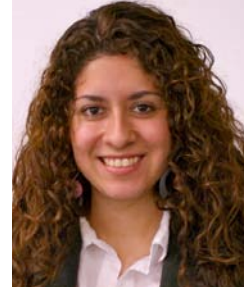


# Generational Transition of Subsistence Fishing Practices in the Pacific Community of Venado Island, Costa Rica

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*The goal of this ethnographic study is to document the way that tourism has affected the subsistence fishing activities on the island of Venado, Costa Rica. A key question is how tourism has forced the residents of this fishing community to make choices between a traditional economy and the need to survive in an expanding global market of ecological tourism. The method of research is ethnographic. The goal is to portray cultural issues through the life of the islanders. I hope that this research will create a better understanding of the cultural impact of global change on the people of Venado Island, as well as a wider appreciation of their rights and perspectives in this rapidly changing region of the Americas.*

Ethnographic analysis is inductive and builds upon the perspective of the people studied. The primary strategy used in this study is participant-observation. The participant-observer maintains two primary data gathering tasks: developing interpersonal familiarity within the community through participation of typical, daily interaction, combined with note-taking, photographs and tape recording of natural developing events and interviewing to collect life histories or narratives (Spradley, 1979). The work of Laura Gonzales, *Comunidades pesquero artesanales en Costa Rica*, help me to understand the social dimension in the development of different small scale fishing communities in the Pacific Coast of Costa Rica, as well as the social and economic dynamic and the techniques in the small-scale fishing in Costa Rica. The works of A. Nygren, *Environment as Discourse: Searching for Sustainable Development in Costa Rica* and Maria Eugenia Bozzoli, *A Role for Anthropology in Sustainable development in Costa Rica* served as theoretical basis for my ethnographic field work. This study departs obviously from traditional ethnography yet from a different perspective, as Scheper-Hughes stated in her work on *Death without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil*, “it departs from woman perspective and from a phenomenological grounded anthropology, anthropology with one’s feet on the ground (Scheper-Hughes 1992). This ethnography is about the people of Venado Island, the control over natural resources and their realities and dilemmas in this changing globalized world.

Venado Island is located in the Gulf of Nicoya to 22.5 kilometers from Puntarenas, the largest city in the Gulf of Nicoya. Isla Venado is about 35 to 45 minutes by boat from Puntarenas. There is public transportation via ferry and then bus to the closest inlet on the Peninsula, La Penca and from here, there is no public transportation. The only other way of transportation to reach the island is by boat (see figure 1 and 1a). During low tide the Gulf’s waters can retreat up to 50 meters from La Penca dock. Therefore, boats have to be anchored in deeper waters of the mangrove forest where people must walk through mud to reach the Penca dock. Since there are no deep-water docks I walked through the mud on several occasions when I traveled to Puntarenas or Jicaral to use the Internet. Venado Island is surrounded by two more islands, Chira and Bejuco.

## Venado Island

When I first arrived to Puntarenas, Costa Rica was early in the morning. The weather was more humid that I expected. I met a professor, Arturo Medrano at the University Study Abroad Consortium. Dr. Medrano served as my cultural liaison in the island. Later that day, I was introduced to Marvin Salas, my host dad on the island. He and his son, Marvin Junior were waiting for me at the coast ready to leave to the island. Marvin was very surprised when Arturo introduced me to him, he could not believe how well I spoke Spanish; I told him that I was Mexican. We boarded Marvin’s motor boat to go the island in the company of Arturo, Marvin, Marvin Junior or Bebe, in addition to three girls from Puntarenas. The girls work for a Puntarenas bank and they wanted to talk to the people about financial opportunities within their bank. In forty minutes we arrived at the island.

I began the afternoon by having lunch with Marvin, he confessed me how glad he was that I am Latina and speak the same language; I was introduced to the rest of the family: Eugenia, Marvin's wife, Douglas (22), Tony (21), Ariely (15) and Bebe, Marvin Junior who is 13 years old. I felt really pleased with their welcoming; they treated me just as another member of the family. After lunch I had a deep but informal conversation with Marvin and Eugenia about the government of our countries. It is very usual among Latinos to talk about the economic, political and social problems in our countries. They expressed their dislike of the United States. They see the United States as a monster that controls Latin America, and takes advantage of the resources of this continent. They told me that they hate the idea that rich gringos are buying land in Costa Rica; "tourism is not the best option to improve the economy of this country because only few benefit from tourism, and of course poor people are the most affected" said Eugenia. Marvin told me that the Costa Rican government is planning to transform the island into a tourist site. They want to build big hotels, restaurants and bars as well as to relocate the people from the island. The islanders have resisted the idea of being turned out of their homes. They believe that the government does not care about them and wants to sell their patrimony to rich Americans. Currently, the islanders are legally able to keep their land. They also informed me that the population in the island is around one thousand people, and that most of them are family. Almost everybody on the island is related to each other. After our conversation, Eugenia and Marvin told me how happy they were to have me at their home. I became their "Mexican daughter." At night, we spent a fun time at the local bar, eating, drinking and dancing. I was very happy to enjoy the company of such genuine people. They enjoy the music with such a passion that makes me feel myself again. I ended the night very tired but very happy to have the company of the islanders.

## The island social structure

The first settlers of the Venado Island were the Chorotegas, an indigenous group, that left the island for unknown reasons. After the abandonment of the island, some Spanish colonizers established themselves for a short period but they left the island for the lack of basic necessities like fresh water. Around 1912, the first families establish themselves permanently in the island. They formed three small communities: Oriente, Jicaró, and Florida which still exist today. The population of Venado is distributed among the three communities, Oriente forms part of Jicaró since there is no clarified borders between the two communities. The center of the island is not inhabited due to the thick forest and the steep slope of the mountain. The residents living in the south coast of the island in La Florida comprise forty percent of the population. The residents from Jicaró and Oriente have a more dense population sixty percent of the population of the island live in those communities. The forces that influence the values, social norms are the family and the church. There are four churches, one Catholic and three Protestants. The islanders live a very peaceful life. They live in harmony with each other. They are very easy going and easy to talk to. The common Costa Rican phrase is "pura vida" a phrase that they used all the time to express their enjoyment of life. There is not a judicial representation or official on the island. There is a police department building which has become a home for a family. Marvin informed me that they used to have a policeman, who wanted to charge Venado residents for his service. Since they did not want to pay him, the policeman left and they have been without police for four years. According to Marvin, "there has never been a conflict, looting, assaults or any kind of problems where the police enforcement is needed. The island is a very secure and peaceful place." Marvin says that he can leave the door open or any tool in the open, because no one will attempt to steal them. Also, his neighbors are his relatives and they take care of each other.

The family is a very important institution on the island. The family takes care of itself and this could be the reason why there is not formal or central committee to coordinate the population. The Universidad Nacional has helped the community to implement development associations that help with the organization of the community. The University has also contributed economically and morally to help the people of Venado. The island has thirteen associations among them associations of development, eco-tourism, fishermen from both sides of the island, progressive women from Jicaró, the association of women, the pioneers from Florida and the association of united youth of Venado Island. Each association has a purpose within island society. Eladio Aragona Solano is the president of the association for development on the island and a pastor of the Baptist church. He loves to serve the community and the people, and he told me that his association is the main association in the island. Currently now he is waiting for the approval of the government to receive material to reconstruct the roads in the island. He is a well respected member of the island, community who, as pastor, people trust.

The large extended family of the island creates the context for daily life (see figure 1.1). One of the things that really caught my attention was the way people share their things and the trust in each other; particularly between family and relatives. Marvin lend tools to his neighbors who are his relatives. They also share gasoline for the motor boats, essential services like water and drinks. My first days on the island, I was amazed and confused by all the people who visited Marvin's home. Eugenia explained that most of those people were their relatives. Marvin and Eugenia's relatives visit the house at any time of the day, but especially in the afternoon when all the chores are

done. They go in and watch the TV or ask for coffee at the time of “el cafecito” of the afternoon. They use the bathroom, drink water, and use the kitchen. Visitation between households is frequent and very informal.

## History of the families

The history of the population in Venado Island began with the migration from families to the island around 1912. The first families that migrated to the island were few and they lived isolated from each other but as more families migrated to the island they started forming two communities, Jicaro and la Florida. One of the first families that first arrived to the island was the Barrios family. Rodrigo Barrios came to Venado when he was a child (see figure 1.2). He is now married and he has the biggest family in the island. He states,

“I am 74 years old and I came to the island when I was 12 years old, so I have 62 years living in Venado. We were not the first to live in the island, there were a few dwellings already, and Marvin’s mother was born here so Marvin’s grandparents were the first to live in the island. I have 17 sons and more than 70 grandsons. The Jicaro is the barrio of los Barrios. I live very happy in the island. I will die in the island. When I was young, I practice the small-scale fishing. I fished only with nets and my boat. I never had money to buy a motor or better tools, that is why I quit fishing 30 years ago and I have never been in the Gulf since then (Rodrigo Barrios, interview 06-13-06).

Nicolas Villegas, a second generation of Venado born residents, recalls the past of the island, the first services, the first school and how they struggled in the past. He relates,

“I am native of Venado Island, I am a second generation of inhabitants of this island, and my mom was one of the first individuals born in Venado. I remember that we were a few individuals living in the island because we had the first school. There were only 18 kids which means there were only 6 or 8 families, and this is 40 years ago. The first school was in Jicaro under a mango tree, and the school was established thanks to the support of some people from San Jose who came to Island every summer for vacation. They noticed that there were kids without receiving a formal education, so they fought to establish the first school. Later, a new school was built. It was a structure covered with leaves and bark but one day a storm blew away the school and even the health minister said that our community was not a good spot to build a school. When the population increased, the minister built a school, I couldn’t attend the new school, I only studied to third grade that was the highest grade in Venado before the new school was built. I quit school to help my dad, there were difficult times. I was 10 and I decided to help my family” (Nicolas Villegas, interview 6-21-06).

## A daily round in the island

Venado islanders rise between 5:30 AM to 6:30 AM, although this varies from house to house. In my host's house Eugenia rises everyday at 6:30 to prepare breakfast and coffee. By 7:30, I was already having breakfast. Everyday, when the older kids have gone to school, the mothers begins their daily chores. In my host home, the chores included the following: cooking, washing plates, washing clothes, sweeping the floors, feeding the chickens and the goats and preparing food. Eugenia’s younger sister helped her with the chores and later I helped them with some of those chores, especially cleaning the house. After lunch, people often rest in the shade in a fishing net strung hammock-style; they play with the babies, listen to the radio, watch TV, and often sit silently in the breeze of the sea. In the late afternoon, between 4 and 5 PM, most people end their chores and have a cup of coffee. There is no set dinner time, but people generally eat anywhere from 5 to 9 in the evening. A lot of people use the evening to relax and to visit their relatives and watch soap operas. Most of the people do not wear shoes, only sandals and the kids are always bare foot. When they go to the port of Puntarenas or to San Jose they wear shoes. They wear fresh clothes to better suit the hot and humid weather. They are very clean people, the houses are always clean and smelling good. They take a shower everyday and their clothes although old for everyday use, are always clean.

The residents live a relaxing life in the island; the slow tempo keeps a certain harmony among the islanders. The first days on Venado, I was surprised every morning by the noises of the forest. After a week or so I got used to the noise of the birds and the kids who are awake very early in the morning, around 5:30 and 6 a.m. Children awake every early to make visits. Also, Eugenia wakes up early to prepare the coffee and breakfast, the traditional pinto which consists of fried rice and beans accompanied with scrambled eggs and a cup of coffee. Marvin and Eugenia wake up early so he can move the goats and cows. The children help him with the animals; they feed them and chase

them when they got lost in the forest. Marvin's family also has chickens and they produced lots of eggs which Eugenia sells. A few families' have animals like cows, pigs, chickens and goats, sheep.

## Social services

"Life in Venado was a simple life. We lived in darkness pulling water from an underground well until 1990 when an Italian organization came to Costa Rica through a fishermen union from Puntarenas. The fishermen union made contact with the Italians who were very thrilled by social movements; they explained to the Italians the marginalization of the small-scale fishermen in Costa Rica, they explained that the state did not provide any kind of support program for the fishermen, there was not and still there is no financial credit for the fishermen because we are stereotyped by being unethical and irresponsible. The Italians helped us to move out from the sub development by helping us built a mini aqueduct and the installation of electricity. The Italians provided the material and the engineering and Venado islanders provide the labor. La Florida was helped by a German organization to build an aqueduct but those aqueducts did not work in either side of the island, the water was not pure enough to drink, it was salty. When the president José María Figueres was in power, he came to Venado and asked the community what we need the most. We said we need water. He promised to provide us with potable water and we kept remind him of this promise. Venado Island has water and electricity because we work extremely hard. With the help from Montaña Grande community, we built 25 kilometers of pipes that pass under the sea to the island. Montana Grande has natural potable water and the community agreed to share the water with Venado Island. Finally, the Universidad Nacional helped us to bring phone lines to the island. UNA has been providing support and developing associations of development in the island (Nicolas Villegas, interview 06-21-06).

Venado Island has a few social services that serve the community. In Oriente, there are an elementary, middle school and a kindergarden where children from Jicaró and Oriente attend school. La Florida also has a school. The island has only one high school or tele-secondary which is based on a distance learning education program where all the adolescents from both sides of the island attend. The students follow the instruction by video lectures with a professor's support. Not all the children attend school, some prefer to play all day or other students just quit going to school. Only five persons have left the island to continue with their higher education. Two of those who left are Marvin's nephews, and the other three Nicolas Villegas's sons. Oriente also has a health center which is visited by a doctor from the Peninsula once a week. For medical emergencies, the islanders must travel to the Municipal Hospital in Puntarenas or the health center in Jicaró. Most of the residents of Venado have their own home phone and cell phones as well other media as radio and television. They are not limited by the remoteness of the island. There are even a few residents that have a computer at home. The residents of Venado have "Pulperias" or small convenience stores managed by the families. These small stores sell the most necessary comestibles but the islanders travel once in a while to Puntarenas or Jicaró to buy the things not available in the "Pulperia." Eugenia's brother has a pulperia right in front of Eugenia's home. There are two more pulperias in Jicaró and Nicolas's pulperia in the Oriente. Florida has one pulperia.

## Personal space and islanders' view of foreigners

Western notion of personal space, are unknown on Venado Island. The room that was assigned to me for my personal use was not only for my own use was also used by the family. They keep their clothes there and they went in when they need something. They respected my belongings, but the rooms are for general use. I always kept the door open during the day except during night. The same happens when you are in a group of people, they get close to you, touch you and hug you. When Ticos talk, especially Venado islanders, they are very passionate, keep eye contact at every moment and touch your arm or shoulder, shake hands and give you hugs. When they talk to girls they call you (sweetie, love, beautiful), amorcito, mi vida, linda, vida, the language is very affectionate too.

Some of the islanders have a negative view of foreigners, especially because they have had bad experiences with them. Eugenia told me about a girl, a college student from San Jose, who came to the island to interview the people and to take pictures. The behavior and attitude of this girl really bothered Eugenia. She is still furious of the way this student approached the people from the island. This student had no tolerance and knowledge about Venado Island people. She apparently treated them as savages. I was told that she took a picture of some little girls who were playing outside wearing no shoes. She commented that the only things these girls needed was a loincloth (taparabo). This outsider was ignorant and ethnocentric about her own culture and country, and the people from Venado felt very insulted by her behavior. On another occasion, a group of college students and a professor from Universidad Nacional came to the island to have meetings and workshops with the different development associations in Venado. When they were leaving, one of the students started to take pictures of the island. Eugenia and I were sitting on an

old boat by the beach, and without asking us, she took pictures of us and the kids that were sitting with us. I thought it was rude and unethical. Eugenia was angry and exclaimed that the student took the pictures because she thought islanders are exotic objects of entertainment.

## Gender division of labor

A significant element of life on the island is the sexual division of labor. I was informed that most of the women in the know how to fish with the cuerda or the cord which is the most rudimentary fishing tool and sometimes they go and fish with the men. I had the opportunity several times to go fishing with the cuerda with my host family. Marvin and Eugenia took two young girls, Eugenia's nephews, Ariely and me to fish using this method. Eugenia and Ariely were having a lot of luck fishing and even the little girls were encouraged by Marvin to fish, and they learned at such early age. Women's fishing, however, is not for commercial sale but for family consumption.

Women spend most of their time cleaning, taking care of the kids, cooking and doing all the house work. I have not seen any man doing house work, yet I have often seen men spending time with their children. Sometimes they carry their children in their arms. They are very affectionate parents and the affection is mutual between parents and children. I have not seen any corporal punishment toward the kids though but I have heard comments from Eugenia and other parents about hitting the kids that do not behave well. As a Latina, I found this behavior normal. Growing up I was punished by my mom physically with an occasional spanking. People from the island see this punishment as a way to correct a bad behavior.

One example of the sexual division of labor is the partition of responsibilities in the island. On one occasion, I accompanied Eugenia to the beach to help China weight the trash. On the island, there are people who are in charge of weighting the trash and taking it to Lepanto or Jicaral to be processed. All the islanders have to pay c35 per kilo of garbage. I was informed by China that the women associations, on both sides of the island, are in charge of collecting, weighting, and taking the garbage to the port. The development association of Venado Island almost put in charge the women association to collect the garbage of the island. La China complains that no one from the Arañas, (the women association from Jicaral and Oriente) wants to help her, I noticed that she was doing the job by herself. She said that only she and Eugenia are the ones in charge, no one else from the women group wants to help. Not only do the women not want to help, but the people in general refused to pay for the services. They would rather burn the garbage or throw it in the ocean. This is exactly what the development association wants to prevent, contaminating of the environment and the propagation of disease. Eugenia informed me that the same is happening on the other side, La Florida, only two or three women are in charge of the whole load of garbage and the same people do not want to cooperate with them.

When la China finished weighting and collecting the garbage, and went to Lepanto and Jicaral (the garbage processor ports) there was a problem. They initially refused to accept the garbage because supposedly she did not call to inform them that she was making a delivery. She stayed there for hours until they finally agreed to accept the garbage. They buried the garbage in a huge hole, after separating the plastics all the recyclables. When she came back, she was tired and mad because, she said, that it is always the same problem every time she collects and takes the garbage to the port. She is getting tired and she said she might quit. The Women's Associations from both sides of the islands have labor roles that men do not practice. With the support of Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica, the women associations received financial and instructional support to establish programs that help the women to learn skills. The association of women from Jicaral and Oriente created a Pulperia and a room to teach each other to be tailors. They then sell the clothing to the islanders. La China goes to Puntarenas once a week to receive instruction on this occupation and then she teaches the girls on the island. The associations of women from Florida, with parallel support from UNA have a bakery. In addition, some women make scrubs from natural fibers and they sell their products off of the island.

## Youth and leisure time

I talked with Douglas, Eugenia and Marvin's oldest son. I realized the pressure on the need young people to leave the island and experience other life styles like those they see on television. Douglas is 22 years old and he has been a fisherman since he was a little kid helping his dad. He now does his own work, of course with his father since this is a family tradition. He and all the family love to hear me talk about the United States, the life style of the "gringos" especially the young people. They ask questions about the American culture, if it is as they perceive it on TV. I ask if they would like to leave the island and live somewhere else? The young people say they would love to leave but come back someday and the older people say they would not. Ariely, Marvin and Eugenia's only daughter confessed to me that she wants to come with me to the United States by hiding in my suit case "Yo me voy con usted en su maleta para los Estados Unidos." Her cousin told me "yo me voy de indocumentada para los Estados Unidos"

that she will leave with me as undocumented to live in the United States. I imagine the young people wish to have a different future beyond the island. Some young people leave school, and only a few continue with their high school education. Ariely has her parents' complete support to finish high school and pursue a technical education. She is in high school. With three more years to go. She wants to get a technical education in Puntarenas to get a job, save money and have a stable economic position and then study in a university. Eugenia told me that they want her to study and be independent so if she gets married she won't be dependent of her husband.

Most of the young women and men go to the plaza located at Jicaro. They play pool, arcade or just meet with their friends to chat. Venado islanders love soccer. There are teams from Jicaro and Florida and most of the time they play against each other. Before the game, the players chat and eat tacos which are different than Mexican tacos. The Costa Rican version consists of rice, meat or fish and yucca and a small tortilla. There is another dish called vivoron, which consists of fried pig skin with rice, cabbage, yucca with juice lemon over the cabbage. Some residents set up their little restaurants during the games which is another way of generating income. When the game starts they play music while the spectators enjoy the game, food, a beer and the music. In the month of July, a group of women from Jicaro and Oriente, Eugenia and I started an exercise group. We walked everyday except for Sunday around the island periphery. The first days were tough for me especially climbing the steep hills of the Albina road. People from Florida have a fitness group too but they usually do not walk around the island, they only climb Albina road. Most of the residents of Venado from older to the youngest residents keep in good shape. There were young adults that ran around the island everyday or in the afternoons the boys and young men organized running competitions around the island. They also have soccer practice when the sun is set. On one occasion, a North American young man from Peace Corp, taught the residents of Venado to play football. The young man was a little bit frustrated because they did not understand the rules but they played football anyway. It was great fun, especially for us, the spectators.

### Small-scale fishing tradition

On one occasion, I had the opportunity to go fish with the children, Marino 15 years of age, Bebe, Ariely and Brian. The kids learned the fishing techniques in a really early age; by accompanying their parents. They know how to catch the bait (carnada) and how to navigate by themselves in the boat-they even know the best spots to fish. They cooperate with each other, while one is taking care of the carnada, another is driving the panga (boat), and a third is raising the anchor. I was impressed by their cooperation. Marino, the oldest of the group, was in charge of driving the panga. Brian, Bebe and Ariely's cousin was in charge of taking care of the bait. Bebe prepared the cuerdas for everyone and Ariely was in charge of filling bottles with drinking water for us to share. They all had their own cuerda but since Brian was in charge of the bait, he inserted the bait in the hooks for everyone. They joke with each other, making fun of one another for the poor luck to catch fish or if someone lost their bait in sea without catching anything. Unfortunately, they did not have any luck fishing, none of the kids caught any fish, they gave up and we return to the island. We could see a turtle swimming close to our panga. Upon the return from fishing, again the same cooperation was evident, all worked together to separate tools, throw away the bait and to set the boat in the shore at the beach (see figure 1.3).

Marvin and I talked everyday during dinner about the island and his experiences in the fishing practice, he told me that 25 years ago the fishing was very productive. He recalled his grandparents having the luxury of choosing the biggest fish and throwing away the smaller ones.

"The shrimp, there was no need to fish it, it came alone to the beach, it was amazing the quantity and quality of shrimp, we fished more than 80 kilos of shrimp, now 15 kilos is much if we are lucky" (Field notes 06-08-06). The small-scale fishing has changed a lot in the last 20 years, Marvin remember the good days we they did not have the techniques they have today. They only used the cuerda, bote a remo (paddle boat), and at night they did not have lights, but they all cooperated with one another to have a successful catch. The small scale fishing practices have changed with the innovation of fishing techniques and equipment while the fish has decrease in numbers.

### Fishing on Venado Island

"Mankind has always been characterized for exploiting its natural surrounding and has survived with what the environment provides.

The first families to settle in the island were not entirely dependant of the small-scale fishing practices. Fishing was a secondary activity; we opted to cultivate the land first and then fish to complement our economy. The fishing activity was something hard to practice because we needed to travel to Puntarenas to sell the fish; Puntarenas was the economic power. Little by little the fishing activities

increased in the island, we started by fishing Mero, then the shark using rudimentary tools and then the fisherman was introduced with the invention of the ice, new fishing techniques were introduced as well and fishing became our lives” (Nicolas Villegas, interview 06-21-06).

The economy of the island is heavily dependant on the small-scale fishing practices. Almost everyone in the island practice subsistence fishing, from men, women and children. The small-scale fishing activities are the first link in the fishing industry of the Gulf of Nicoya. The small-scale fishermen usually fish in local waters and sell their product to one of the fisheries on the island or directly to the fisheries in Puntarenas. This is particularly true of shrimp, which then is sold for exportation. The local fisheries in the island are either family-owned or cooperatives. The most valuable seafood caught by the islanders is the jumbo shrimp. The mangroves serve as host ecology for the shrimp to lay their eggs before retreating to the deep waters of the ocean. The small-scale fishermen on Venado employ traditional techniques such as the use of fishing rods, the traditional cuerda or rope, tackle, throw and drag nets (see figure 2.1). They rely on a paddle boat or motor boat for transportation to and from the fishing grounds. In the last 30 years the small-scale fishing techniques have change considerably and have brought a social change as well with the introduction of new techniques from foreigners. In the following story, Marvin describes these changes:

“There have been a lot of changes in the fishing techniques in the island, before the only tool was the cuerda, everybody used it, and we didn’t use the Trasmayo or Taiwanese line like nowadays. These changes made that lots of people decided to fish as a way to survive. The Jumbo shrimp was not fish because nobody knew how to trap it before but later people introduced the Trasmayo and they started to fish the Jumbo. With the introduction of Trasmayo, people from everywhere in Costa Rica sold their land to buy boats and fishing equipment like Trasmayos to become fishermen. Back then fishing was a good business; but little by little the fishing practice has declined until now that there is no much left in the Gulf of Nicoya. Fishing does not generate much and it was worse for the people who came with no experience. If the fisher has the experience to survive and if he has to fish with cuerda, the most rudimentary tool, he’ll survive. But to people who do not know what traditional fishing is and they only know how to use the Trasmayo, they have a difficult task to survive” (Marvin Salas, interview 06-04-06).

In some of my conversations with Marvin Salas, we talked about the foreigner population and their influences and effects on the small-scale fishing techniques. According to Marvin, the Chinese immigrant population brought new fishing techniques, huge fishing ships with hundreds of Chinese immigrants that were brought illegally so they work as slaves. The Chinese practiced external exploitation, everything that they fished was sold to other countries so in some way the Chinese did not immediately affect the small-scale fishing because the small-scale fishermen from the island and Puntarenas only sold their product in Puntarenas for national exportation. However, the Chinese ultimately affected the local and small-scale fishermen production because they had the technology, cheap labor, and new techniques, and the knowledge to know the location in the sea with the most fish. While the small-scale fishermen used very rudimentary techniques such as the cuerda and drag nets, Marvin explains that “by those times, when the Chinese took hand in the commercialization of fish, I was very depressed because thanks to the low production of fish he was close to losing his license. I was going to sell my license to a Taiwanese fishermen because the small-scale fishermen thought that there were no more fish in the Gulf of Nicoya” (Marvin Salas, field notes 06-07-06).

The Chinese fishermen improved the fishing activity in the Gulf of Nicoya by introducing the Taiwanese line which consists of a long line with more than two hundred hooks bailed with live bait. This technique extracted massive catches from the ocean of the gulf. They also introduced the Rastra, a huge net that sweeps the sea floor trapping any kind of marine species. The Rastra is very destructive because it exterminates large populations of sea life that are not commercially important. I will explain the ecological problems and the prohibition of these techniques in the Gulf of Nicoya later in this section.

“Thanks to the introduction of these techniques we also had the opportunity to buy motor boats which were cheaper back then. Now it is really hard to buy one, millions of colons, which we can’t afford (Marvin Salas, field notes 06-07-06). Marvin has a motor boat, a paddle boat and other tools such as rastra, Trasmayo, Taiwanese line, cuerdas and nets. Not all the islanders own their own fishing equipment. Some of the fishermen in the island work as peons for other fishermen that have their own equipment and required hired labor.

Puntarenas is the main port where local, national and international fishermen sell their catch. This port city has become a multicultural place where more of the commercial associates are of South American or Taiwanese origin which is affecting the small-scale fishermen and the national fishermen. The small-scale fishermen are selling their fishing licenses to foreigners especially to Taiwanese, Colombian and Venezuelan fishermen. In Puntarenas a center of fisherman include 1198 (small-scale fishing), 744 (medium), and 211 Advanced and 60 very large (Costa Rican Channel News, 07-06-06). The small-scale fishermen have access to two kind of license to fish: a license to fish in the Gulf and a license to fish out of the Gulf, in other seas. Unfortunately, the small-scale fishermen and the nationals are selling the fishing license to fish out in the ocean to foreigners because they can not afford a trip to fish in the ocean. A medium size fishing boat spends 30 millions Colones on a trip out of the Gulf of Nicoya. The competition among the fishermen in Puntarenas is causing the national fishermen to retire because they can not compete with the advanced equipment of the foreign fishermen, Marvin used to have a license to fish out in the ocean but he cancelled it because he could not afford it.

The average catch per fishermen in the Gulf of Nicoya has been declining over the last thirty years. This could be explained by the increase of fishermen which has caused an overexploitation and the environmental deterioration of the Gulf. The fishermen from Venado have respond to this issue by spending more time fishing. The Costa Rican government, in the last ten years, has responded to the over exploitation in the Gulf by implementing a bi-annual fishing restriction known as "Vedas." Veda was introduced and created to let the species reproduce and replenish fish stocks in the Gulf. Veda starts in the month of May and lasts two months after the end of July. Fishermen are allowed to fish the whole moth of August and after that they have one more month of Veda. During the months of Veda the government provides financial assistance to the fishermen who have a legal license to fish. This fishing prohibition takes a tremendous toll on the lives of island people who have no other means of survive. In the following story Marvin describes his feeling about this period of no work and no income:

"The government does not provide the traditional fishermen with any kind of economical or financial assistance, the only help is Veda. During the three months of prohibition, the government provides a minimum amount of money to survive during prohibition that is not enough even to eat. During the months of Veda, in order to receive the (45 mil colones) financial aid from the government we need to contribute to the community by working in the schools, clearing the roads, and painting. If there is any kind of job at the school, the board of education presents the project and people are assigned to work at the school. If there is work at the streets another group is assigned" (Marvin Salas, interview 06-04-06).

During Veda, Venado's economy is hit hard. Economic and sustainable problems become so serious that some people move temporarily to San Jose or Puntarenas to find a job. Jose Antonio Solano Salas, who moves to San Jose during Veda to work in an electronic company, and has been a fisherman since he was able to walk, share sentiments that watch that of his cousin Marvin: "los 45 mil colones que ofrece el gobierno no son justos ni comprensibles, los isleños pescamos para subsistir y mantener la familia, el futuro de los pescadores va acabarse, tendremos que ir nos a buscar otro futuro" (The monetary help from the government, 45 thousand colones are neither fair nor comprehensible. We, the islanders fish to survive and to sustain our families, I guess we will need to move somewhere else to find other ways to survive) (Antonio Solano Salas, interview 06-05-06). Some islanders move out of the island during Veda but the ones that stay find other ways to survive. Some opt to violate the Veda law and fish illegally risking their fishing license.

On one occasion I had the lamentable opportunity to observe a man fishing illegally and witnessing the consequences of his actions. That day I heard a lot of commotion outside so I decided to go out. Marvin, Eugenia, Marvin's wife and her brothers and some kids were at the beach watching a boat. They told me that the man in the boat was being chased by the marine patrol; he was caught fishing during Veda and all the fishermen were concerned and feeling pity for the man. They said he is going to lose everything, license, boat, and fishing tools and the worse thing is that he is a peon, so all the equipment and the boat is not his. Some were reluctant about the situation because they think he deserved it, he never respected Veda and he had been fishing several days. Others think that it is not fair because they said that as fishermen they are poor and during Veda they really suffer. Marvin weighed both sides. He said that the man deserved to be arrested by fishing during Veda. He states that "yes, it is true that we really have a hard time surviving during Veda because the government help is just not enough, 45mil colones is not enough to survive during two moths, we have to pay for electricity, water and food for the family, that's why some opt to go and fish but if they don't respect Veda they are damaging their future and the future of others because they are working against nature and the law" (Marvin Salas, field notes 06-20-06).

Not only Marvin disagree with people fishing during Veda, there are lot of islanders who disapprove of this behavior especially the use of the *rastra*, one of the most harmful, banned techniques used in the Gulf of Nicoya.



“The rastra is one the most harmful techniques, if you ask me. Who are the ones that exterminated the shrimp in the Gulf of Nicoya? It was not the big shrimp embarkations from Puntarenas, it was us, the small-scale fishermen, because we do not let the shrimp grow and we do not respect Veda. I am totally against the rastra, I have never used it, and the day that I will have to use this technique, will be because I am starving to death. The Gulf of Nicoya is collapsing, people need to respect Veda, and if we do not respect this restriction we will destroy our own future. I think it will be hard to restore the Gulf because it is already too damaged” (Nicolas Villegas, interview 06-21-06).

In the first week of July, the second month in Veda, it was obvious that the people were having difficulty they had no money, no food and no work. Their situation is hard and somehow desperate; they can not wait until the end of the month to receive the government financial assistance, their families need to sustain their family. In that week, I noticed a lot of activity in the sea, lots of fishermen have been fishing with the rastra to fish shrimp even though is prohibited to fish during Veda and even worse is totally prohibited to use the rastra since is so destructive and harmful. I asked Marvin and other islanders about all the activity in the sea and he told me that during these days most the people do not have much to eat. In July the Gulf becomes like a hot spot for the shrimp so everybody takes advantage to catch the shrimp. Unfortunately, the most efficient tool is the rastra (see figure 2.2). The fishermen are aware of how harmful it is. Later that day, Eugenia told me to go with some of her relatives to fish with the rastra; I accepted the invitation although somehow reluctant due to Marvin’s objections. He was mad because they were risking the family fishing equipment and their own license. The young fishermen gathered all the equipment and we got in the panga or motor boat and started getting away from the island to the middle of the sea. They covered their faces and wore long sleeve shirts even though the day was cloudy. They did not want to get burned by the sun that was hiding behind the clouds. There were several pangas using the rastra. Some days ago I saw people fishing with rastra and even one of the fisherman commented that he hasn’t seen so many pangas in the Gulf not even in normal time. The young fishermen threw the net and the rastra.

The rastra consists of a net with two heavy squares of wood that keep the rastra on the sea floor. Once deployed, it is like a wall that goes sweeping the sea floor and trapping all marine species in an effort to catch the precious shrimp. The rastra works at certain speed. They keep the panga going at a slow pace and when they feel that it has enclosed enough they give a 180 degree turn to completely trap the product. They then start pulling the wood that runs along the sea floor, and then the net and put the entire catch in the panga. I was amazed by all the marine species that died only for the shrimp. We separated the shrimp and edible fish in a big bucket and threw away the rest of the species. The birds and pelicans got fed with the rest of fish. They used the rastra twice, only the first attempt was successful. The second time was not successful. This time they left the rastra in the sea for a shorter period because they were informed by other fishermen that the marine patrol was coming from Puntarenas. So they did the work very fast and we left the place at a high speed towards the island. On our way to the island, they were informing the other men to hurry up and hide from the patrol. I was so astonished by the devastation of a single fishing tool. No wonder the rastra is prohibited (see figure 2.3).

The Veda or prohibition time demands that the islanders, especially women, the obligation to support the family by employing an informal economy. Some women organized bingo games at the island plaza where the prizes are comestibles such as rice, beans, salt or sugar. The participants are mostly women, young girls and boys that want to contribute to their families’ economy. I observed the game several times. I never played but I did help the younger participants to fill the bingo table.

Another important and indispensable food supplement during Veda time is the clams. When the islanders of Venado do not have any money and the men do not fish, women are the ones that provide the food. They spend long hours looking for clams, when they find lots of them they sell them to other people on the island. The search for clams is primarily a woman’s job, although young girls and little boys also help with this activity and once in a while men accompanied their wives and children. The clams are in the sand always under the rocks, but only when the tide is low people are able to find them. I went with Eugenia and the family to find clams and pianguas (another kind of shell-fish). We went to Florida to look for the almejas (clams). Eugenia’s brother told us of a zone where he found several kilos of them and he was going to sell them, so we went there. We divided up and Eugenia and I went to look for the clams while Marvin, Ariely, Bebe, Marino and Brian went to the mangroves to look for Pianguas. Eugenia and I started to dig in the sand, which is very hard work. You have to bend your back or sit on the rocks, or only bend your knees because the rocks are like knives especially in Florida among the mangroves. The only tools used are a knife or stick, a cube to hold the clams and your own luck to find them. After an hour or so a group of women and two kids from the Florida joined us, even though the day was cloudy it was hot and humid. I was wearing water proof boots that Marvin loaned me because the rocks were very sharp. All of the women were only wearing sandals (see figure 2.4). The time went fast and enjoyable, since we were chatting while we worked. The women mentioned how useful the clams are during Veda time. I excavated in the sand just as Eugenia told me, it was hard to distinguish the clams from the rocks because both of them are covered with sand. But I was able to help Eugenia to fill the bucket. Marvin and the kids had luck finding pianguas, I have heard that finding pianguas is harder than clams because the pianguas are hiding in the mangroves and is hard to get through them because you can

cut or scratch yourself in the mangroves. They collected 100 or so pianguas and we went home. Eugenia prepared the clams with rice, they were delicious and they prepared the pianguas with onion, banana, tomatoes, and lime.

## **Globalization and the tourism industry in Venado Island**

Globalization has transformed the subsistence economies of Costa Rica's coastal fishing communities. These small, resource-based communities are particularly vulnerable to structural changes in the Costa Rican economy. One of the aspects of globalization impacting the island is tourism which is one of the fastest growing industries in the world (Turner 1973). It has the capability to bring the underdeveloped areas closer to the modern world and it can generate great opportunities for rapid economic growth. Developing countries, as well as less developed regions within developed nations are increasingly looking towards tourism as a potential contribution to growth and development (Loukissas 1978). Yet in recent decades, a different kind of tourism has made its appearance: Eco-tourism.

Eco-tourism has been hailed as a panacea: a way to fund conservation and scientific research; protect fragile and pristine ecosystems; benefit rural communities; promote development in poor countries; enhance ecological and cultural sensitivity; instill environmental awareness and a social conscience in the travel industry; satisfy and educate the discriminating tourist; and, some claim, build world peace. Costa Rica is ecotourism's poster child (Honey 1999). Costa Rica has become a popular vacation site, in any tourism booklet Costa Rica appears as a country that offer all the necessary components to satisfy the millions of tourists that are looking for adventure, culture, beaches, and especially ecological experiences. Costa Rica has marked its beautiful tropical environment as an opportunity of economic development and within the tourism industry; eco-tourism has become a very popular form of investment. Tourism developopers are looking for rural areas to promote eco-tourism. Honey (1999) asserts that Eco-tourism often involves seeking out the most pristine and isolated areas on earth. The physical separation and relative isolation have made islands very popular tourist destinations and Venado Island is currently trying to implement tourism.

Currently organized tourism does not exist on Venado Island, but there is one organization that is very interested in introducing eco-tourism. The association of Eco-Tourism of Venado Island favors the idea of ecotourism development, to preserve the natural surroundings and to benefit the local economy. The Association's goal is to begin a small-scale ecotourism where the islanders could control the impact and protect the island's natural and human environment. Jose Angel Gomez, the main representative of the association explains that "The main reason to create an association of eco-tourism on Venado Island is to find new way to earn income because fishing is not prolific anymore in the island. The association was created with the help of Universidad Nacional of Costa Rica three years ago. The activities that we would like to offer to the tourists are information centers, ridings in horses around the island, artistic works, our youth in Venado has a lot of artistic talent and we should utilize it. We do not intend to harm the fishermen with the implementation of eco-tourism; the tourists will share and learn from our community" (Jose Angel Gomez, interview 06-04-06).

The association of eco-tourism does not receive the complete support of the community. Many islanders have misconceptions about tourism, they are afraid of the consequences that any kind of tourism might bring to the community. Roberto Bolivar, representative of the association, asserts that, he, as well as many islanders disapproves the national or massive tourism because it harms the values and the environment of any community. That is why he believes eco-tourism is a better option for Venado Island. Bolivar states, "the social, environmental and cultural impact of eco-tourism in the island would be small because the tourist will interact with the community, the experience will be cultural and environmental exposure, and we can show the tourist to respect our values" (Roberto Bolivar, interview 06-04-06).

Venado Island has two cabins to provide shelter to tourists who visit the island. Both of the shelters are located by the beach and close to the cantina bar where the tourists have access to pool tables, karaoke, food and drinks. Venado Island does not have more accommodations for tourists but it does offers it's beautiful environment and its genuine people. During the time I spend on Venado, I saw tourists only once in the local bar. They usually do not explore the island much, but spend the one day or two on the beach and at night they go to the local bar to sing along the karaoke machine, drink and have fun. Since there is no transportation from Puntarenas or Jicaral to the island, the tourists sometimes are exchange students or people who have contact with Venado islanders provide transportations from the mainland.

The Venado residents do not have much experience with tourists. Some of the islanders do not like the idea of tourists invading the island. My host mother, Eugenia Salas, believes that tourists have different values, ones that she would not like their daughter or sons to mimic. She also thinks tourists do not and won't respect the islander's values. The simple idea of foreigners on the island bothers her. My presence in the island was taken differently; my family loved the idea of me being Mexican or Latina because they know we share a lot of cultural and moral values especially the language. When I talked to the women about this issue, said that they disliked the idea of tourism or

eco-tourism in the island. Their main concern is the cultural impact on the islanders, they think that instead of the tourist learning from their culture they can be intruders. According to Honey (1999) ecotourism, as opposed to conventional tourism, holds out the twin promise of educating the visitor and respecting the local culture; however these two goals conflict. Eco-tourism is still struggling to find models for authentic cultural exchange that respects the rights of the host and satisfies the curiosity of the visitors.

Venado is a small island whose infrastructure is still developing and currently would not be able to support the increased population of tourists. Also all water and energy are generated to the consumption of the local community, while space and food resources are also limited. The overall limitation of Venado infrastructure is land which is an essential and main component to intensify the construction of housing for tourists, pathways across the mountain and the coast.

## Rights to land on Venado Island

Venado residents have no rights to titled land because of the Costa Rican law, *Ley sobre la zona marítima terrestre* No. 6043, which restricts the development on the small islands and the repartition of land. The only documents that the islanders have to prove their occupation of land in the island are zoning maps that described the conditions of the soil, and the space occupied by a particular family. Those documents or maps were granted by the municipality thanks to the “Plan de Regulador” or zoning plan. This documentation does not prove ownership rights; it only proves the occupation of land. In some cases this documents also proves the illegal occupation of land by people living within on property banned or restricted by the law (*Ley Marítima Terrestre* 6043). Most of forty families from Oriente and Jicaró communities are under this legal situation. These residents of Venado had been living with the uncertainty of not knowing when the law will be enforced. The implementation and enforcement of the law seldom occurs due to insufficient municipal funds, nevertheless, there is already some native families of Venado that have a legal order to vacate the illegally occupied land.

The first peoples who settle the island were the Barrios, Salas, and Villegas families. They emigrated from other provinces of Costa Rica. Now their descendants, Venado born, have scattered across the island in the three communities. They established themselves on the island and since they were the first ones to settle in Venado, they assumed natural ownership of land. They passed the land to their sons, natives of Venado. My host family on the island, Salas-Barrios, lives under the legal situation of land. I talked with Eugenia Barrios about the Terrestrial-marine law. I immediately noticed her sadness and anger. She said that there is not an option for the islanders, the laws will relocate the people at the end: “Talvez la próxima vez que venga a la isla, nos va a encontrar en el cerro” (Maybe the next time you come the island, you won’t find us here or maybe living in the steep mountain) (Eugenia Salas, field notes 06-19-06).

According to Terrestrial-Marine Law the marine terrestrial zone is composed of two hundred meters from the coastline. This zone is divided it in two sections: the public zone, which includes the first fifty meters from the coastline and the mangroves; and the restricted zone, which includes the last hundred and fifty meters. In both zones, it is totally prohibited to build houses or any kind of establishment unless the Costa Rican Institute of Tourism, the National Institute of Housing and Urbanism, and the municipality, approve the construction of houses or buildings. The people who are violating this law will be pushed out of their properties and they will have to pay for the demolition of their own houses or properties (*Ley sobre la zona marítima terrestre* No. 6043). In Jicaró and Oriente, most of the people have their houses within the 200 meters. In Florida, thanks to the mangroves, they live out of those prohibited meters but all the fishing equipment is within the forbidden zone (see figure 3.1).

Doña Regina or Virginia Matarrita lives in the community of Florida. She moved to the island with her parents when she was ten years old and since then she has lived in the island. Her eighteen sons and daughters were born in the island. She is one of the oldest people on the island who still practices small-scale fishing using the most rudimentary tools. She is one of the islanders who have already got a legal order to vacate their premises from the municipality. “I am an old woman, I am 75 years old, and I don’t have much time in this world I believe. I don’t want to leave the island, this is home. I wish they can leave us live in the island, leave us live the way we live as a fishing community” (Virginia Matarrita, interview and field notes 06-27-06).

Land is the primary issue on the island. Some islanders have opted to wait passively until the municipality and the government decides to enforce the law, while others have formed an association to fight back and defend their rights. The “Alianza” (alliance) is an association that was formed two years ago with the purpose to represent and fight for the community. Its members are the leaders of the different associations on the island and they are advised by the Universidad Nacional of Costa Rica. Viviana Bolaños, a young woman from Lepanto and now a resident of Venado Island is one of the main leaders of this association. She is an activist who is encouraging the islanders to fight back. She has fought fiercely for Venado Island, but she also explains that some islanders are confused by the debate:

“A lot of people from the island believe that the Alianza is the one that is causing all the land and tourism issues in the island, and even though we have explained them several times the purpose of Alianza they don’t understand. I am not a native of Venado, but my husband and my sons are from Venado and here is their legacy and that’s why we need to fight. I came to Venado to build a home here, why do I have to leave? Or why I am going to let my husband be thrown away from his land, he was born here and my father in law has been here for than 50 years” (Viviana Bolaños, interview 07-07-06).

Venado residents have many misconceptions about Alianza and this has make the work of Viviana and the other members harder because they do not receive support from all islanders this is a particular dilemma for Viviana as a leader:

“...at the beginning it was very hard, Alianza is an association of community leaders, I was not a leader, and they didn’t know me. A woman, young and with different and radical ideas from all of them, at the beginning it was hard because they did not take me seriously but when they started noticing that my participation was outstanding, that I was useful then they started asking for my opinion to the point that today, if I am not here there is not Alianza. To me this has been a good, interesting and stressing experience. This is something that has no comparison because I felt that I am useful. I live for the community not from the community, I don’t wait for someone to do something and just wait for the benefits, I take action. I am studying, I am receiving educational and leadership instruction from the Universidad Nacional is that’s why the members from Alianza take me seriously now” (Viviana Bolaños, interview 07-07-06).

During my time in the island, there were two very important meetings. I missed the first meeting which was held in Jicaro. This meeting was about the implementation of massive tourism in the island. A representative from the government from the Libertarios party was leading the meeting. Based on reports I heard the meeting was really heated when Alianza appeared. I had the opportunity to be invited to the second community reunion where each of the representatives from the associations was present as well as members of the community. The reunion was planned to organize the community and unify the associations so they can find a solution to the problem of land in the island and the potential impacts of tourism. I was very happy to be at this meeting because ALIANZA was the organizer of the reunion. It was my opportunity to learn more about this controversial association.

It was very interesting for me to be an external spectator to listen, learn and analyze the people’s ideas from another perspective. The reunion started a little bit late and it was chaotic. All the people wanted to talk and discuss their issues. Viviana, the main representative of ALIANZA, was directing the meeting which was hard since all the people wanted to talk at the same time. I felt a lot of tension at the meeting. The atmosphere was tense and with different opinions about the land issue, everybody discussed their issues and defended them without even listen to the concerns of others. There was a man who consistently reminded the people about the law and how it was broken for the people that are living in the public zone. Others expressed the misconception that ALIANZA is responsible that the government wants to relocate people that are living within the 200 meters. Still others argued that they will never find a solution because the community does not speak up; they are just waiting until the law takes effect in the island. I have been informed by several informants that in fact; the law will never be enforced in Venado. The islanders will continue to live in the 200 meter and nothing is going to happen because the municipality has been talking for a long time but the people keep living in the same places. The meeting continued in a seemingly disorganized and heated fashion. Finally, Viviana reminded them what the meeting was about, to formulate a project that could be presented to the senators at congress in an attempt to do something for the people on Isla Venado. Eladio, the president of the development association and Viviana, informed the crowd that they were tired of working and to fighting alone for the community. They formally resigned to their positions in their respective associations.

There was a man besides me at the meeting who did not belong to the community. He remained quiet, observing and listening. I never thought that when he spoke, he was going to be able to change the meeting and the perspectives of everybody attending. “Jose” (a social activist, community organizer, and ecologist from the Universidad Nacional) talked to the crowd as an external spectator but as a national, a Costa Rican. He started by sharing his observations from the meeting. He gave them a lesson and provided examples that made the people understand and get united. He told them that the meeting was based on “I am telling you so you are telling me and you are being the toys of the senators. The senators get a group of people from the island and tell them one thing and promise another, and then gather another group and promise them a different thing. The thing is that they are dividing the community; “divide and conquest” the old same thing is happening in the island” (“Jose” Field notes 06-23-06). Everybody was divided in opinions, ones for ignorance, others for bad information; he told them how easy it is to be defeated if they are divided and that is the tactic of the senators. “Resistance” Jose exclaimed. He told

the group that they need to resist and make the senators respect them, their dignity as islanders and respect their way of life, like the indigenous groups in Costa Rica and in other parts of the world” (“Jose” field notes 06-23-06).

The fishing sector on Venado Island is the most susceptible and the most criticized. People from other parts of Costa Rica ignore how the fishermen and islanders make sense of their lives, the way of life. It seems that the government does not care either and that is why they want to implement the Terrestrial-Marine law and other tourism projects. “Jose” spoke at the ALIANZA meeting of a group of islanders that lived in the worse conditions some years ago. They lived in a small island with no light, and no drinkable water. Yet the government wanted the land where they lived. None of these islanders knew how to read or write, so the government met with each one separately and made them sign a treaty that expelled them from their land. If they could have stuck together, the story could have been different. He made his point that in Venado this is happening in the same way. Everybody is fighting their own battle and not looking for a collective solution. Jose told them that they are opinionated about the law and so it is impossible to find a solution, but he asserted that the law is man made, thus it is not permanent- it is not written in stone. The law is by men and for men and the law has to change, because the laws from a hundred years ago are not applicable in modern times. As people change through time the law must change too to accommodate to needs of the people. The Ley Maritima Terrestre can not apply to Venado Island because it would affect the whole population, especially the houses in the Oriente and Jicaro that are within the 200 meters prohibited. Most of the islanders established themselves by the beach not to break the law, they needed to have their equipment by the beach and also take care of the boats. The situation is different for the Florida residents because that side of the island is covered with mangroves so they built their houses further away from the beach but they will be affected by the law too because they will not be able to leave their pangas or boats in the beach since is public area. This will end their ability to fish.

The government has been very insensitive and incomprehensible about the fishing communities. If they relocate the people who are in the 200meters, which is something islanders believe will happen, the whole population will be affected for the reasons mentioned above. They are a fishing community and the law does not respect their way of life. The government’s massive projects assure new jobs for the people; new opportunities for the young and more economic stability. Yet will these developments truly benefit the native population? Some portion of the population knows it will not. They disagree completely with massive tourism. They will be relocated and eventually end up without any property. A similar thing occurred at the Isla Caballo where half the island belongs to foreigners and the rest of the people who live there are resisting the sale of their land. However they will eventually be forced to give up because the government cut the light and water, pushing them to sell. They are also worried about the consequences that massive tourism might bring- for example drugs, prostitution, unemployment and more difficulties for the fishermen. The community supports tourism but only eco-tourism where the community still can handle the situation.

Jose told them that the government wants to trick the people with ghost tourism projects but they all know that Oscar Arias, Costa Rica President, want to sign the TLC (Free Commerce Trade) to promote the massive tourism in Costa Rica. “Jose” affirms that Costa Rica will become another Centro-American poor country like Nicaragua, El Salvador or Mexico. He advised them to fight for what they believe in and what they live for. Jose words not only excited me but they encouraged the crowd. He changed the people’s perspective. For the first time during the meeting, the community began listen to each other. At the end of the meeting they found a solution to the problem in the island. The community decided to write a propuesta (proposal) and take it to the congress after being accepted and voted on by the whole community. They stipulated that they do not want any changes in Venado, they want to remain as a fishing community. So the next step was to set another reunion where the whole population will attend. This is more difficult since many people show no interest. They decided to make a mandatory meeting and they will need the help of the Fishermen Association since they are having the fishermen work for some hours for the community in order to receive the monetary help that the government provide to the fishermen during veda.

I attended to the next mandatory meeting which was held at the youth house. Unfortunately Viviana was depending on the Protestant pastor of the island to print the propuesta or proposal but he left to Nicaragua that morning and forgot to print the document so they postponed the meeting. I could see that Viviana was frustrated and mad. I got the chance to talk to her and we discussed the current events on the island. She expressed her feelings against the TLC. “Here in the Island not all the people know about the TLC and some just don’t care, they disregard that behind TLC there is so many problems. For example the Libertarios’s project would pass with the TLC, all the land would pass in their hands. I know that Costa Rica grants land to a foreigner if he or she is been a resident for ten years, but with the TLC they will be free to buy land. Everything will be affected, the fishing activities I meant everything and that’s why we should fight against it. I believe if the TLC takes action in Costa Rica, we are going to have armed forces again. What we can do to fight against the TLC is first to support all the labor unions in this country, all the student movements, all we can do is to support because can you imagine us organizing a movement in the island? Laughs” (Viviana Bolaños, interview and field notes 07-06-06).

I do approve and support this propuesta (proposal) but I have some concerns. All the fishing productivity in the gulf has been decreasing in the last few years, and the people are looking for opportunities beyond the island. Yet the people keep practicing the only thing they know better which is fishing. Also the Arias government is determined to support national tourism no matter what, so eco-tourism might be an economical option in Venado. I support the islander's and fishermen's causes, they deserve respect as any other human being; they have to defend their way of life and their property. Miscommunication and passiveness are the major problems on the island. That is why they do not organize themselves as they should and also why the Universidad Nacional cannot achieve most of their goals and projects successfully. I hope Venado residents get united to fight for their rights to land and to decide what to do for their future.

## **Conclusion**

I finally had the opportunity to talk with the USAC professor, my cultural liaison on Venado Island. He came for the second and last time to the island during my stay. He has a tremendous amount of information and insight about the island. He is well known in the island and very loved by the people and especially the kids because every time he visits the island he brings food for them. He said he does it because the kids get really happy and the kids never get this kind of attention. Arturo and I talked for about an hour, he is very knowledgeable in law matters as well as the legal issues in the islands, and he is a lawyer and a biologist so he has information about the ecological and cultural history of the island. After we talked, he decided that would be neat to gather more people and have a group interview, so he called some of the Barrios, Marvin's brothers, and some more people who joined us in this conversation. I felt very pleased once again to be part of a conversation to discuss and share views about the island matters. We kept talking even though the digital recorder was out of memory. I didn't want to run and get the other one because the talk was so pleasant and open out of respect I decided to stay and listen to the people. Only one woman joined us, the rest were men. We held our conversation at the beach, in front of the sea which looked like an infinite lake, so calm, so peaceful and so alive. The tide was descending slowing leaving the sand naked under moon light and we kept talking and I admired the sea beauty for the last time. This was formally my last interview and conversation with the people from the island. In two days I was leaving the island. I went to a soccer game in Lapanto and by the end of the afternoon it started raining and the tide was amazingly far away from the dock. All the boats were beached at least a mile and half from the dock. They looked like deserted islands in the sand. All the Venado islanders that came to the game walked in the mud under the rain and we all pushed our respective boat for almost a mile to find deep water to start the motor boat, our feet were completely covered in mud. We had fun pushing the boat, the men were singing and they had fun imitating my Mexican accent.

The next day I woke up early. Marvin was waiting for me at the beach to take me to Puntarenas. I cried in Eugenia's arms, I did not want to leave. It was so hard to leave. I saw the beach and the island for the last time and I promised to return for them and for the part of my soul that I leave in the island. I felt nostalgic and sad. I will miss the people, my island the one they offer me as my home, my second home. I truly appreciate all the generosity, kindness, and genuineness of the people. I will always live content and grateful with them.

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## Interviews

- Aragona, Solano Eladio**, Main Leader of the Development Association, Venado Island, interviewed on 06-13-06.
- Barrios, Rodrigo**, Community member, Fisherman, Venado Island, interviewed on 06-13-06.
- Bolaños, Viviana**, Leader of ALIANZA, Venado Island, interviewed on 07-06-06.
- Bolivar, Roberto, Representative of Eco-Tourism Association of Venado Island, Venado Island, interviewed on 06-04-06.
- Gomez, Jose Angel**, Main Representative of Eco-Tourism Association of Venado Island, Venado Island, interviewed on 06-04-06.
- Matarrita, Virginia**, Community member, Venado Island, interviewed on 06-27-06.
- Salas, Eugenia**, Community member, Venado Island, continuous discussions from June through July 2006.
- Salas, Marvin**, Community member and Fisherman, Venado Island, interviewed on 06-04-06 and continuous discussions from June through July 2006.
- Solano Salas, Jose Antonio**, Community member and Fisherman, Venado Island, interviewed on 06-05-06.
- Villegas, Nicolas**, Community member and Fisherman, Venado Island, interviewed on 06-21-06.

## Figures



**Figure 1a.** Aerial photo of Venado Island. Taken by Ricardo Sánchez Murillo.



**Figure 1.1** The Salas Family celebrating the grandmother's birthday. Taken by Maria Venegas 07-02-06.



**Figure 1.2** Rodrigo Barrios practicing his new job. Taken by Maria Venegas 06-13-06.



**Figure 1.3** Children fishing with the traditional "cuerda." Taken by Maria Venegas 06-04-06.



**Figure 2.1.** The traditional "cuerda" the most rudimentary fishing tool still used in Venado. Taken by Maria Venegas 06-04-06.



**Figure 2.2.** Young men fishing with the rastra. Taken by Maria Venegas 07-06-06.





**Figure 2.3.** Islanders separating the rastra's caught for shrimp and edible fish. Taken by Maria Venegas 07-06-06.



**Figure 2.4.** Women and children looking for clams in the mangroves. Taken by Maria Venegas 07-03-06.



**Figure 3.1.** Jicaro community, all the houses are within the 200 meters prohibited by the Marine-Terrestrial Law. Taken by Maria Venegas 06-16-06.