agriculture (Ibid, Perez S., 1977). The head of the Department of Agronomy of Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry (MAG), Carlos González Orias, restructured the department by creating different sections, one of them dedicated solely to coffee research. Taking into consideration the low budgets the Coffee Section (*Sección de Café*) had, the MAG worked with farmers from around the country to carry out experiments in their lands which helped with the adoption of new techniques, as farmers were most likely to accept new practices if they were able to personally verify its effectiveness. As such, the Coffee Section was able to establish regional agencies to study coffee related issues in the main coffee areas: they established two agencies in San José, and one in Alajuela, Heredia, Cartago, and Naranjo. In 1953, an additional agency was created in Turrialba at the request of Association of Coffee Farmers of Turrialba (*Asociación de Cafetaleros de Turrialba*) (Perez S 1977, 172). The research program established by the Ministry of Agriculture focused on improving the following aspects regarding coffee farming: nutrition, genetic improvement, pests, illnesses and weed management, cultural practices (such as planting distance, plant management, and shade regulation), technical assistance and dissemination of results in the form of publications (Ibid, 173).

Research and developments in these areas proved to be highly successful as between 1950 and 1980, Costa Rica became the most efficient and lowest cost coffee producer in Latin America and the entire world, having the best average production per area of Arabica Coffee (Paige 1997, 258). As a result of the research efforts and extensive field trials, 10 high production seeds were created and used in coffee plantations throughout the country (Pérez S. 1977, 176). Furthermore, reforms under subsequent PLN governments such as the development of cooperatives for marketing, credit, processing and eventual export through preferential bank credit and exemptions from taxes on profits and agricultural inputs, aided in the growth of coffee production (Ibid). Technical developments expanded production but also caused conflict between Costa Rica and the International Coffee Organization from 1962 to 1989. Coffee production was regulated by the International Coffee Agreement which assigned production quotas to member countries in order to regulate price fluctuations by controlling production (Ibid). However, the agreement mostly favored the largest producing nation, Brazil and the largest consuming nation, the United States. This meant that production quotas were larger for countries like Brazil, yet as Costa Rica started expanding its production capacity and its efficiency, it was no longer satisfied with the quota assigned by the ICA.

It is also important to point out that a year before the conflicts with the International Coffee Organization began, in 1961, the Law no. 2762 had been passed in the Costa Rican legislature, which provided a regime of relationships between producers, *beneficiadores*, and exporters (Canet Brenes, 1983). This law sought to create equitable relations between producers, *beneficiadores* and exporters thus ensuring a “rational and true” participation of each sector while also acknowledging the law’s responsibility to protect the coffee producers as the weakest and most vulnerable to the other two sectors (Esquivel Mora, 2002). This could be seen as a legacy from the protests and

tensions between coffee farmers and beneficiadores. Luis Alberto Monge, a member of the legislative assembly who presented the law in 1961 comments on the importance of regimenting the relations by stressing the importance of small coffee producers in the preservation of democratic institutions and the bedrock of Costa Rican economic and social prosperity:

Various social experiences, especially in Costa Rica, show that the existence of the strong nuclei of the small land holders constitute a moderating element in social and economic development. In addition, and also [sic], in the case of Costa Rica, the small property holder is a *force of social and political equilibrium* [my emphasis], and by reflection of strengthening democratic institutions. In general terms, the areas of the country where small landowners have economic and political force, the exotic and totalitarian ideas have not been able to penetrate¹². (Acuña Ortega 1986, 153)

Another contributing factor to the development of fairer relationships between producers and farmers was the cooperative movement driven by the Alliance for Progress programs implemented by US President John F. Kennedy starting in 1961. As a general doctrine for development, the Alliance for Progress sought to foment some form of agrarian reform and redistribution of resources to the poor via the formation of cooperatives, as a response to the Cuban revolution of 1959, and thus to disperse tensions in the Latin American region (Sick 1993a, 7). Cooperatives were seen as a way for medium and small coffee farmers to take control of coffee processing and get rid of the beneficiadores as the middlemen. Furthermore, cooperatives were seen as a means to increase the standard of living of its members, increase personal savings and social funds, as well as promoting education and solidarity of its members (Sick 1993b).

¹² “Varias experiencias sociales, especialmente en Costa Rica, demuestran que la existencia de los núcleos fuertes de los pequeños propietarios de la tierra constituyen un elemento moderador en el desarrollo económico y social. Además y también en el caso de Costa Rica, el pequeño propietario es *una fuerza de equilibrio político y social*, y por reflejo de fortalecimiento de las instituciones democráticas. En términos generales, las zonas del país en donde los pequeños propietarios tienen fuerza económica y política, las ideas exóticas y totalitarias nunca han podido penetrar.”

In terms of the domestic realm, amid this conflict, in 1982, the government started to adopt a more neoliberal approach to the economy, which according to Guido Cruz and Castro Sanchez, led to the neglect and almost abandonment of the agricultural sector that supplies national consumption (2007, 11). However, in 1985, the *Oficina del Café* transformed into *Instituto del Café de Costa Rica* (ICAFE) whose most important task is to make sure that the “Costa Rican coffee farmer receives a just treatment according to the real value of its product”. The ICAFE (as it is currently still functioning) controls all the process from the *beneficio* (or coffee mill) to export and commercialization of coffee as well as determining the price of liquidation that beneficiadores should pay to producers (Canet Brenes, 1993). In addition, this change highlights the recognition of the contributions of coffee production to the national economy. The change in name from “office” to “institute” is also a recognition of the increased involvement of the state and the “primordial” role the institution plays in the regulation of coffee production (Esquivel Mora 2002, 61). This involvement, however, was geared towards improving coffee as an export product rather than strengthening national industry.

Finally, returning to Costa Rican involvement in the ICA, Paige (1997) writes that “by 1989 Costa Rica was selling more than 40 percent of its crop to markets outside the ICA at prices half or less of the ICA price” (260). Coffee farmers and producers thus decided to withdraw from the ICA since they believed that they could not fare worse in the free market since they provided “low costs, high efficiency, and quality coffee” (Ibid). However, this was not the case. When coffee quotas were suspended on July 3rd, 1989, the price of coffee collapsed from \$140 per hundredweight in June to \$70, and eventually recovered to the low \$80s (Ibid, 261). By 1989 40% of the crop was produced and processed by small-holder cooperatives with ample state credit and technical assistance (Ibid, 258). The creation of cooperatives had broken the monopoly of the

beneficiadores, placed small scale coffee production at the forefront of the Costa Rican economy but due to the country's exit from the ICA, placed cooperatives in a very vulnerable place.

Large scale processors were able to survive the price fall, yet it was not as easy for small and medium producers. According to interviews of coffee producers and government officials carried out by Paige, any producer who yielded less than 30 quintals per manzana would lose money when the national average was about 20 and as a result many small and medium producers started to abandon production because they did not have the resources to adequately care for their lands (Ibid, 262). So, as the monopoly of the beneficiadores had been finally broken, small and medium coffee producers suffered the devastating blow of unregulated coffee prices, which led to the rise of a “new class of agro-industrial mega-processors” (Ibid, 264). “The harmonious, egalitarian mythical world of la *cultura cafetalera* seems far removed from the unregulated competition, mega-processing, and transnational capital of the emerging neo-liberal economic order in Costa Rica—a new world which the Liberación [PLN] reforms created” (Ibid, 271). Paige even quotes one of the coffee producers he interviewed: “there has always been an egalitarian sense, a sense of community here, but we have lost a lot of that in the last twenty years. We became a lot more competitive” (Ibid). The coffee industry went from a small family and community-oriented endeavor to an impersonal, large-scale production. The narrative of small land owning *campesinos*, working with their family as the bedrock of the coffee economy and by extension, the nation, is no longer a reality.

The coffee crisis from 1999 to 2005 affected small and medium coffee producers more than any previous crisis due to a decline in coffee prices as well as uncertainty in different areas of the national economy (Guido Cruz and Castro Sanchez 2007, 9). At the time of Guido Cruz's

and Castro Sanchez's publication coffee producers received 1% or less than 1% of the price of a coffee cup sold at a coffee shop and would barely receive 6% of the price of a bag of coffee sold at a supermarket or grocery store (Ibid). The most stable and profitable market after the collapse, seemed to be that of gourmet coffee (Paige 1997, 261). However, the Costa Rican model for coffee production was not suitable to successfully enter that market:

The productive system that had once served Costa Rican small farmers so well—cooperatives that were able to combine coffee from large numbers of farmers to allow them to export directly and provide technical assistance to improve production—now are something of a liability as small farmers seek opportunities in the new world of specialty coffees, organic production and fairly traded coffees” (Smith 2007, 218).

Costa Rican coffee is too mild and balanced to compete in specialty coffee market which was looking for more distinctive cups of coffee, that came from a specific farm or a specific microclimate. Central American coffee in general and more specifically Costa Rican coffee was being edged out by the more distinctive Asian and African flavors (Ibid, 213). Costa Rican coffee was thus deemed too “modernized” due to the previous optimization processes and had lost the authentic, artisanal, and idiosyncratic tastes that the new market demanded.

The country currently places as the 14th largest coffee producer of the world producing 1,429,000 60kg sacks of coffee in the 2018-2019 harvest, in contrast to Brazil, the world's largest coffee producer, yielding 62,925,000 60kg sacks of coffee during the same time (ICAFFE, 2019). More coffee is currently destined for national consumption as in the 1994-1995 harvest only 9.4% (307,818 46kg sacks) was used for national consumption and in the 2018-2019 harvest that number increased to 16.8% (278 764.61 46kg sacks) (Ibid). This shows how coffee production is no longer as expansive as it once was. Coffee has been replaced by a more diverse range of products including nontraditional crops such as pineapple and flowers, industrial exports such as microchips and most importantly, tourism (Sick, 2008)

Costa Rican coffee has entered the Fair Trade and Sustainable coffee markets (ICAFFE). Fair Trade and Sustainable coffee practices marks a transition from the more technical and efficiency-based system to one more focused on social and environmental concerns: “Theoretically, premium prices that socially and environmentally conscious consumers pay help small and disadvantaged producers earn higher and more reliable incomes from commodity production” (Ibid, 194). Although Fair Trade has been around since the 1970s and 1980s it was not until the coffee crisis of the 1990s that it became a more attractive option for coffee farmers in Costa Rica. Furthermore, the cooperative model, and the fight for more equitable labor relations that occurred between the 1940s and the 1960s, as well as the predominance of small farmers allowed for the social consciousness aspect to become easier to fulfill (Smith 2007). The main challenge for small fair trade and sustainability-based farming thus became the implementation of environmentally conscious practices.

Given that the certification process for fair trade, sustainable and organic markets is expensive and requires radically transforming the coffee plantation, very few cooperatives and small coffee farmers have been able to successfully enter the market (Ibid.). Given that every coffee farmer around the world gets paid the same amount of money per sack and that the Costa Rican cost of living as well as labor is higher than in other countries, very few farmers see profit in the fair-trade market (Ibid). Thus, to survive some farmers have opted to diversify their crops while others have tried to focus on the local market (rather than export) and plan to offer coffee plantation tours and to open coffee shops for the many tourists who pass through their town. Those who do so, enter then the tourism industry by providing an experience of coffee to foreigners who visited the area and according to Sick (2008): “the argue they can sell their coffee with higher value added directly to visiting consumers from the North” (202). The creation of value in coffee

by foreign consumption and investment, a trend seen in the initial stages of coffee production in Costa Rica is seen in the transition of these farmers to a more tourist-based endeavor.

After the 1980s not many works have focused on coffee production and political economy in Costa Rica, which is probably due to the reduced impact it started to have in the economy and in Costa Rican politics in general. One pattern that can be seen in this history is the predominance of elites in the construction of Costa Rican coffee ideologies. Although there are different levels of elites—the higher status of the *beneficiador* as the initial exporter of coffee, the varying importance of the large, medium, and small coffee farmers and producers, the political elites composed of children of coffee producers—it is only them who are seen as active participants in the formation and mobilization of coffee ideals. Most of the works on the history of coffee and coffee discourses in Costa Rica are centered around the producers and farmers of coffee, in their role as independent landowners and active participants in construction of the country.

Small and medium coffee farmers are thus the embodiment of Costa Rican identity and in turn, Costa Ricans are the ones who display the values of hard work, equality, community, and democracy present in coffee ideology. However, the *jornalero*, is not seen in the formation of these ideologies and is actually obscured in them. As people who did not contribute to the creation of coffee ideology, they are not the true Costa Ricans and in turn the true Costa Rican is not a *jornalero*. In addition, literature on the history of coffee does not mention at what point in Costa Rican history does the labor force become foreign and migrant based. The history of coffee and its retelling is nationally focused, yet also formed and validated by foreigners, not in the construction or reproduction of it but in its consumption. The nation is constituted between two figures of foreignness: the consumer and the laborer, one of whom is celebrated, and the other is erased.

As I will show in the following section, it is precisely on these two figures of foreignness that the news report on Dota draws upon to highlight its exceptionality. Migrants, as a source of contagion, become manageable assets while the humble and hardworking population of Dota focuses on what matters: keeping COVID-19 transmissions levels low to attract the outside audience who visits the area and to ensure that coffee reaches the foreign consumer as expected.

III. Coffee, COVID-19, and Media Portrayals

A. “The Fall of the Last Bastion”: Dota as the Costa Rican Ideal

Looking at the news report by 7 Días, titled “*La caída del ultimo bastion*”, the fall of the last bastion, helps exemplify the exceptionalizing tropes of coffee ideology that are not only shown in terms of COVID-19 prevention but also in terms of community building and economic progress formed around coffee. However, it also shows the elite construction of such ideologies, and the contradictions present in them, such as the exclusion of laborers and the fragility of its dependence on an international or outside audience.

After the airing of the news report on television, it has been made available on the Teletica’s website. The byline accompanying the video report on the website reads:

The canton of Dota was free of COVID-19 for months, until August 12th, 2020, when the first case was registered. The hypotheses on the causes vary from the geographic location of the canton to the behavior of people in the community. Far from considering themselves immune, the inhabitants of Dota knew that in any moment the first case could be registered, which is why they assure that they always took seriously every indication emitted by the authorities. How did this site manage to remain the last bastion to resist the pandemic?¹³ (Colombari, 2020)

¹³ El cantón de Dota estuvo libre de COVID-19 durante meses, hasta el 12 de agosto del 2020, cuando se registró el primer caso. Las hipótesis sobre las causas son varias, desde la posición geográfica del cantón hasta el comportamiento de las personas de la comunidad. Lejos de considerarse inmunes, los habitantes de Dota sabían que en cualquier momento podría registrarse el primer caso, por lo que aseguran que siempre se tomaron en serio, todas las indicaciones emitidas por las autoridades.

¿Cómo logró este sitio mantenerse como el último bastión que resistió frente a la pandemia?

The question that the news report seeks to answer is how the community managed to remain free of COVID-19 cases for 5 months since the first case was diagnosed in Costa Rica. The structure of the report suggests that there are three main factors: (1) the people and the alliances created by community leaders, (2) coffee production, and (3) tourism.

The first frames of the report show women walking around what one could assume is the town of Dota, wearing either face shields, face masks or both of these protective devices. The next frames include a road sign showing some the towns that are in Dota: Hacienda (shortened to Hda.) de la Lucha, 11km, Frailes 15km and Santa (shortened to Sta.) María de Dota 27km, and then a panoramic view of the canton from the air is shown, where several small houses and few roads are spread around a sea of greenery. As these images are shown, the narrator, a female voice, which is probably that of the author of this piece, Stefanía Colombari, introduces the story asking: “What makes a community survive the contagion of COVID-19 for 159 days?” (Ibid.). She expands on this question by adding that the community never felt safe against the threat of the virus, and it is probably their cautious attitude that helped.

After this, an image of a church is shown, followed by interviews of neighbors of the area, all anonymized. Between takes of the faces of the neighbors the audience is shown images of people entering grocery stores and having their temperatures taken, and men wearing facemasks while riding their bicycles or driving their cars, highlighting the sense of community. Although sometimes images of statues, or the church serve as transitions between the interviewees, the people remain at the center of the first seven minutes of the news report. It is also worth noting that in the section where a doctor is interviewed about the measures taken to mitigate the impact of COVID-19, there are very few transitions from his face to other illustrative images, and his interview makes up around 3:30 minutes of the 7 minutes of the initial section. However, the

constant return to images of people emphasize that it was in part the humility of the town and the knowledge that they were not immune to the grasp of the virus that helped Dota become the “last bastion” in the fight against COVID-19.

The visual focus on the people is also paralleled in the content of the interviews as the mayor, the doctor, the priest (all identified by their names and positions) and the neighbors speak about the importance of the people working together to help one another. The mayor, Leonardo Chacón, comments that part of the pressure to adhere to prevention guidelines lies on the fact that people in Dota all know each other; “we are all basically family” he adds in this section. The doctor, Dr. Jorge Roldán, also mentions, “we are a small community, we know each other very well”. He also shared that the community identified the people who could not afford to buy face masks and between the three municipalities of the area and the three largest cooperatives of the area and the three parishes, did a campaign to collect face masks to give to the identified people. They also wrote down the names and the addresses of these people in order to renew their facemasks and also took the opportunity to do health promotion.

At around minute 7, halfway through the report, the narrator introduces a priest, Juan Carlos Quirós, that according to the narrator, will recount how the church has helped in the prevention efforts in a community that is considered to be religious. It is not until the priest is interviewed that the topic of coffee is mentioned. He stresses that the church implemented measure of social distancing, hand washing and the eventual closure of the churches and the transition to virtual mass due to the topic of the harvest, (mentioned in minute 8:36) as if following a train of random association. Immediately after the priest says this, the next frame features coffee berries being poured into a container, a man closes said container and the following frame shows a sign that says “Cafetal/Coffee Plantation”. Colombari begins the segment by saying:

In October and November, every year, people from all parts of Costa Rica and also foreigners enter the country, including this area, for the coffee harvest and Dota, as a coffee region par excellence, the challenge currently is, paradoxically, to hire enough people to avoid losing the harvest and at the same time make sure that these people do not represent an increase in transmissions in the community (Ibid).

More images of coffee berries, leaves, and people carrying sacks of coffee follow this statement.

In the 50 seconds that the mayor of Dota talks about coffee, 20 seconds focus on his face and the following 30 are images of coffee berries and people picking them but zooming into the coffee.

The mayor comments:

From that moment [the day the first case of COVID-19 was identified in Costa Rica] we created the regional COVID commission...many approaches with [the ministry of] health, *Fuerza Publica* [the police], *La Caja*¹⁴...in this way, the owners of the farms and those who are going to come have to be able to give an absolute traceability to the entrance and sojourn that they will have within our farms or coffee plantations in that period so that it is of much less impact¹⁵ (Colombari, 2020).

The theme of forming alliances seen in the first part is also repeated here, yet in this case the motivation behind these is geared not towards the well-being of the community but for the protection of the coffee harvest, whose success relies on migrant workers.

These images of coffee even serve as a transition between the mayor's comments and those of Luis Madrigal, general manager of COOPEDOTA, one of the major coffee cooperatives in the area. Again, in the minute that the manager spoke, about 10 seconds are focused on him and the rest includes aerial views of coffee plantations with focus on the berries, once again and the greenery surrounding coffee plantations. His words also echo those of the mayor. After he explains

¹⁴ *La Caja* is commonly used to refer to *the Caja Costarricense del Seguro Social*, the public health system of Costa Rica.

¹⁵ Desde ese momento creamos la comisión COVID regional...muchos acercamientos con salud, fuerza pública, la caja...para así lograr tener que los dueños de las fincas y los que van a venir, poderle dar una trazabilidad absoluta al ingreso y a la estadía que van a tener dentro de nuestras fincas o cafetales en ese periodo para que sea de muchísimo menor impacto, la infección que vamos a tener definitivamente en la recolección

the 3 types of people who are involved in the coffee collection process, he focuses on the Ngöbe-Buglé population, whose migration into the country is the main concern:

It is the Ngöbe immigrant from the Panama region, Ngöbe-Buglé, who also already have to have the binationality card, they have to have the pass and a whole process to enter the country under a regulation that gives traceability of access to the farm where it will be with the producer who has to pick it up directly at the border or at the national site where they have already done their quarantine process¹⁶ (Ibid).

The Ngöbe population is an indigenous group who live between Costa Rica and Panama. This resonates with the earlier history of race and indigenous dispossession. Furthermore, when he is being featured again towards the end of his commentary, he is looking at coffee leaves and walking between coffee bushes. The following frame features people wearing face masks and face shields packing coffee in bags for its distribution; the emphasis is placed in the packaging center. The repetition of images of coffee beans and the lack of focus on the people who are in charge of the collection of coffee contrasts the first part.

It is important that what the mayor and Madrigal are talking about is the ways in which the community has organized and been in contact with governmental authorities such as the Ministry of Health to help prevent transmission and ensure a safe coffee harvesting season. They both mention the “traceability” that they want to give migrants and any person from the outside who seeks to enter Dota for the harvest season. Although traceability has been used in the context of contact tracing for COVID-19, the visual emphasis here is not on the people spoken about or those that are speaking but, on the coffee, and the landscape in which it is harvested and produced. This is also shown in the last words of Madrigal who says: “The priority is coffee production...so that

¹⁶ Es el inmigrante Ngöbe de la región de Panamá, Ngöbe-Buglé, que ellos también ya tienen que tener ya el carnet de binacionalidad, tienen que tener el salvoconducto y todo un proceso para entrar al país bajo una normativa que dé la trazabilidad del acceso hasta la finca donde va a estar con el productor quien lo tiene que recoger directamente en la frontera o en el sitio a nivel nacional donde ya haya hecho su proceso de cuarentena.

producers have the certainty that the economy will remain stable¹⁷” (Ibid). So now, rather than people, it is the materiality of coffee and the openness to the domestic and international migrants that are highlighted in the fight against COVID-19. The commodification is not only applied to coffee but to the coffee collectors too. They are dangerous assets to be managed and cared for by the coffee plantation owner.

Following this image, at 11:32 minutes, the focus of the news report shifts to tourism and this transition is marked by an image of a waterfall. Colombari narrates that even though the virus has arrived to Dota, the tourism industry will strongly adhere to the sanitary measures in order to reactivate this sector. The images that accompany the narration include a woman wearing a face mask with her back facing the camera folding towels, a person wearing gloves placing a door hanger on a hotel room and a person disinfecting a massage area. As a representative of the chamber of tourism of the area talks about the measures taken to reopen the tourism sector safely, images of a hummingbird, a rainforest, and a waterfall are featured for 10 seconds, but then it focuses on images of people washing their hands, a waiter wearing a facemask and face shield serving a customer, hotel maids disinfecting rooms. In general, it illustrates the many ways in which people in the tourism sector have taken seriously the health measures.

This last section, which also blends into the conclusion of the report, seems to reconcile the tension and contrast presented in the first two sections. Although objects such as massage areas, hotel rooms, a waterfall and a hummingbird are featured, people are also included, which also parallels the final message of the news report. As the news report ends, the same images of the beginning of the report, the road sign featuring the districts of Dota, the panoramic view of the mountains and the small houses also accompanied by a shot of horses, people walking around town

¹⁷ La prioridad es la producción del café...para que los productores tengan la seguridad de que la economía va a estar estable

wearing facemasks and face shields as well as taped off public areas. Jorge Serrano, a board member of the chamber of tourism says invites people, in this case the Costa Rican tourist, to come to Dota but to first take care of its inhabitants and in turn the people of Dota will take care of them. He says: "...that they take care of us. We will take care of them, and we will take them in with a lot of care, as we have always been characterized in the canton of Dota and the area of Los Santos in general" (Ibid). Tourists, especially the local tourist, contrast with migrants in the ability to "take care" of the population of Dota, in the sense of their power, according to the citizens of Dota, to pose less of a threat of infections. The possibility of value creation and the maintenance of the exceptionality of Dota relies on an audience, the viewers of the news report as well as the tourists who feel safe visiting because the canton has managed to keep a low rate of transmission.

So, what are the exceptionalizing tropes that are connected to coffee ideology and identity in Costa Rica? The democratic nature of coffee and democratic values is shown in the tight knit community that is present in Dota. The value of family or familial/close relations are present in the description of Dota's success, and in the formation of committees/alliances between the town and government entities, which shows democratic values. Some these relations, however, are in service of the coffee industry and the tourism industry. People must work together in order to open themselves, and the town for the entrance of tourists and migrants. Furthermore, the same way the history of coffee in Costa Rica only records the elite ideas surrounding coffee, so does this news report show the version of the notable figures. This story is told by what can be called an elite, portrayed by the mayor of Dota, a representative from the Church, a doctor, and a member of the chamber of tourism. These are the respected members of the community, identified by name, as opposed to the "neighbors" or even the nameless faces of the people working in the coffee processing plant or even standing in line in the store. However, the importance of Dota is more

salient when placed in conversation with what other news and media are responding to. It is the body of articles and videos created throughout the year that show a bigger conversation that Dota's story exemplifies.

B. In Other Coffee News...

Dota's portrayal of exceptionalism reflects other news reports and articles that have been published throughout the year. On May 6th, an article on the news site of Teletica reported that coffee could be seen as a solution to unemployment that arose from the pandemic. In this article the director of ICAFE comments "the only market in the world that has manifested with a significant positive tendency is that of arabica coffee, which is harvested at 100% in our country"¹⁸ (Martinez, 2020). However, a few days later the same website publishes a video report that shows the impact the pandemic has had on coffee farmers in the province of Guanacaste, which also relies on tourism. The report explains that coffee farmers in this area have reported lower revenues as a result of the pandemic (Hidalgo, 2020).

However, at around the same time that the 7 Días report aired (on August 3rd and August 25th), two calls for coffee collectors were published in widely read news site CRhoy.com. The headlines of these two calls read "Looking for work? 3,000 coffee collectors need to be hired" and "CoopeTarrazú needs to hire 14,000 coffee collectors". Considering the increasing levels of unemployment as a result of the pandemic, these calls might seem ideal and more exceptional than the traceability and safety provided to migrants, after all it is more important to give jobs to the citizens of the country than to outsiders. However, the exceptional quality remains in Dota's ability to maintain the status quo. The success in securing the labor needed to pick up coffee and in

¹⁸ "el único mercado en el mundo que se manifestó con tendencia positiva de manera significativa fue el café arábico, el cual es cosechado al 100% en nuestro país"

curbing the transmission of the COVID-19 virus, Dota has the upper hand, and the news report tells a story of comfort and security as opposed to the urgent call to national coffee collectors to save the upcoming coffee harvest. In contrast with the Dota news report, which encourages the Costa Rican citizen to visit the area as a tourist, these articles encourage fellow citizens to become laborers, *jornaleros*. Similar to how smaller coffee farmers favored their identity as producers rather than those of the occasional laborer, the more satisfying option for Costa Ricans, is to take on the more active role of the creator of value to the economy, rather than the foreign asset to be managed.

The call to maintain the status quo can also be seen in the response to a short video announcement published on July 16th, 2020, that CRhoy.com titled “Minister of Labor Recommends Coffee Picking to Fight Unemployment”. In the video the Minister of Labor, Geaninna Dinarte addressed the results of a survey where it was revealed that 20% of Costa Ricans were at the moment unemployed in part due to the pandemic. As she acknowledged the effect on the economy and big impact this has on families whose primary breadwinner have lost their jobs, she also adds that country is committed to avoid job closures and to eventually reactivate of economy. She also calls for people to join the agricultural sector where 77,000 jobs have been identified, and that this figure could increase. At no time did she mention specifically the coffee sector, yet CRhoy.com made that direct connection, as evidenced in the title, and also elicited mixed reactions from the commenters of the piece. While some people lauded the government’s efforts and commented on the dignity of coffee picking and agricultural work in general, some others criticized the government as out of touch with the economic reality of the country and unaware of the dynamics of the coffee sector. A comment representative of this attitude says:

I ask! Will the coffee growers pay per basket according to the price set by the law? I picked coffee when I was younger and, in those days, the cheap Nica labor pandemic had not entered

the country yet. If they pay what they must pay, I'll sign up. But the problem is that coffee plantation owners pay starvation wages and that is why bring the *Nicas* (Nicaraguans). In addition, they want to put you in harvests with up 20 or 30 people all mixed up. What does the minister of health say about that? Miss do not be ridiculous and send your children to pick coffee. Give us back our jobs since it is there where the country develops. Ridiculous.¹⁹

This comment includes several important threads. First, the commentator identifies himself as a former coffee picker, which gives him the authority and the first-hand experience to comment on the state of affairs of the coffee collection industry. However, his experience was “before the cheap Nica (which can sometimes be used derogatorily) labor pandemic”, a seemingly ideal time as also indicated by his youth. He complains about the poor labor conditions, which only occur as a result of Nicaraguan migration and appeals to the institutional authority of the Minister of Health to question the validity and quality of Dinarte’s job offers. Furthermore, the use of the phrase “labor pandemic” conflates Nicaraguan migrants and the threat of COVID-19 as with their entrance to the country, they also bring the risk of the virus. Also, the same way that the pandemic threatens the country’s economic viability as well as the health of the Costa Rican population, so does the labor that Nicaraguan migrants provide, endangers the Costa Rican population by becoming a source of cheap labor that demeans the humble endeavor of coffee picking. He finally ends by telling the minister to send her children, infantilizing the endeavor of picking coffee or possibly mobilizing the idea that if a person would not let their children perform a certain task, then it is not appropriate, and then says that the real jobs and the real possibility for development and progress is not found in coffee or agriculture, but elsewhere: “our jobs”. The xenophobic

¹⁹ Yo pregunto! Los cafetaleros pagarán la cajuela al precio que dicta la ley? Yo recolecté café de muchacho y en aquellos años no avia (había) ingresado aún la pandemia de la mano de obra Nica barata. Si pagan lo que tienen que pagar yo me apunto. Pero el problema es que los dueños de cafetales quieren pagar sueldo de hambre y por eso traen Nicas. Y además te quieren poner a dormir en cosechas con hasta 20 o 30 personas más todos revueltos. Que dice el ministro de salud de esto. Señora, no sea payasa y mande a sus hijos a [*sic*] cojer café. Regresenos nuestros empleos que es ahí donde se desarrolla el país. Ridícula."

sentiments are quite relevant to the call to restore the status quo, as Nicaraguan migrants are the ones who should be doing the menial, childlike, jobs that do not bring progress to the country because they are not compensated fairly. This also points to the transformation of coffee from a family and community affair to the transnational mega processor. The small family and community affair are the right conditions for the Costa Rican coffee laborer, not the large, modernized plantations.

However, as coffee harvesting season comes and goes, the calls of the public to maintain the status quo are replaced by a nostalgia for the simpler coffee picking times, in which coffee picking is seen as a means for progress and a noble endeavor. The media shifts to a more promotional content, where Costa Rican athletes share their experiences with coffee picking as a source of humility and a source of pride, a worthy job that provides opportunities for advancement and also contributes to a century-long tradition. I will consider two different news posts/articles here: one is a video ad campaign, shared on the website of Teletica, which features former soccer star Mauricio “*El Chunche*” Montero and another article by CRhoy.com sharing a Facebook post shared by athlete Junior Oporta. This content was released in the month of December, the 4th and the 30th respectively.

On December 30th, 2020, CRhoy.com published an article about a Facebook post shared by the Costa Rican athlete Junior Oporta. The post included two pictures of the athlete working in a coffee plantation. On one of them, he has a basket full of coffee berries tied around his waist and in the other picture he is carrying a sack of coffee. The text included with the pictures is as follows:

After a few years, I came back today to the company that for more than 15 years fed me, El Cafetal, which is the best place to value and thank God for your life.

Through these plantations, deputies (members of the Costa Rican national legislative branch), nurses, teachers, policemen, in general, great beings that value every effort to pay their own studies and to be, what they are today, thanks to God and coffee.

The hardest part is not the work that is done, which you have to do regardless of how hard it is, the hardest part is forgetting where you come from and be the arrogant ones of tomorrow and complain about everything and not being thankful.

Never forget where you came from and thank God for where you are now, because the future comes filled with many blessings²⁰.

Oporta is known for also being a motivational speaker given the adversities he has had to face to become a figure in Costa Rican foot racing, as exemplified in the story he shares in the post. The comments on the CRhoy.com article sharing the post are quite favorable and applaud the athlete's humility and hard work, the same qualities that allowed the canton of Dota to be so successful: "Excellent young man, may God continue blessing him, he is a great example for everyone"²¹. "A humble man, yet greater than any politician"²². This Facebook post was also shared in other news sites such as that of the middle to high class newspaper "*La República*" and in the news site of prominent journalist Amelia Rueda, *amprensa.com*, as well as on the website of the more sensationalist, yet widely read among the Costa Rican population, newspaper, "*La Teja*". This means that the message of hard work and coffee picking is one that resonates among all Costa Ricans regardless of social class. It is also worth noting that this post was shared during the last days of the year, when people usually reflect upon the year that is ending and create aspirations for the upcoming year. Coffee, and the values associated with the act of picking coffee become part of the reflection and planning ritual.

²⁰ "Después de unos años hoy regresé de nuevo a la empresa que durante más de 15 años me dio de comer, El Cafetal, donde es el mejor lugar, para valorar y agradecer a Dios por la vida. Por aquí han pasado, diputados, enfermeros, maestros, policías, en fin los grandes seres que realmente valoran cada esfuerzo para pagarse los estudios y hoy ser, lo que son, gracias a Dios y al café.

Lo difícil no es el trabajo que se hace por más duro que sea, lo difícil es olvidarse de dónde se viene y ser los arrogantes del mañana y quejarse por todo y no agradecer nada.

Nunca olvides de dónde saliste, agradece a Dios dónde te encuentres hoy, porque el mañana viene cargado de muchas Bendiciones".

²¹ "Excelente muchacho, que Dios lo continúe bendiciendo, un gran ejemplo para todos".

²² "Un humilde hombre, pero más grande que cualquier político".

The video that is shared earlier in December on Teletica.com, “*El Chunche*” begins by acknowledging the hard economic circumstances that the country is facing at this moment, and adds that these are also felt in the production of coffee: “We are in a situation where coffee is being lost, we cannot bring people from outside because they are asking for many things, but you Costa Ricans have the opportunity to change history”²³ (Naranjo, 2020). This part is also emphasized in the article that includes the video.

It is worth noting how the discourse changes from an effort to take care of migrants as seen in the Dota news report and also found in an article from August 19th (again around the same time that the Dota report aired), whose headline reads “Indigenous peoples who do not comply with sanitary protocol during coffee collection will be expelled”²⁴. The article quotes the Minister of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry who says that organizations such as the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labor, the Ministry of Public Safety, the National Directorate of Migration and Foreigners, the ICAFE and the coffee growers, who *require* migrant labor to avoid losing their harvest, are committed to the implementation of the protocol, which includes an isolation period after crossing the border, daily symptom checks, periodic inspections of facilities by the Ministry of Health and other relevant entities, a binacional identification provided to indigenous populations who live between Costa Rica and Panama, and finally a medical exam performed in Panama before people cross the border (CRhoy.com staff, 2020). These measures go from being important to ensure safety to then becoming too ambitious and demanding for coffee growers as expressed in “*El Chunche*”’s rendering “they are asking for too many things”.

²³ “Estamos en una situación donde se está perdiendo el café, no podemos traer gente de afuera porque están pidiendo muchas cosas, pero ustedes costarricenses tienen la oportunidad de cambiar la historia”

²⁴ Expulsarán a indígenas que incumplan protocolo sanitario en cogidas de café

Therefore, “*El Chunche*” continues, Costa Ricans are encouraged to become a part of this historic moment of hardship and help maintain a tradition of producing world-renowned coffee for 100 years. Then he shares his own experience picking coffee and finishes with a call to action:

When I was in (elementary) school, a *pata pelada* (barefoot) I had to pick coffee to help my family, to help my father to make a bit more money. I went to *pulsearla* (hustle). I went not to *chollarme las nalgas* (callus my butt/work my butt off), like when I played soccer but to *chollarme las manos* (callus my hands/work my hands off) because your hands get calluses. Is it hard work? Of course, it’s hard work. Is it difficult? Of course, it is difficult. But I invite you to come. I invite you, Costa Rican, to feel proud. Come pick coffee, please do not stay home²⁵.

The connections this video makes between Costa Rican identity are quite clear. First, we have a soccer star (soccer is the national sport of Costa Rica) and more specifically, “*El Chunche*” Montero, who is known for being a more stereotypical Costa Rican personality, in his use of less formal language, as exemplified in the slang words *pata pelada*, *pulsearla*, *chollarme las nalgas*, and *chollarme las manos* as well as in his humble origins, here exemplified in how as a child he was put to work to bring supplemental income. The nickname “*El Chuche*” is also emblematic of Costa Rican identity as it is slang for “thing”. Furthermore, the invocation of the long history of coffee and the call to become a part of history and feel proud of the hard work that is required in the collection of coffee also brings forth the earlier parts of coffee history where the country was literally built on coffee. The plea to not stay home and participate in the coffee harvest efforts is contradictory to the greater message the Ministry of Health was, and still is, disseminating of staying home to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. “*El Chunche*” mentions in the ad “Help

²⁵ Estando en la escuela, andando a pata pel’a me tocó coger café para ayudarle a mi familia, a mi papá a arrimar un poquito más, me fui a pulsearla, me fui no a chollarme las nalgas como jugando futbol, no a chollarme las manos porque se chollan las manos. ¿Que es duro? Claro que es duro. ¿Que es difícil? Claro que es muy difícil. Pero yo lo invito a que usted venga. Que usted, costarricense, se sienta orgulloso. Venga a coger café, no se quede en la casa por favor.

us collect the best coffee in the world”. Yet, the tension remains: do Costa Ricans save the symbolic and economic importance of coffee, or do they look after their health?

The same paradox expressed in the earlier transmission of the Dota news report is also seen in this ad, but it is more concealed than it was before. An analogy can be drawn where Dota is to Costa Rica as Costa Rica (or at least its portrayal) is to the rest of the world. As a coffee country by excellence, the stakes here are raised higher than before. Rather than just ensuring the economic viability of a town, it becomes about upholding the standards the nation has set in terms of coffee around the world. The superficial solution to this issue is that a national workforce, exemplified and idealized in the population of Dota, is much safer than the migrant population that brings in the possibility of more infections and thus need to be traced. Migrants are seen as a transitory force in opposition to stable and hardworking Costa Rican, who has a stake in maintaining and reaffirming the country’s reputation, in absence of the international public that usually consumes it. Dota’s reputation as exceptional is only established because of its response to the pandemic, whereas Costa Rica’s reputation for exporting quality coffee, has been in the making for 100 years, as “*El Chunche*” mentions. Ironically, it is in the position of the *jornalero* that the formation of coffee ideology ignored, that this same ideology encourages Costa Ricans to become during the pandemic. Most importantly, this ad is sponsored by ECOM Agroindustrial Corporation, a “global commodity merchant and sustainable supply chain management company”, with operations in 35 countries, and *F.J. Orlich & Hnos. Ltda* (FJ Orlich & Brothers Limited) one of the five major coffee exporters of the country and an affiliate of ECOM (Biodiversity Partnership Mesoamerica. 2015, ECOM Agroindustrial Corp. Ltd. 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic thus emerges as an opportunity make Costa Rica as imagined by coffee ideology: a nation that thrives economically as a result of its exceptional coffee, produced

by its hardworking *campesinos*, who are obviously Costa Rican citizens. Yet, that country never really existed, as the greater news conversation reveals. News articles calling for the national public to work in coffee collection are met with resistance from the population, since coffee is no longer as profitable, and more importantly, the working conditions are not suitable for the Costa Rican worker as the “labor pandemic” of Nicaraguan migrants has diseased coffee production and rid it of its family and community-oriented values. With this conversation in mind, the news report on Dota, provides a satisfying solution as their efforts not only curb COVID-19 infections but in doing so, manages the “labor pandemic”. However, considering that it is only the “elite” of Dota that told this story, that the ICAFE, the government entity that was created to protect the interests of coffee, said that coffee exports have remained stable, that the Minister of Labor supported the ICAFE’s calls to mobilize labor efforts towards coffee, that a transnational company that sponsored an ad that invites Costa Ricans to make history, it shows that this version of Costa Rica is mobilized by an elite, similar to the predomination of the elites in the formation of coffee ideology in Costa Rican history.

IV. Conclusion

The answer to the question “why did a news report whose focus was on the prevention of COVID-19 shift its attention to coffee”? seems simple in the case of Dota: it is a coffee region by excellence, so in order to maintain its economic viability, as any town in the world during the pandemic, it needs to keep the COVID-19 virus from infecting its population. Furthermore, as a coffee region by excellence, it has the excellence to accomplish the exceptional task of being the last canton to remain without COVID-19 cases. However, the way in which the images focus on the townspeople at the beginning and then shifts to coffee when speaking about migrants reveals a much complex story. The mobilization of coffee as a national symbol and the concern

surrounding coffee harvests during the pandemic in the Costa Rican media marks a moment of conjuncture, where the ongoing pandemic and the desire to provide stability reveal a greater, deeper crisis in the Costa Rican tendencies and ideologies surrounding coffee, and by extension its identity as a country.

Coffee gives us a good way into understanding the paradoxes and tensions of nation building, right now, because Costa Rica *is* the *grano de oro*. Costa Rica's democracy and economic progress is exceptional because its coffee and its development as an export is exceptional. The democratic ideals that founded the nation of Costa Rica and that were also reaffirmed in the civil war of 1948 are also related with coffee as a democratic crop. The unfolding conversations in the media are also in dialogue with the greater history of coffee in Costa Rica, invoking similar themes of progress, nation building, and democracy as well as values of hard work, humility, and exceptionalism. At the same time, they expose the paradoxes and contradictions that exist in coffee ideology. The closure of the Costa Rican borders deprives the nation of its audience, in the form of tourists, and forces the Costa Rican population to become audience and also actors in the maintenance of its exceptionality. Most importantly, it sets the stage for a national conversation to occur that shows the real formation of coffee ideology as controlled by elites, as exemplified in the news report on Dota, and in the different stakeholders mentioned in the news, such as cooperatives, ICAFE, the Costa Rican government, and transnational companies as ECOM.

The call to collect coffee in the present, the way Dota manages to remain low levels of transmission for coffee, and the declaration of coffee as a national symbol, thus, become calls to return to the humble origins of the nation, where the land was accessible to all (and by all, I mean those who fit in the imaginary of the Costa Rican citizen) and everyone could farm coffee to contribute to their personal advancement as well as that of the country: the exceptional Costa Rica.

However, that is not to say that the Costa Rican population is a passive recipient of such an ideology. As defined initially, these ideas are circulated widely and as exemplified in Junior Oporta's Facebook post and in the positive responses it received, such an ideology is not only invoked by elites, though its construction features them. It is also criticized, examined, and upheld by commenters in these news articles and by me, a Costa Rican, who exclusively drinks Costa Rican coffee, has a poster about coffee hanging in her apartment and who looked into the intricacies of coffee ideology in Costa Rica, as highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Works Cited

- Acuña Ortega, Víctor Hugo. 1987. "La ideología de los pequeños y medianos productores cafetaleros costarricenses (1900-1961)." *Revista de Historia*, no. 16 (July): 137–59.
- Biodiversity Partnership Mesoamerica. 2015. "Ecom Agroindustrial Corp. Ltd: «Café amigable con la biodiversidad»". Accessed July 26, 2021. <https://www.bpmesoamerica.org/partner-view/ecom-agroindustrial-corp-ltd/>
- Cabezas, Yaslin. 2020. ¿Busca trabajo? Requieren contratar 3.000 recolectores de café". *Crhoy.com*, August 25, 2020. <https://www.crhoy.com/economia/busca-trabajo-requieren-contratar-3-000-recolectores-de-cafe/>.
- Canet Brenes, Guillermo. 1993. "Evolución De La Caficultura Costarricense Y Situación Actual De La Actividad". San José, Costa Rica: IX Congreso Agropecuario y de Recursos Naturales.
- Cardoso, Ciro F. S. 1978. "The Formation of the Coffee Estate in Nineteenth-Century Costa Rica." Chapter. In *Land and Labour in Latin America: Essays on the Development of Agrarian Capitalism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, edited by Kenneth Duncan and Ian Rutledge, 165–202. Cambridge Latin American Studies. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511563126.008.
- Cerdas Albertazzi, José Manuel. 1995. "La cuestión social y las condiciones de vida de los obreros de Costa Rica (1930-1960)." *Revista ABRA* 1 (21–22). <https://revistas-colaboracion.juridicas.unam.mx/index.php/abra/article/view/37587>.
- Colombari, Stefanía. 2020. "La Caída Del Último Bastión". *Teletica.com*, August 17, 2020. https://www.teletica.com/7-dias/la-caida-del-ultimo-bastion_265457.
- "Definition of CANTON by Oxford Dictionary". 2021. *Lexico Dictionaries | English*. <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/canton>.
- ECOM Agroindustrial Corp. Ltd. 2021. "Home". Accessed July 26, 2021. <https://www.ecomtrading.com/>

- Esquivel Mora, Luis Fernando. 2002. "Los Contratos Comerciales En El Derecho Nacional Cafetalero". Undergraduate, Universidad de Costa Rica.
- Fischer, Kate. 2018. "Nostalgia por un pasado idealizado: la producción de café y la identidad nacional en Orosi, Costa Rica." *Boletín de Antropología* 33 (56): 158–83.
- Gudmundson, Lowell. 1983. "Costa Rica before Coffee: Occupational Distribution, Wealth Inequality, and Elite Society in the Village Economy of the 1840s." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 15 (2): 427–52.
- Guido Cruz, Francisco, and Silvia Castro Sánchez. 2007. "Crisis cafetalera y condiciones de vida. Pequeños y medianos productores de café en San Ramón, Alajuela, Costa Rica." *Pensamiento Actual* 7 (8–9).
<https://revistas.ucr.ac.cr/index.php/pensamientoactual/article/view/4094>.
- Hidalgo, Argenis. 2020. "Productores de café de Guanacaste sufren graves pérdidas ante la parálisis del sector turístico". May 17, 2020.
https://www.teletica.com/nacional/productores-de-cafe-de-guanacaste-sufren-graves-perdidas-ante-la-paralisis-del-sector-turistico_257271
- Holalola. 2020. "¡Hola!Tenía muchas ganas de hacer otro póster sobre café". Facebook, August 11, 2020. <https://www.facebook.com/holalolatravelgifts/photos/3226287287492526>.
- Loría Bolaños, Rocío, Timo Partanen, Milena Berrocal, Benjamín Álvarez, and Leonel Córdoba. 2008. "Determinants of Health in Seasonal Migrants: Coffee Harvesters in Los Santos, Costa Rica." *International Journal of Occupational and Environmental Health* 14 (2): 129–37. <https://doi.org/10.1179/oeh.2008.14.2.129>.
- Martínez, Andrés. 2020. "Recolección de café: una salida al desempleo en el país". *Teletica.com*, May 6, 2020. https://www.teletica.com/nacional/recoleccion-de-cafe-una-salida-al-desempleo-en-el-pais_258789.
- Molina Jiménez, Iván. 1993. "Los Pequeños y Medianos Caficultores, La Historia y La Nación. Costa Rica (1890-1950)." *Caravelle* (1988-), no. 61: 61–73.
- Naranjo, Julio. 2020. "Video: 'Chunche' Montero llama a ticos a chollarse las manos cogiendo café". *Teletica.com*, December 4, 2020. https://www.teletica.com/nacional/video-chunche-montero-llama-a-ticos-a-chollarse-las-manos-cogiendo-cafe_275184

- Paige, Jeffery M. 1997. *Coffee and Power: Revolution and the Rise of Democracy in Central America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Pan American Union. 1902. *Coffee: Extensive Information and Statistics*. U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Pérez S., Victor Manuel. 1977. “Veinticinco Años de Investigación Sistemática Del Cultivo de Café En Costa Rica.” *Agronomía Costarricense* 1 (2): 169–85.
- Quesada, Jéssica. 2020. “Coopetarrazú necesita contratar a 14mil recolectores de café”. *Crhoy.com*, August 3, 2020. <https://www.crhoy.com/economia/coopetarrazu-necesita-contratar-a-14-mil-recolectores-de-cafe/>
- Rausch, Lisa. 2005. “The Coffeeness of Costa Rica.” Thesis, University of Kansas. <https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/handle/1808/7891>.
- Rodríguez, María Jesús. 2020. “Atleta Junior Oporta conmueve con imagen de empresa donde laboró 15 años”. *Crhoy.com*, December 30, 2020. <https://www.crhoy.com/deportes/atleta-junior-oporta-conmueve-con-imagen-de-empresa-donde-laboro-15-anos/>
- Samper, Mario. 1993. “Los Paisajes Sociales Del Cafe. Reflexiones Comparadas.” *Caravelle* (1988-), no. 61: 49–60.
- Sick, Deborah R. 1993a. "The Golden Bean: Coffee, Cooperatives, And Small-Farmer Decision Making In Costa Rica". Doctoral Dissertation, McGill University.
- Sick, Deborah R. 1993b. “Coffee Cooperatives and Small-Farmer Decision-Making: A Case from Costa Rica.” *Sociological Bulletin* 42 (1–2): 171–87. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038022919930109>.
- Sick, Deborah. 2008. “Coffee, Farming Families, and Fair Trade in Costa Rica: New Markets, Same Old Problems?” *Latin American Research Review* 43 (3): 193–208.
- Smith, Julia. 2007. “The Search for Sustainable Markets: The Promise and Failures of Fair Trade.” *Culture & Agriculture* 29 (2): 89–99. <https://doi.org/10.1525/cag.2007.29.2.89>.

Smith, Julia. 2009. "Shifting Coffee Markets and Producer Responses in Costa Rica and Panama." In *Economic Development, Integration, and Morality in Asia and the Americas*, edited by Donald C. Wood, 1st ed., Research in Economic Anthropology:201–24. Bingley, UK: Emerald/JAI.

Staff. 2020. "Video: Ministra de Trabajo recomienda ir a coger café para enfrentar el desempleo". *Crhoy.com*, July 16, 2020. <https://www.crhoy.com/nacionales/video-ministra-de-trabajo-recomienda-ir-a-coger-cafe-para-enfrentar-el-desempleo/>.

Staff. 2020. "Declaran Al Café Como Símbolo Patrio". *Crhoy.com*, July 28, 2020 <https://www.crhoy.com/nacionales/declaran-al-cafe-como-simbolo-patrio/>.

Staff. 2020. "Expulsarán del país a indígenas que incumplan protocolo sanitario en cogidas de café". *Crhoy.com*, August 19, 2020. <https://www.crhoy.com/economia/expulsaran-del-pais-a-indigenas-que-incumplan-protocolo-sanitario-en-cogidas-de-cafe/>

"Teatro Nacional De Costa Rica". 2014. Sistema De Información Cultural De Costa Rica. <https://si.cultura.cr/infraestructura/teatro-nacional-de-costa-rica.html>.

Topik, Steven, Allen Wells. 1998. *The Second Conquest of Latin America: Coffee, Henequen, and Oil During the Export Boom, 1850-1930*. University of Texas Press.

Vega Jiménez, Patricia. 2004. *Con Sabor A Tertulia*. San José, Costa Rica: Icafe, Instituto del Café de Costa Rica.