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Marcela Camargo Ríos

Independent Researcher

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INTRODUCTION

As happened in the American continent, the isthmian territory was occupied by Amerindian populations, mostly located on the Pacific slope, made up of hamlets and chiefdoms. In the sixteenth century, the irruption of Spanish armies had terrible consequences: diminishing the population, dismembering their political, economic and social system, and the reduction of inhabitants in Indian settlements as well as the establishment of Spanish settlements and hermitages with mixed populations. The former were located close to the Spanish populations, where the latter took advantage of their services and labor. In the Indian villages they were taught Spanish, the Catholic religion, and the cultivation of new plants and agricultural techniques. Nevertheless, these villages were encroached on over time by Spaniards and Blacks in order to conduct trade and live in.

The demands of the work, payment of tribute, the obligation to pay tithes and “first fruits,” and the theft of their lands drove the original settlers of Penonomé to abandon their village and head for the mountain. Today they constitute the so-called “cholos de Coclé”¹ who, as other groups, in addition to the biological and cultural interbreeding, have been strongly impacted by globalization.

The Spaniards seized large concentrations of land, which they used to establish new towns and crops and to promote cattle raising and mine and pearl extraction. Black slaves took over these activities, and over time some of them, by then freed, created small settlements close to the crops or the mills². The current inhabitants are descendants of the Africans who arrived with the Spaniards: they speak Spanish and practice the Catholic religion and other customs adopted from

¹ That is how the mixed-race descendants of the indigenous people of Penonomé, Coclé Province, are called.

² Omar Jaén S. provides a wealth of information on the matter in his book, *Un estudio de historia rural panameña. La región de los llanos del Chirú* (1991). Also, *La población del Istmo de Panamá. Un estudio de geohistoria* (1998).

the Spaniards, albeit with the modifications arising from racial mixing, the processes of acculturation, and globalization.

From the conquest and colonization onward, two large and well-differentiated geographic spaces – mountains and plains inhabited by indigenous populations – witnessed the innermost disruption of their territory in human and cultural terms and the modification of their habitat. I am referring to “spaces” taking Lefebvre’s anthropological version, which describes space as a social product, not of an individual or an entity, but a social reality susceptible to investing [in] space, producing it with the means and resources within its reach.³

This article shows my access as a historian to the geographic spaces described above: plains and mountains – not always an easy journey – and highlights spaces and the perception of their use within the house that welcomed me to conduct my research. In my opinion, such custom reveals cultural practices, where the functions assigned to men and women are differentiated. I also address the struggles and resources employed to have ownership or right of use over land earmarked for cultivation, the construction of housing or as source of raw material for handicrafts, fundamental spaces for their sustenance and the future of their families.

This whole coexistence and work experience took place in a period spanning from 1995 to 2009 with specific objectives: to obtain information in order to write my masters’ thesis on the History of Panama and America, based on the production and trade of the peasants from the District of Penonomé; and subsequently to continue my work as a historian of rural labor, stressing on this occasion, the area of the plains where I hoped to highlight the inhabitants’ identification with their land, struggles and actions to keep them and the right to a decent life.

For that reason, the topic of space was not the objective of my original research. Nevertheless, the entire effort of the two populations to produce and trade, or to keep their land, took place in the space occupied by houses, and the use given to it, in farming or market lands. The previous description brings to the fore the omnipresence of space in the lives of the inhabitants of these regions, something that deserves to be made known, since it shapes the habitat and its life referent. This article is the product of that reflection and my insights regarding the use of such spaces.

That said, this article is based on the research carried out in both areas and covers between 1995 and 2009, using recorded interviews with residents over 50 years old obtained through the method of oral history. I based my thesis and some publications on them with the hope of enhancing the history of the two sectors. The protagonists: peasants from Penonomé, Coclé Province, Panama, share a space not studied much, sidelined from the country’s economy: the rural world. A special aspect of this method is precisely to report on the life histories, experiences, troubles, failures and joys of those members of society to whom little attention is paid and about whom hardly anything is written, and also to enhance the already known history with the introduction of new protagonists and topics. In another regard, that history brings back memories and is the product of two persons, the interviewee and the interviewer, making it more intimate, closer and more democratic.

³ Henri Lefebvre, *La producción del espacio*. (Madrid: Capitán Swing Libros, 2013), 169.

TRAVELED ROADS, OBSERVED SPACES

According to my intended objectives, I begin by commenting on the access to the communities visited in the mountainous area, located to the north of the province. The area is characterized by a rainy tropical climate, with annual precipitation in some points of 4,000 mm.⁴ Places with a higher elevation are cooler than those close to the plains. Numerous rivers and streams flow through the area.

Its inhabitants are the mixed-race descendants of native peoples; during the colonial period they supplied Penonomé with agricultural, artisan, medicinal and wood products. Although this supply of goods continues, it is currently shared by products coming from other provinces, the capital city or abroad.

The villages chosen for my study were Las Delicias, Churuquita Chiquita, Churuquita Grande, Pajonal, Tambo, Pozo Azul, Toabré, Rincón de las Palmas, Membrillo and San Miguel Centro, located close to or on the central mountain range in the watershed.

In order to have a greater coverage of the rural world, the plains were the next space that was studied. They are on the border of the Pacific Coast, have a tropical savanna climate with a dry season lasting four to five months. It is characterized by its mangroves and swampy lands. To the south, the village of El Coco, for example, has 500 hectares of mangroves, where *junco* (*Eleocharis Sp.*) the raw material to make horse saddle mats known as *esterillas*, and *enea* (*Musa Sp.*) used to make mats known as *esteras* grow.⁵

It is also, some local residents told me, a place for fishing and the nesting site of many birds, although in the words of Professor Isan Domingo Liao “the exploitation of sand in the streams and rivers is destroying the wetlands and thus altering the population of birds that come here to nest.”⁶

In the plains, during the colonial period, the relationship of slaves or freedmen with their employers entailed serving them in their homes, taking care of the cattle, working in the sugarcane fields and the mills, while agricultural production was less important. The landowners obtained most farm produce from the population up north. Starting with their emancipation, which occurred throughout the Isthmus at different paces in the mid nineteenth century, groups from the plains of Coclé who worked in the farms settled in areas close to them. They established hamlets and devoted themselves to the sale of sugar cane products: panela, molasses and sweets

⁴ *Provincia de Coclé (Panama)*, EcuRed, 2015. www.ecured.cu/EcuRed: Enciclopedia Cubana. Accessed on 25 February 2021.

⁵ Junco, a native plant, and enea belong to the genus *Thypha*. *Esterillas* are placed under the horse saddle so as not to hurt the horse. *Esteras* are used to cover wooden beds, to sit on or sleep on the ground, and also for babies to crawl on.

⁶ Isan Domingo Liao. “Memorias del sindicato agrícola de El Coco,” Interview by Marcela Camargo R., *Memoria del III Encuentro Internacional de Historia Oral “Rescatando la memoria de nuestros pueblos,”* (2009): 254.

such as *cabanga*⁷ and afterward to the sale of cattle and cattle meat and the rice trade. For a long time, they dealt in *esteras* and *esterillas*, which at present have almost disappeared.

The historical development of the two populations during and after the conquest was and is different, and their evolution and relationship with Penonomé so demonstrates it.

IN THE INTIMATE AND REDUCED SPACE OF A HOUSE

After having located the vast physical or natural spaces: mountains and plains, we place ourselves at the dwelling. Regardless of its size and the materials used to build it, a house delimits the space taken from nature and takes us to more restricted and specific areas for the family or domestic group. I deem valid the definition by Sánchez Q. and Jiménez R. that considers the rural dwelling an “organism that is eminently active and interactive with the natural, constructed, and communitarian environment that constitutes not just a cultural legacy but also an emotional and cohesive support for families, buttressed or heavily influenced by their economic and communitarian activities...”⁸. Therefore, the place where the interview was conducted inside or outside the perimeter of the house is decisive and can be a thermometer to appreciate how its inhabitants represent spaces.

In the mountains, as I was able to notice, it was common to be welcomed at the porch, with the interviewee and I being the only ones there. The porch is a part of the home built with cement blocks or adobe, according to the material employed to build it; it may have a cement or dirt floor. It is always at the front of the house and consists of an open space with a low wall and cement columns in the block houses and only wooden posts in the adobe ones. It is occasionally used by the male and less often by the female to chat, weave a hat, make fishing nets or take in the cool air seated in a wooden bench or the hammock. It is generally facing the road or trail where people walk by, which makes greetings and interaction, or the exchange of information or products, easier. The furniture is plain; depending on the purchasing power of its inhabitants; there is one or two rustic wooden benches, industrial-made wooden or plastic chairs and a hammock.

The kitchen was another place into which they [interviewees in the mountains] welcomed me; it is independent of the house and mostly built with palm leaves or the cane or bark of the jira palm tree (*Socratea exorrhiza*), placed vertically or horizontally; there are others made of adobe. It is located at the back or side of a house. Most of the interviews with the women took place there. It is a more intimate place that the woman feels as her own. It is the “private domestic space,” where she spends much of her time; it is used to prepare meals, the ingredients and cooking

⁷ A confection made with cane syrup, with papaya added to it. It is cooked in big metal recipients called *fondos*. Later it is poured into molds, and once it hardens it is packed, originally in sugar cane leaves but currently in plastic. At present, the production is low.

⁸ Concepción Sánchez Quintanar and Eric Orlando Jiménez Rosas, “La vivienda rural. Su complejidad y estudio desde diversas disciplinas,” *Luna Azul* 30 (2010): 174

methods of which are a reflection of a group's culture and identity.⁹ It is here where friends and closest friends are received.

During the interview [with women], husbands or partners almost always accompanied us, perhaps to affirm the powers of the patriarchy as expressed in their wanting to know what the woman said or to support or correct her when hesitant or in doubt. In our research the males expanded the information that was provided or corroborated it. On many occasions I noticed a stove consisting of three stones on the ground or raised on small columns that held up a grid of canes and mud. A rustic table and chairs, pieces of logs or a waist-high wooden mortar "lying down" constituted the furniture and kitchenware: manufactured dishes, whisks, pots, cans and gourd recipients. In that space of the kitchen one could also see vegetables, handfuls of rice or corn cobs used in their diet. The woman in her space always had something to do: stir what she had in the pot, weave a hat, clean the rice, "*espurgar*,"¹⁰ or shuck corn. That is how we conducted the interview, which was made more pleasant by a draft of cool air. The kitchen is the place where they usually eat, although so is the yard, under some shady trees.

In the plains, the interviews [that] were conducted with men who were the survivors of the original agricultural labor union, for the most part [took place] on the porch, and on one occasion, in the yard. Of the four houses visited, three were built with blocks and one with adobe. Plastic or wooden chairs were used during the interview. Cars driving by, dogs barking, neighbors saying hello and the breeze accompanied us on every occasion. The porch is, thus, a reception room, a social area, for neighborly interaction.

Evidently, the uses of the spaces inside the peasant home denote that the areas closest to nature – that is – open areas like porches, kitchens and yards, are deemed valuable and used more frequently. It is probably for the enjoyment of the breeze and social interactions; the remaining areas are for sleeping. This is what Lefebvre would call "spaces of representation,"¹¹ which correspond to the action, imagination and passion of those who live in them, those who inhabit them.

LAND AS SPACE IDENTIFIES, NOURISHES AND ALSO GENERATES CONFLICTS

When I defined the rural dwelling in the previous paragraphs, I mentioned that it was an "organism that is active and interactive with the natural environment," so that the relationship with the land in the surroundings of the house, in its crops and its hunting and fishing areas, is an intrinsic condition to the residents of the rural area. Those links and relationships with the

⁹ Juana María Meléndez Torres and Gloria María Cañez De la Fuente, "La cocina tradicional regional como un elemento de identidad y desarrollo local. El caso de San Pedro El Saucito, Sonora, México," *Estudios Sociales* 17 (2009): 1. Interesting article that brings to light culinary practices as the expressions of the culture and identity of a small town that in the process of change uses food to earn money and improve its economy.

¹⁰ To remove the impurities, pebbles, seeds or grains from the rice without unhusking it.

¹¹ Ion Martínez Lorea prologue to *La producción del espacio*, 16.

territory, with their life project and their history, is what is called place attachment and it generates resistance.¹²

Therefore, I will refer to the conception and symbolic value of the land and the struggles waged by a group of residents from the community of El Coco in the plains to rescue and ensure for themselves and their descendants, a tract of swampy land used for fishing and gathering the reeds used to make artisan products such as mats and horse saddle mats, in addition to growing their crops and preserving their life and customs.

These lands had been declared as safeguarded by Decree No. 14 of 4 February 1918, which protected 1,000 hectares of land in the place called El Juncal. As per that Decree, the inhabitants received the benefit of the right of way and access to water and the plants that provided the materials for their artisan products, from which they obtained their livelihood. In 1925, through Decree No. 73 of 21 July 1925, 8 hectares were added to the ones existing already. The consequence of those Decrees stemmed from the actions and pressure by the area residents before local and national authorities.

The space of El Juncal was seized in the mid-1950s by Plinio Pérez¹³, a powerful man from the nearby provincial capital of Penonomé, who claimed it for himself as an inheritance. Therefore, a protracted lawsuit ensued with some residents, punctuated by violence, incarcerations and intimidation, by means of police force, that divided families and attracted the gaze of politicians. The matter was finally resolved with the intervention of General Omar Torrijos, head of the government during the early 1970s.

As I stated above, Mr. Pérez decided to put a fence that split the community in two, thereby preventing a large number of inhabitants from entering the land that meant their livelihood and work. This man demonstrated his power by establishing differences between him and the residents.¹⁴ This evidences a duality of representations of space. One is directly linked to private ownership (capital) and the other, to the peasant sector (subsistence). On this matter, this is how Ezequiel Bernal Vargas put it:

Well, the problem arose, and it did because as you know in the community of El Coco, the land was being hoarded by the powerful and we with the peasants were being left . . . [a gesture with his head and hands signaled that they were being left with nothing] to the point that the last parcels of national land left were the reed beds. So, we put in a request to get those reed beds as rice fields and to have a few animals, the ones among us who had them, and to count on something then. But at that time the government was not with the proletariat, we, peasants, as we still are, but. . . they enforced more can't do laws on us, that they could not, who knows what, and finally . . . they brought a law that stated that those lands were inalienable and so they could not give them to us, but then, this

¹² Byron Salazar Manrique and Visnú Posada Molina, "La identidad campesina y la estética del arraigo como resistencia", *Criterio Libre Jurídico* 14 (2): 107-113, <https://doi.org/10.18041/1794-7200/criteriojuridico,2017.v14n2.1632>.

¹³ Not his real name.

¹⁴ Octavio Spíndola Zago, "Espacio, territorio y territorialidad: una aproximación teórica a la frontera". *Revista mexicana de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales* 61 (2016), <http://www.redalyc.org/pdf/421/42149082003.pdf>. Accessed on 22 February 2021.

man, who was to the north of the parcel, who was Mr. . . . the family . . . the old man was on his way to enter the mangroves.¹⁵

Several considerations arise from the interview conducted with this area resident. One, at that time, the farmlands available to them were being hoarded. That in his imagination “reed beds” could be a resource or refuge to obtain the land they needed to resist and subsist. The other one is that the appeal to the authorities went unheeded; instead, the petitioners were reminded that this land was inalienable. Their hopes vanished, but they were in for a bigger surprise a short time later when a chieftain from a nearby town, Mr. Pérez, began to split the village with a fence that blocked access to the “reedbeds.”

Perseverando Bernal another villager spoke this way:

In 1957, . . . when we realized it, there was a fence dividing the community. In the back, the reed beds and properties. Since the laws were on their side, they built a fence.¹⁶

The land served for agricultural and artisan labor, and it is to be stressed, according to Bernal, that it was used “for planting rice, for the fiber that is an indispensable medium for our lives.” Inés Camargo, Florencio Camargo and Ezequiel Bernal also mentioned the use for cattle raising and fishing, and all underline that it means “having something to count on,” “to have a reserve,” because if “we had nothing,” “we were left up in the air.”

Comments like these express the ties to their land, the image they had of it; their lives and that of their families who depended on it. It also denotes surprise and reproach at the authorities that did not abide by the law and did not enforce them in order to favor the powerful to the detriment of their life aspirations.

Ezequiel Bernal Vargas, as well as Perseverando Bernal, point to Mr. Pérez’s abuse and assault. They implicitly recognize that they are dispossessed and that the laws favor those with means. Here, race and class come to the fore in the simple and heartfelt words of the interviewees: Afro-descendants from the coast, rural inhabitants with little education and poor, up against a rich, white owner with powerful relationships and from the town who was taking their land away.

That could not be tolerated. Therefore, they organized and promoted meetings to find a solution to the problem and invited other residents to join the movement. As a means of struggle, they decided to cut the barb wire around Mr. Pérez’s property, visited the town authorities, and lastly, with counsel, they created an agricultural labor union with the encouragement of the Christian Democratic Party. The government responded by sending police officers to contain the rebel outbreak against the land of a wealthy individual from the town, for considering it an expression of communism. These actions took place in the mid-1950s and during the 1960s, in the midst of the Cold War, when the specter of communism justified all of them. In that regard, several

¹⁵ Ezequiel Vargas Bernal. “Memorias,” *Interview by Marcela Camargo R., III Encuentro Internacional de Historia Oral (2009): 255.*

¹⁶ Perseverando Bernal. “Memorias,” *interview by Marcela Camargo R., III Encuentro Internacional de Historia Oral (2009).*

persons were arrested and held in prison for months, over many years. One of those detainees said:

“[A]t the time the authorities did not lend us the little guys a hand. I was detained, and Cheque spent a year and a half. They caught him at Jobo, when we were at a meeting. Cheque and Baldonero because they were accused of cutting the fence. You know that at that time people lent themselves to make false statements, and since the laws were on the side of the opponent, they did them the favor.”¹⁷.

Relatives and many inhabitants censured them and pushed them away. The formation of a labor union created cohesion and had greater strength to be heard. Some politicians and authorities of the revolutionary process that followed the military coup of 1968 took notice of the struggles of the group and its affiliation to a labor union and supported them through the creation of a settlement, which generated assistance. Actions and lobbying before the government authorities succeeded in reaching an agreement in 1971 with Mr. Pérez so he would not invade the reed beds.¹⁸

As a result of their struggles, the reed bed space was run by a settlement successfully for several years. But subsequent poor management of the rice fields that turned into grazing fields, and the failure to pay banks, led to the loss of much land. It is currently being leased or used in usufruct by private citizens. Mr. Pérez’s descendants continued raising cattle and cultivating rice fields, and some own livestock and shrimp farms. Many of those who created the original settlement abandoned it, and only a handful continue using a small portion of it in usufruct.

As the village, education and ties to capitalist companies grow, trades and jobs become diversified and broaden life prospects. Some women offer their services as maids or ironing clothes in the town, others are police officers or security guards, others own small stores or bars, some are construction workers, orderlies, teachers or professors. There are some who have cattle or are peons or workers in the companies established in the town or nearby. Most live from subsistence farming in small plots that they own or lease.

Thus, it becomes clear that the initiators of the movement maintained the village, the reed beds included. They have a place to live in, a place in which to be educated and profess their faith, to enjoy themselves and rest for eternity. Although the struggle of a few for a vital space cost them tears, imprisonment, estrangement from their families, the reward in the end was that their land was secured for them and their descendants. This is a way of stressing that land as space “was everything,” since otherwise “we were left up in the air.”

The northern sector of the province, which I have named the mountainous area, was not spared the difficulties stemming from the tenure and loss of its land. Throughout the history of the populations that settled in that space, there were very harsh times that prompted displacements, hoarding of their land, involvement in a civil war and quarrels among brothers and between families.

¹⁷ Florencio Camargo. “Producción y comercio en la sociedad rural de Penonomé, durante los primeros cincuenta años de la república.” Interview by Marcela Camargo R., *Colección Agenda del Centenario de la Universidad de Panamá* (2002): 257-258.

¹⁸ Marcela Camargo R., “Memorias,” *Memoria del III Encuentro Internacional de Historia Oral* (2009):259.

One of the displacements took place during the colonial period, since for different reasons the original town, Penonomé, suffered the encroachment of other groups, Spaniards and Blacks, who were taking away their land; in addition, the onerous weight of certain tax burdens, which were paid with personal work, in cash or in kind drove many of its residents to withdraw into the mountains, where they preserved much of their culture. By the same token, support for a war that started in Colombia – for 80 years Panama was part of Colombia, with intermittent separatist movements – led to the participation of “Coclé’s cholos,” who under the Liberal Party banner and the leadership of Victoriano Lorenzo, fought for three years, mainly for their land. The involvement in these struggles of someone who was to be president of the Republic on three occasions, Belisario Porras, prompted the State to designate some lands as indigenous reserves. In that respect, Decree No. 44 of 7 June 1914 created an indigenous reserve in the northern area of Coclé, and thus inalienable. In this fashion, according to Agustín Arias, “the land they cultivated was indigenous land that did not require title deeds and was protected, preventing their use and hoarding by non-natives, with the exception of the land that already had an owner or was used in usufruct.”¹⁹ Given that situation, peasants lived and grew their crops in his space without owning it, and many of them have remained this way until today, although the reserve was eliminated in 1972 by the revolutionary government under the command of Omar Torrijos, transforming the space into an area under the control of the State, a situation that as one can see brings the “spaces represented” by the mountain communities closer to private capital.²⁰

This situation becomes evident with the remarks by Salomón Santana. He expressed the idea that the land “is mine because my father worked it, and I inherited it in 1948 when he died, and I continue to work it.”²¹ To have that right means that an ancestor of theirs occupied the land and worked it, because they demarcated it and inherited it and used it constantly. Therefore, they have possessory rights and nobody can take the land away from them.

As mandated by the State since the early days of the Republic, but with greater intensity beginning with the revolutionary process, some inhabitants obtained their title deeds. This effort, in addition to being lengthy, complex and onerous, was marked by lawsuits, disagreements and violence, as described in Juan Rivas’ account of the acquisition of his land in Churuquita Grande:

My brothers and I inherited land from our father and an uncle for the most part, but we also bartered among brothers and purchased land. My father bought a plot in Churuquita Grande, and it was never registered. Upon his death, part of the land was lost, since others seized it and occupied it, the family sold the rest. With my share I purchased a plot that I exchanged for another one with some relatives, which is where I now live.

¹⁹ Agustín Arias. *Producción y comercio en la sociedad rural de Penonomé, durante los primeros cincuenta años de la república*. Interview by Marcela Camargo, 56.

²⁰ Marcela Camargo R., *Producción y comercio en la sociedad rural de Penonomé, durante los primeros cincuenta años de la república*,” 63.

²¹ Salomón Santana. *Producción y comercio en la sociedad rural de Penonomé, durante los primeros cincuenta años de la república*. Interview by Marcela Camargo, 56.

The land belonging to my uncle was located close to the river, and my brothers and I inherited it However, later when the family grew there was discord, and they decided to divide the land but only in word. When my older brother died, we went to the *corregidor* [a community judge], drew up the title deed, and now I have it registered at the Land Reform office, and I have also divided.

Most, however, did not do that, which led to frequent quarreling and deaths among relatives over land inherited without property title. Also, since there were no fences around it, many neighbors and outsiders began invading and then registering it, and so the persons who had the right of use were left with no land. That is what teacher Atilia de Fernández told us: that the villagers would use the land but had no title deeds.

[I]n the past, they would ask every year for a piece of land for their crops (that started since time immemorial . . .) they themselves respected the property, as if it were titled” --but she warns that it also created problems-- “that was the source of the irritation, and they were in the mayor’s office all the time . . . and they would fight . . . and sometimes there would be deaths.²²

Land as a generator of space is a powerful factor of cohesion for peasants, a builder of identities, and also a cause of conflict, struggles and quarrels. The residents of the plains identify that space with the land; if they do not own it, they are worthless because at that time land meant food, housing and pastureland for their few heads of cattle; it was the place to obtain some fish protein and small game, it was the place to rest for eternity. In addition, it was a reserve for the future.

The inhabitants of the mountains, descendants of the indigenous people, assume that the space demarcated by the now-abolished “indigenous reserve” continues to belong to them, since it is indigenous and unalienable land. The resistance on the part of some inhabitants to get a title deed falls within the framework of the “possessory right,” which they use to claim that since they inherited the land from their ancestors and continue to cultivate it, it belongs to them and nobody can seize it from them. Such remarks put the emphasis on identity and resistance to the pressure by the State, since they affirm that if they obtain the title deed, the land will be taken from them. This is their way of resisting the government onslaught and pressures from national and international capital.

CONCLUSION

Approaching the residents of rural areas to learn their histories is much more effective using oral history as methodology, because through their memories and testimonies one can access their inner selves, their insights and appreciation of their lives and that of others, topics that are hardly known in the national historiography.

As a result of this research that used this method to a large extent, I was able to obtain details of residents’ daily lives, production and trade, and the century-old struggles to obtain and conserve their land located on one side in the North and the other in the plains of the Province of Coclé. At

²² Atilia de Fernández. *Producción y comercio en la sociedad rural de Penonomé, durante los primeros cincuenta años de la república*. Interview by Marcela Camargo, 56.

the same time, I observed the utilization of differentiated spaces within the house at the time of the interview between men and women.

In the mountains, the creation of the indigenous reserve in the early twentieth century, which protected their land, customs and traditions, introjected into peasants the idea that that land belonged to them, it was inalienable and nobody could take it from them. They would claim possessory right over it, a weak legal instrument that is currently easily impinged on. Sadly, over the years the State has enabled looting by encouraging the registration, purchase and expropriation of land for production purposes. Therefore, a segment of the population resists the onslaughts of the interests of powerful national and international sectors. These struggles of resistance and rejection also took place in the plains. The mobilization by a group kept the invader, representative of national interests, from seizing the vital space of El Juncal.

If the access and conservation of the space for crops has generated powerful reactions because this is where life is spent, there are also cultural practices that prompt us to consider that inside the house there are distinct spaces used by men and women in a differentiated way. In my research, without intending to, I was able to perceive that the males welcomed me on the porch of their homes; the women, on the other hand, took their place in the kitchen and that is where they saw me.

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