



Graduate School of Development Studies

**Community Art Collectives as Political Actors:  
One Case Study in Costa Rica**

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***Disclaimer:***

This document represents part of the author's study programme while at the Institute of Social Studies. The views stated therein are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Institute.

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## List of Acronyms

CFT	<i>Calle, fuego y tambor</i> (Street, fire and drum)
CCP	<i>Centro Centroamericano de Población</i> (Central-America Population Center)
CCD	Community Cultural Development
INEC	<i>Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos</i> (National Institute of Census and Surveys)
IOM	International Organization for Migration
LCA	<i>La Casa Amarilla</i>
MARACA	<i>Red Centroamericana de arte comunitario/Movimiento de arte comunitario</i> (Central-American Community Art Network/Movement)
MCJD	<i>Ministerio de Cultura, Juventud y Deportes</i> (Culture, Youth and Sport Ministry)
MEP	<i>Ministerio de Educación Pública</i> (Public Education Ministry)
MERCOSUR	<i>Mercado Común del Sur</i> (South Common Market)
NGOs	Non Gubernamental Organizations
RFCS	<i>Red Federativa del Circo Social</i> (Social Circus Federal Network)
RLATS	<i>Red Latinoamericana de arte para la transformación social</i> (Latin-American network of art for social transformation)
RLTC	<i>Red Latinoamericana de Teatro en Comunidad).</i> (Theater and Community Latin-America Network)
UCR	<i>Universidad de Costa Rica</i> (University of Costa Rica)
UNA	<i>Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica</i> (National University of Costa Rica)
USA	United States of America

## **Abstract**

This research analyzes the experience of a community art collective of young artists in Liberia, Costa Rica. The discussion presented, locates this group as an actor that seeks to address the enjoyment and practice of art as a public good in a context where the social hegemonic order promotes it only as a good for private exchange. In this sense the aim is to recognize the political character, the group, by emphasizing its agentic capacity to propose and address social change through community art practices. The study uses a qualitative approach and discusses concepts of power, collective agency and the public space as one full of inequalities, conflicts, and hegemonic structures.

## **Relevance to Development Studies**

This research is located within development studies because is concerned about power dynamics and social change. However it is not a state-centred or market-centred analysis. It is focus on people's experiences in their everyday life social interactions with different power structures. In this sense, the document aims to contribute to development studies from a qualitative approach to a particular case study, but drawing its connections within a historical-contextual moment and broader dynamics of power.

## **Keywords**

Community art, political actor, collective agency, the public space, hegemony, marginalization, subaltern.



# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1. Indication of the Problem

This research analyzes the experience of a group of young artists that practice community art in Costa Rica. The concept community art has acquired different understandings depending on the historical moment and context where its practitioners promote it (Palacios 2009:198). Its specific uses emerged between the 60's and 70's decades (Kirby 1991; Palacios 2009) in United States of America (USA), Britain and Australia<sup>1</sup>. A period characterized by the emergence of identity politics and anti-war movements that criticized some expressions of the capitalist-oriented model (Kirby 1991; Palacios 2009).

Specifically what characterize community art practices is its critiques against the commoditization of art, and the individualization of the artists and their creative work (Kirby 1991:18-19). These practices emerged because of the existence of cultural elites that excluded different population groups from enjoying arts, and because artistic work stop making reference to culture and contexts of local communities (Kirby 1991:20). Scholars like Palacios (2009) and Adams & Goldbard (2001a, 2001b) consider that community art practices aim to achieve cultural democracy, because it is based in the value of cultural diversity in contestation to cultural hierarchies (Adams & Goldbard 2001a, 2001b:129; Palacios 2009:199).

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<sup>1</sup> Cohen-Cruz (2002) and Romero & Niño (2006) identified other earlier examples of community art related practices countries like Russia and France. However the concept was used for the first time in these three countries. In USA for example the Black Arts Movement is a famous example of these beginnings. Their main critique was against the racism of white artists, in contestation this movement promoted black communities' aesthetics (Cohen-Cruz 2002); in Britain community art's focus was mainly on urban planning processes like for example, street art murals creation to promotes public spaces. In Britain the political proposal of the movement was promoted within pedagogic practices at schools (Palacios 2009:202-203); finally, in Australia community art was characterized by the existence of workers' art clubs of leftist influence and the elaboration of youth art festivals. Was in this country where the concept 'community cultural development'(CCD) appeared (Kirby 1991:25-30).

In this sense, community art practices more than seeking aesthetics outcomes intend to create social improvements within specific social contexts (Palacios 2009:199). However scholars point out that through time, these practices had faced constantly reframing of its proposals<sup>2</sup> and it was never strongly consolidated (Adams & Goldbard 2001a, 2001b; Palacios 2009:129). Palacios (2009) affirms that community art related practices are very diverse and its practitioners make particular contextualized interpretations (Palacios 2009).

Since the 90's decade in Latin-America, different cultural and artistic-oriented networks were created as the *Red Latinoamericana de arte para la transformación social* (RLATS). It is a platform of more than twenty social, cultural and artistic organizations<sup>3</sup>. Particularity in Central-America, similar networks were created during the last five years of the decade as the *Red Centroamericana de Arte Comunitario* (Maraca<sup>4</sup>), and the *Red Mesoamericana* (*Caleidoscopio*<sup>5</sup>). I did not find specific studies about this phenomenon, but some articles suggest the possible connection of these initiatives with regional integrationist policies<sup>6</sup> (RLTS' website 2010; Incorporate 2000).

Through these networks' web pages I identified that very diverse place-base organizations and groups integrates it. Most of them are identified with community art, or related concepts as art for social transformation, and social circus<sup>7</sup>. Their purposes are variable but usually seek to address political and social issues as the promotion of social integration, cultural democracy, citizenship, human rights promotion, inter-cultural sensibilities, environmental issues, /promotion of youth and marginal communities, and so on. Between the prac-

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<sup>2</sup> For example the term is often used in relation with practices as public art, art based community development, community animation, cultural work, art for social transformation, etc. (Adams & Goldbard 2001b:20-22; Suess 2006; Palacios 2009:198).

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.artetransformador.net/sitio/> Accessed August 2010.

<sup>4</sup> <http://redmaraca.blogspot.com/> Accessed August 2010.

<sup>5</sup> <http://caleidoscopioenelvacio.blogspot.com/> Accessed on August 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Like for example '*puntos de encuentro*' a political proposal of cultural regional integration RLATS propose with others in the frame of MERCOSUR (RLTS' web site).

<sup>7</sup> Another network exist specialized on circus art for example the *Red Federativa del Circo Social* (RFGS) (<http://fede-circo-social.org/> Accessed November 2010).

titioners involved is possible to find circus artists, actors and actresses, cultural promoters, singers, social workers, etc.

In Costa Rica, Guanared<sup>8</sup> is a national network affiliated with the networks mentioned above. Guanared promotes the 'collective enjoyment of art and culture' in local communities of the country through the elaboration of free artistic monthly events called *peñas culturales*. Liberia, in Guanacaste, Costa Rica was the second community where these events were presented. Its execution is now under the responsibility of *Calle, fuego y tambor*<sup>9</sup> (CFT) the group selected as the study case of this research. CFT established at the end of 2008 approximately, is a group of young artists that use their artistic abilities to make different types of community art oriented-activities in their community.

The dynamics exposed show that despite the conceptual and pragmatic global dispersion of community art, the networking dynamics in Latin-America might be working as an encounter medium in the region. However is not clear to what extent those practices maintain the underlining critique of older community art movement in relation with the opposition to the existence of cultural hierarchies. The interpretations of such a critique might vary depending on the readings community art practitioners give to their contexts.

As a result, despite different research questions could be formulated, it is important to start by recognizing one specific experience to analyze: how does a particular experience of community art re-signify the movements' critiques? Do specific community art collectives are also concern about contesting dominant cultural hierarchies? Are community art collectives, political actors? Could specific community art collectives be understood as political actors by simply addressing its practices in a specific context? What are they addressing specifically? Why? How?

The following document aims to collaborate in the understanding of only one experience of community art. The assumption is that in the daily life experiences of a specific case study, it is possible to recognize a broader scope

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<sup>8</sup> <http://guanaredcr.blogspot.com/> Accessed April 2010.

of practical and discursive significance that give sense to a community art collective's proposals and actions as political actor. In this sense the main question of this study is *how the experience of a community art collective exposes dilemmas that make it a political actor?*

## 1.2. Research Objectives and Questions

Considering the questions and arguments presented, this research's **main objective** seek to *study the dilemmas a community art collective experience as a political actor*. This main objective was disaggregated into three specific areas:

- Propose an analytical framework to understand the concept 'political actor' for an experience as *CFT*'s (Chapter 2).
- Analyze the way a political actor interprets the contextual-power dynamics it interacts with and seek to confront giving meaning to its community art practices (Chapter 4).
- Analyze the politics a political actor seeks to address while practicing community art (Chapter 4).

As previously mentioned, the main question to address in this study is: *how the experience of a community art collective exposes dilemmas that make it a political actor?* Specifically, I will attempt to answer the following sub-questions: which are the main concepts that could help me to identify a political actor? In which specific type of space of interaction could the political actor be discussed? (Chapter 2); Which is the main socioeconomic information and institutional characteristics related with cultural politics of the context where community art collective studied interacts? What are the main characteristics of this collective? Which are its action-proposals, practices, purposes, etc.? Which are the meanings underlining those practices and action proposals? (Chapter 3); what is the collective trying to address and how this express its involvement with power? To what extend it show relations with different social actors? Which are the

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<sup>9</sup> <http://grupocft.blogspot.com/> Accessed July-August 2010.

main politics applied while interacting with power dynamics and why? (Chapter 4).

### **1.3. Relevance and Justification**

Among the early concerns influencing the realization of this study, was the fact that scholars had recognized the lack of studies connecting young people and politics in Costa Rica (Carballo 2009). In addition to this, Durston (1997) points out the need of research focused on young people from rural areas of Latin-America.

Considering this, the analysis of the experiences of the group CFT becomes relevant for different reasons. On one hand, it is a group composed of young people, living in a region distant from the metropolitan area of Costa Rica<sup>10</sup>. However the concerns relative to age and residential location, acquired more significance during the field work visit. In fact, one of the reasons CFT's members expressed their interest in sharing their experiences was because their capacities often go unrecognized based on their age and since they are not from the capital city.

On the other hand, networking dynamics related with community art practices are emerging in Central America, underlining social and political proposals. In this sense it is relevant to understand what might be pursued with such practices. This study contributes to this with the analysis of CFT's experiences of addressing community art in a specific context.

### **1.4. Methodology, Research's Scope and Ethical Concerns**

As Blasco & Wardle (2007) mention, ethnography has been used in different ways, among those it seeks to provide understandings about human nature and social change (Blasco & Wardle 2007:190). Ethnography is based in the selection of a case study as a method to understand, in broad terms, a specific social phenomenon or experience, but cannot be generalized (Yacuzzi

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<sup>10</sup> In Costa Rica for example most of the studies tend to concentrate on the metropolitan area of the country.

2005:3). It seeks to consider the complexity of social actions and its social meanings (Andaluz 2005:118-119).

This research is based on a case study which requires a *qualitative approach*. First, because is not my aim to generalize, but understand a specific case study's experience (CFT's) in relation with a specific context (Liberia, Costa Rica); and second, as McNay (2004) argues, the notion of experience should be understood as a 'relational entity' where people do not create meanings and discourses disconnected from the material structures they interact with. The analysis of CFT's experience from a qualitative approach not only seeks to observe their actions, but understand the meanings and contextual interpretations behind the group's proposals and type of practices executed.

### ***Selection and delimitation of the case study***

The selection of the study case was initially based on the following criteria: a group of young people, outside the metropolitan area of the country, not conventionally identified as a political actor, but involving any type of social-political practice. Is important to mention that *CFT* covers all these criteria, but its specific selection was an unpredicted decision I made during the fieldwork<sup>11</sup>.

The composition of CFT is mainly men (only one women); mostly between the 15-22 years old; already having finished their studies in the artistic high school of Liberia, except one that is still studying in another high school, and two are already in university; the majority of them still live with their parents, however most of them are generating their own income.

The group CFT formed at the end of 2008 (almost two years ago), but the chronological details of its experiences were not an interest of the study. It was not my intention to analyze CFT's history, but recognize meaningful expe-

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<sup>11</sup> Initially I was going to make the research about Guanared, but once in Costa Rica Briseño (2010, personal interview) recommend me to work with *CFT* because was the most organized group of Guanared.

riences in its process of giving significance to its community art practices, and the way of addressing it.

### ***Techniques applied and sources of information***

The data collection was mainly based on primary data obtained during the field work visit to Liberia, Guanacaste. It was executed during two non consecutive weeks between July and August, 2010. As is exposed in the following table, I conducted 7 individual interviews and 2 collective with CFT's members; 4 individual interviews with outsiders with knowledge about CFT, Liberia's context, or community art networks; 7 days of non-participative observations; and one participative observation. I also used for the analysis secondary sources of information, digital and physical academic literature; CFT's and other networks' web pages (blogs and facebook pages).

**Table 1.**  
**Techniques applied and sources of primary and secondary data**

Primary data:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seven individual interviews with CFT's members</li> <li>• One collective interview with the participation of nine CFT's members</li> <li>• One feedback and collective interview with the participation of seven CFT's members</li> <li>• Four individual interviews with people related with CFT as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ A representative of the municipality</li> <li>◦ The regional director of the MCJD in Guanacaste</li> <li>◦ One Guanared's funders and communication facilitator</li> <li>◦ One artists and socio-cultural animator from the NGO <i>La Amarilla of Barcelona</i>, Spain.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Five non participatory observations in: 3 days in CFT's trainings, one event presented in a school in Liberia, the event 'Variete', one peña cultural in Alajuela, one open workshop about climbing silks and trapeze</li> <li>• One participatory observation in CFT's free day.</li> </ul>
Secondary data:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CFT's Internet blog and facebook.</li> <li>• Guanared's blog, facebook, mails, documents.</li> <li>• Caleidoscopio's, Maraca's, Caja Ludica's, Circo Social's, Circo Fantástico's, RLATS's web pages.</li> <li>• Research about community art movement, community cultural development, arte bases community development, etc.</li> <li>• INEC's national statistics and documents with secondary data about Liberia's and Guanacaste's contextual information.</li> </ul>

**Source:** personal elaboration.

The interviews with *CFT*'s members and participatory and non participatory observations, had initially some guiding key words and questions about what they do? (Project), how they do it? (Strategies) and why they do it? (Meanings). However it was modified in the ongoing of process each conversation and shared events.

### ***Scope of the research and some ethical concerns***

The analysis presented in this document is not considering all the data collected because the limits of this paper allowed me to select only one part. This is why I only analyze *CFT* as a collective involved in the broader context of Liberia. This implies the analysis of the individual members of the group interaction in their process of defining a collective proposal, but not the interactions within the group.

In relation with the above decisions, it is also important to add that this research prioritizes the information of the collective as a whole. Individual interviews, and the information I selected from them, refers only to the individual interpretations on behalf of a collective identity, and not individual identities<sup>12</sup>. Thus, despite the fact that during the field work I included some outsiders' information, I recognize that this study is based on a partial view that puts emphasis on a collective perspective. This is mostly based on the current core members of *CFT*'s; and in relation with a specific historical moment and context which can change through time.

This research is my personal interpretation of the group's experience. It is partial and never ending, which is why I have committed to discuss the results and analysis with the group once I go back to Costa Rica.<sup>13</sup> Therefore

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<sup>12</sup> In this case study, individual views were mostly in a non-conflictive relation with the collective's positions. The reasons could be because I did not have a lot of opportunity to explore this, or because the group is capable of creating mechanisms to address their differences. However only further studies could go deeper into it.

<sup>13</sup> During fieldwork I discuss some findings in a feedback meeting. However during the last three months I have kept in touch with the group through Internet, and have already discussed future encounters between January and February of the coming year.



this study is, and will continue to be, relevant to my process of understanding the concerns of this study.

The next chapter provides the theoretical approach defined to analyze this case study. The third chapter provides some contextual data, and presents the case study' findings relevant to this research. The fourth chapter analyzes the group's experiences as political actors, highlighting on the main dilemmas the group as a political actor experience. Finally, in the last chapter I provide the conclusions of the research.

## Chapter 2

### Theoretical Framework

This chapter will discuss the theoretical approaches and main concepts that will allow me to analyze *CFT*'s experience as a political actor. To do this, I argue that broader conceptualizations of the political are needed as a way of understanding this group that is not a 'conventional' political actor. For this reason, in the first section, I refer to which type of political actor I am talking about and its location in the power relation dynamics; in the second section, I define a political actor as one involved in power dynamics in a reflective way using the concept of agency, specifically the concept of collective agency that interacts in power relations within a territorial-based community; in the third section I delimited the discussion of collective agency involvement in power relations with the concept of 'the public', which I define in opposition to the private, as a space of conflict, hegemonic structures and where collective agency can be express by maintaining, contesting or proposing alternatives in relation with these hegemonic expressions. The last section will summarize the content of the chapter by answering how I define a political actor involved in a public space.

#### 2.1. A Subaltern Stand Point

No knowledge production process is neutral. As O'Hanlon (1988) has already mentioned, a lot of critical attention has been put on 'the control of discourses, the production of professional canons for the representation of truth about the other, the epistemological and ethical ambiguities in the position of the (...) observer...' (O'Hanlon 1988:189). I can also observe, for example, certain hegemonic understandings about concepts as political actor, politics, power, etc. that tend to focus on the dynamics of conventional political actors and structures ignoring other type of experiences. Scott (2008) has recognized these mainstream approaches to power-holders (political actors). Perspectives that tend to prioritize top-bottom readings about power and decision making processes within the state's structures 'through the use of elector-

al and administrative mechanisms' (or other elites-authority structures like authorities of business, churches, etc.) (Scott 2008:29).

In this study, I aim to understand the experiences of a non conventional political actor. To analyze its experience as political, it is important to go beyond mainstream approaches. People-centered perspectives are alternatives to these top-bottom approaches. Different schools had promoted people-centered perspectives (Boyte 2004; Hobson & Seabrooke 2007; Tria 2009), but I based my approach in some selected elaborations from subaltern studies<sup>14</sup>. The subaltern studies' aims are to 'recover the experience, the distinctive cultures, traditions, identities and active historical practice of subaltern groups in a wide variety of settings... which have been lost or hidden by the action of elite histography' (O'Hanlon 1988:195).

Between the different documents I read about the concept of subaltern, it is possible to observe different ways of applying it: as part of a political project; as a way of defining different 'subaltern positionalities'; as a claim against hegemonic knowledge production that omits the experiences of non-elite groups, etc. (Beverly 1999:147; Gaeddert 2007; Galfarsoro 2007; Rodriguez 2001). Initially, Gramsci considered subaltern groups as those 'subjected to the hegemony of the dominant ruling classes' (Galfarsoro 2007). Other scholars had used the term more broadly 'to characterize individuals whose voices and actions have been muted, drastically reinterpreted, lost, or ...swept away' (Gaeddert 2007). It is not the aim of this study to go deep into this discussion, though I made use of the concept in the following ways:

First, to discuss the experiences of a group that I do not consider to be a 'conventional' political actor because its experiences can be ignored by political studies. It is not my pretention to say that I am bringing their voice out. I

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<sup>14</sup> The subaltern studies emerge in the 60s-70s by historical-anthropologic Indian scholars influenced by Gramsci's ideas of people from below (Ludden 2003:3). It got expanded later between different interdisciplinary fields as post-colonial feminists, Latin-American studies in USA scholars, etc. A lot of different discussions had been

am just interested in interpreting their experiences as political, despite them not being conventional political actors. Second, I also employ this concept in order to give space to discuss the 'subaltern agency' that, on one hand, recognizes the existence of hegemonic structures where the subaltern expresses one, or different types<sup>15</sup>, of subordination or marginalization; on the other hand, it gives space to recognize that 'the possibility of realizing their specific demands is contingent on entering into an alliance with the others to invert the structure of hegemony or domination that makes them subaltern in the first place' (Beverly 1999:147).

## 2.2. About Political Actor, Agency and Power

Studying a specific collective/group as a power-holder must begin with an agency-oriented perspective. As defined above, a political actor is one that gets involved in power dynamics, but this type of involvement should illustrate agency. Agency is understood as 'the capacity for action' (McNay 2004:19). However, as Kabeer (1999) mentions, agency goes beyond the action observed itself. It is a process embedded in power relations that includes 'meanings, motivations and purposes which individuals bring to their activity, their sense of agency, or 'the power within'<sup>16</sup>' (Kabeer 1999:21).

Students of agency mention different factors required to understand the concept that include: agency as a reflective process people make in relation with their past-present-future experiences (Emirbayer & Mishe 1998:963-968);

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made about the concept of subaltern studies related with its agency, its voice of representation by scholars, etc.

<sup>15</sup> The concept of marginalization indicates a condition of disadvantage which individuals and communities experience as a result of 'vulnerabilities' that may arise from un-favorable environmental, cultural, social, political and economic factors (Mehretu, Pigozzi & Sommers 2000:90). Considering this the concept of subaltern tends to indicate different subordination types related with gender, age, class, religion, race or any other identity that separate people between the dominants with power and the ones with lack of it (Villalta 1998: 3).

it can be projected towards the future with a normative orientation, and practiced by present actions (Fowler 2009); agency construction as the involvement in a dialogical-deliberative process with others that up-dates self's agency (Emirbayer & Mishe 1998); and finally, in relation with this last point, agency builds reference in a place-based contextual cultural structure of reference (Bauder 2001:279-81) (broader explanations refer to Annex #2).

These factors allow me to understand that the actions or projected actions an actor practice, express agency when it is based on reflective-criteria that define its orientation and process of negotiation. A person can act without reflecting on it, only reproducing norms that are not under question (Kabeer 1999:21). In this case, the actor does not exercise agency. To differentiate these ways of acting, it is important to identify the meanings that underline people's practices and actions. The agents' capacity can be oriented towards different possible goals, but only by empirical studies of people's 'lived experiences' is it possible to understand those goals<sup>17</sup>.

Considering that my perspective recognizes a subaltern experience that is not located in a powerful position, an agency approach will recognize that a subaltern may have the possibility to influence in certain ways, by contesting or even maintain dominant structures. In this sense, despite the orientation of their actions, what is important is that their agency is based on a reflective process where they negotiate their position, etc.

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<sup>16</sup> The power within is understood as 'the strength from within, derived from self-acceptance and self-respect which extends in turn to respect for and acceptance of others as equals' (Hunt 2001:19 following Kabeer 1995).

<sup>17</sup>Feminists had discussed a lot about it. Mahmood (2001) for example claim that liberal feminist had made universal the goal of women's emancipation claiming that this ignores some women's agency exercise during negotiation processes within their subordinate positions.

Taking this into account, it is important to highlight that power is always exercised in relation with other actors and broader complex structures<sup>18</sup> such as: state-institutional systems, community member-dynamics, private sector interferences, different age generations practices and identities, and further. In this relation with others, the power can be expressed in different ways: as 'power to' referring to 'people's capacity to define their own life-choices and pursue their own goals, even in opposition from others' (Kabeer 1999:21; Rowlands 1997:126); the 'power over' that indicate actors' capacity to manipulate, influence the behavior of the other subordinate (Scott, 2008); or, Rowlands also discusses, the 'power with' as initiatives of joining efforts with others to access the 'power to' (Rowlands 1997:126).

In relation with this last type of power, it is important to clarify that agency-oriented studies tend to focus on individuals, but it is also possible to observe it as collective agencies (Kabeer 1999:21). Considering the definition of agency, collective agency will also refer to the reflective capacity to generate actions, but in terms of a collective<sup>19</sup>, not individualities. This is why it is important to clarify that this research is focused on the collective agency of a group.

Is important to clarify that because of this research interests, I delimitate the observation of a group collective agency in relation with its community. Understanding by community a stable territorial-based community where the members share some cultural-historical-social-residential-etc. oriented feelings of belonging to it. It is a place defined by the presence of specific community actors, groups of population, leisure-socio-cultural and productive dynamics, etc. Within a community a group's collective agency could be observed in both private and/or public spaces of interaction because in both types of

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<sup>18</sup> It is part of a 'collective property of systems of co-operating actors' (Scott 2008:30). This is the reason why Scott (2008) claims that power should be analyze inside relational structures, and considering the structural-cultural constraints that shape the exercise of power' (Scott 2008:29) as the discourses.

spheres, power dynamics are manifested. However, this study focuses only on the collective agency of a group within the public spaces; concept that will be discussed in the next section.

### **2.3. Discussing the Concept 'The Public'**

The analysis of a group's collective agency as a political actor requires me to observe its desires/action projections, meaningful practices, strategies to achieve it, and social interactions in relation with a community as public spaces. The concept 'public' can be analyzed using different definitions: as something that is not private, and as an audience (Mouffe 2005:152).

Different approaches exist concerning the distinctions between private-public. Starr mentions, for example, that in modern-conceptualizations the public is related with the state, the government, the official; while the private is the family and the state (Starr 1988:8). Broader definitions relates the public as open, the private as closed; the public as a whole, the private as a part; the public as accessible, the private as restricted; the public as the outer realm, and the private as the inner realm (Starr 1988:7-8).

Habermas is one of the more influential scholars theorizing about the concept 'public sphere'. In general terms he defines 'public sphere' as 'commons' like places where debate and discussion can occur...' (Aslama & Erikson 2009: 4). Habermas' theoretical inputs are based in modern liberal societies, and because of it his emphasis was on a 'liberal model of the bourgeois public sphere'. This public sphere is characterized as one unified public sphere where people deliberate and reach consensus through rational elaborations, free press, free assembly, free speech by institutions of a representative-type government, etc. (Fraser 1990:58-59).

About this I want to emphasize that despite Habermas' influence, several scholars had criticized him (Fraser 1990; Edwards 2004; Mouffe 2005). I

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<sup>19</sup> A 'groups of agents that want to act collectively in a more or less permanent ba-

want to emphasis on two of the main critiques. First, 'the public' is a space of commons but is not open in the same level for everybody because is full of inequalities and exclusions (Fraser 1990:60; Edwards 2004); and second, Mouffe (2005) mentions, that the public cannot be one unified harmonious space where differences can be solve by deliberation until a consensus is reached that puts everybody in tune again (Mouffe 2005:153). Instead, she talks about 'public spaces', full of antagonisms, conflicts and power relations; features that make it a political space<sup>20</sup> (Mouffe 2005).

Both of these approaches tend to recognize that 'the public' is also hegemonic, or as Mouffe (2005) call it, is 'hegemonically structured' (Mouffe 2005:156-158; Fraser 1990:278). This means that, within it, predominates hegemonic social horizons that exclude/marginalize others. Gramsci is one the main scholar discussing about the concept of hegemony. He defines it 'as the 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group' (Lead 1985:568).

Mouffe, in earlier works with Laclau, discussed Gramsci's concept re-defining it as 'the political articulation of different identities into a common project that becomes our social horizon' (Carpentier & Cammaerts 2008:2). Both definitions recognize the existence of a dominant order that is repro-

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sis..., stable and organized way' (Pacheco & Carmo 2003:149).

<sup>20</sup> In this sense, Mouffe differentiates between the concepts of political and politics. The political is something based on the conflictive nature of human relations (Díaz 2003:49-50); it relies in the awareness of humans in relation with 'others' that are different, different in conflict, or different as complement, but different (Díaz 2003: 51). The recognition of this difference is what calls for the necessity of people in societies to address co-existence (Díaz 2003:51). Here is when the concept of politics comes out. The politics' are the 'procedural expression' of the political; are the mediums through which the human differences are regulated (Díaz 2003:51). The definition of the politics are involve in power relations, because they are a collective construction, that includes reflective and practical actions, and are historical-dynamics, not static processes (Díaz 2003:51-52). The importance of these differentiations in Mouffe allow her to see the public space as a political space full of antagonisms, and where politics emerge to organize the coexistence of differences.



duced also by non dominant groups without questioning about it. However the existence of one dominant order that is reproduced implies also the existence of other non-dominants that are marginalized.

In this sense, the concept of marginalization recognizes a 'condition of disadvantage' which individuals and communities might experience (Mehretu, Pigozzi & Sommers 2000:90) related with its location in power relations dynamics. Mehretu, Pigozzi & Sommers (2000) consider this location as '... 'vulnerabilities' that may arise from un-favorable environmental, cultural, social, political and economic factors' (Mehretu, Pigozzi & Sommers 2000:90).

Having this under consideration, a subaltern actor is involved in power-relation structures where a dominant order created by elites-groups prevails. However despite 'the public' being 'hegemonically constructed', it does not mean that space to observe non-hegemonic expressions of agency is not given. On the contrary, Fraser and Mouffe recognize that hegemonic constructions can be contested.

Fraser (1990) for example, defines the concept of 'public sphere' as 'a site where social meanings are generated, circulated, contested and reconstructed (Fraser 1990:278). In this line, she develops the concept of invisible-counter public spheres, as parallel spaces through which people (actually referring to women) open themselves spaces to participate in public life (Fraser 1990:61). Mouffe (2005), on the other hand, gives space to contesting hegemonic manifestation of public with the agonistic politics theory.

As was mentioned above in Mouffe's (2005) perspective, public spaces are always full of conflict and antagonisms. These antagonisms are observed because collective identities are defined over a 'we' - 'them' relation, where the 'we' is built in opposition to 'them' (Mouffe 2005:157). The creation of differences (construction of identities) in her view is not fixed, nor are they non-static, but rather always based in hierarchies. This means that counter-hegemonic practices can be created attempting to 'disarticulate the existing order so as to install another form of hegemony' (Mouffe 2005:157). From an agonistic political point of view, the idea is that conflict can never be denied as

it never disappears, and because of this, democracies should recognize conflict by legitimizing opponents' positions as 'adversaries'<sup>21</sup> that can share common symbolic space where conflict always takes place (Mouffe 2005:157).

## **2.4. How to Understand Political Actors?**

The sections above express the different conceptual frameworks and analytical approaches I used to discuss the research's study case experience as a political actor involved in power relations within territory-based communities. In this line Mouffe's assumption that public spaces are always full of antagonisms, is maintained in my analysis; because of these antagonist power relations, different types of struggles can be illustrated in public spaces, like for example, struggles over resources, what are common goods, what is part of a public agenda, etc.

The discussion presented above about Mouffe and Fraser's inputs to the concept of 'the public' is important to understand the case study's experiences by recognizing its involvement in hegemonic constructions of dominant orders, discourses, etc. Its collective agency might be given under reflective observation of these types of hegemonic constructions, reproducing it, 'unveiling' it, contesting it, or even proposing alternatives to it.

Now, it is also important to recognize that one the main critique to Mouffe is that she tends to focus principally in the discursive constructions, forgetting about materiality (Jorgensen & Phillips 2002:55). Taking this into account, I consider discursive constructions to always be in relation to material realities. The analysis of this research's study case's experience presented in the fourth chapter aims to recover its relation with a public-space where material and discursive structures takes place. In the meaning while, I present in the next chapter a contextualization and description of the study case that will be analyzed in the fourth chapter of this document.

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<sup>21</sup> She talks about adversaries in opposition to the concept of enemies which tend to require the elimination of the other opposed (Mouffe 2005:157).

## Chapter 3

### Contextualization and Presentation of *CFT*'s Experience

In this chapter I present the experience of *CFT*. The first section exposes key elements of the contextual dynamics that frame the experience; the second section provides brief antecedents about the conformation of the *CFT*; in the third section I refer to what they do and practice as a group and the meanings underlining it; the fourth section describes about their interaction with others actors in the community while doing what they propose to; finally, in the fifth section I summarize some general findings about the experience.

#### 3.1. Contextualizing *CFT*'s Experience

The research's study case is analyzed in relation with the context *CFT* interact in, the community of Liberia one of the main cantons of Guanacaste. Guanacaste is a province located on the north-pacific coast of the country (refer to Annex #1). This province is known because of its beaches, volcanoes and conservationist parks, the aggressive urbanization process during the last decade (especially because of hotel projects and real-estate development), and a productive development mainly sustained by transnational capital investments in tourism and export oriented manufacturing (Ramirez 2008:361-364). As of 2009, 84,2% of Guanacaste's population was employed in the private sector; 10% was unemployed; and 18,6% were under the poverty line, representing 10% of the total poor in Costa Rica<sup>22</sup> (INEC 2009).

Liberia is one of the main cantons of Guanacaste. It is located 236km from San José, the capital of Costa Rica (refer to Annex #1). This canton has 19,2% of Guanacaste's total of population (49,7% of women and 51,3% of men) (INEC 2008<sup>23</sup>). In 2007 a 43,7% of the people were under 19 years old, while 30% are Nicaraguan migrants living in Costa Rica permanently or just during productive farming seasons (Johnson 2010:13), and 43% lives in poor

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<sup>22</sup> In 2009 21,7% of Costa Rica's population was under the poverty line (INEC 2009)

<sup>23</sup> Population projections for 2000-2050. Updated in 2010 by CCP and INEC.

neighborhoods of Liberia where there exists intense residential segregation<sup>24</sup> (Johnson 2010:14).

Most of the members of CFT live in the center of Liberia. They studied in the only artistic high school<sup>25</sup> in the community that provided them with a technical-specialization in music, theater or dance. The majority of CFT's members are now between 18-19 years old, most finish high-school in 2009. Despite almost most of them mentioning that they want to keep studying art, no university<sup>26</sup> in Guanacaste offers this. This is the reason why some of them chose alternative careers while others are planning to move to the metropolitan areas of the country to keep studying art in the future.

Considering the facts just mentioned, it is important to point out two tendencies about the cultural policy in Costa Rica. First, it has been very centralized. The macroeconomic cultural-policies of the country are design mainly by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports (MCJD) and the Public Education Ministry (MEP) in San José. However it was only in 2004 that the MCJD created an office to address all of Guanacaste. Though it only operates with one functionary and insufficient budget<sup>27</sup> (Vargas 2010, personal interview). Since the beginnings of the XX century, the cultural-policies in Guanacaste have been closely related with the identification of this province as the 'cradle of folklore'. This should be understood in relation with the historical protagonist position that folklore has in the construction of national identity policies<sup>28</sup> of the country (Menjivar, Argueta & Solano 2005).

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<sup>24</sup> Johnson defines residential segregation as the spatial separation between people with high-incomes and people with low incomes in poverty condition (2010:14).

<sup>25</sup> García (n.d.) <http://www.colegioartisticoliberia.co.cc/> Accessed November 2010.

<sup>26</sup> Artistic careers are only offered in the installations of the *Universidad de Costa Rica* (UCR) and *Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica* (UNA), located in the metropolitan area.

<sup>27</sup> During the interview Ms. Vera Vargas (2009, personal interview) she estimate an annual budget of 1000.000 million *colones* (2000\$ estimated on the exchange rate announced by the Central Bank of Costa Rica for the 8 of November, 2010 (<http://indicadoreseconomicos.bccr.fi.cr/>)).

<sup>28</sup>The '*anexion de Guanacaste*' (annexation of Guanacaste) during the post-independence period of Costa Rica was the formalization of Guanacaste's territory as belonging to the official-physical delimitations of Costa Rica. This event is located in the national memory as one of the main post-independence struggles becoming focus of the national identity construction policies as: the definition of a holiday, the cultural promo-

Nowadays, the recent formation of the MCJD's office in Liberia is opening more space for cultural-artistic activities, most of them in support to community initiatives with like festivals, community celebrations, etc. (Vargas 2010, personal interview). Liberia now counts with different cultural neighbors' associations; the municipality recently appointed a special commission to address a cultural promotion plan (Ramirez 2010, personal interview); and despite there not being any theater in the community, the Municipality and MCJD are planning to open the Guanacaste's museum next year (Collective interview, August 2010).

Considering this research's interests, I should mention that since 2005, Guanared<sup>29</sup> started promoting the elaboration of *peñas culturales* in Liberia as was mentioned in the first chapter. The *peñas culturales* are free artistic monthly events characterize by its non-commercial nature<sup>30</sup>. The *peñas*' aim is to open space for any artists or local neighbors to share or express something by artistic mediums. The idea behind it is to contest the limitations created by the cultural hierarchies of the market-culture (Briseño 2010, personal interview). The context just described above illustrates some of the dynamics *CFT* interacts in. The *peñas culturales* are one of the first expressions of community art in Liberia, and since 2008 *CFT* started getting more and more involve in it.

### 3.2. Antecedents of the Conformation of *CFT*

*CFT* is a group of young artists that decided to come together almost two years ago (in 2008) and make community art. One of the main characteris-

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tion of traditions based on artistic manifestations of folklore as Guanacaste's identity (Menjivar, Argueta & Solano 2005)

<sup>29</sup> A national artists and cultural promoters' network that encourage the 'collective enjoyment of art and culture' in 11 local communities of Costa Rica.

<sup>30</sup> In exchange to the performance the 'artists' receive a hug, call *abrazo peñero* (peñero hug). It is a way of emphasis on the necessity to open spaces for: ordinary people to express themselves; local artists no-recognized by the market interests; and neighbors to meet as a community and enjoy their community culture, art and time. This is the reason why Guanared's is identified as a movement for the '*la vivencia colectiva del arte y la cultura*' (collective experience of art and culture). The Guanared emerge in 2005 in Nicoya (another Guanacaste's canton) but now is in 11 communities of the country. (Briseño 2010, personal interview).

tics of this group is that they make community art by practicing different types of artistic abilities; most of them related with circus arts (like juggling, dance, silks, trapeze, and theater-clown) in combination with musical, theatric and dance productions. They are not a group with a formal-legal status so far. However in the last two years they have experienced a process of consolidation that shows the way they address the negotiation of meanings, and course of actions, to create what they want to do.

Most of CFT's members became friends while they were students in the artistic high school of Liberia. As friends, they shared a lot of leisure activities like juggling, but they also started participating of different community activities such as: activities at the local hospital, and giving some informal support to Liberia's *peña cultural*. After a while they become main responsible for the *peña cultural* of Liberia, providing it with their personal and communitarian characteristics like the '*pregón*' (the introductory part of the *peña*):

*'sometimes we (go dressed like colorful clowns) to the park and in front of the catholic church after the religious services and start juggling and calling people to come to the peña'; 'the pregón it is an alboroto (agitation) we make to call the attention of the local people and invite them to the peña; one day we decide to make the peña during the full moon of each month as a way for people to remember, because there is no place where the moon looks more beautiful like in Liberia as the song said'<sup>31</sup> (collective interview, july 2010).*

After becoming responsible of the *peña* CFT decided to become a group, but a specific type of group to make '*something different in Liberia; 'do something 'by and for the community' (collective interview, august 2010):*

*'From one moment to the other 'PA' Calle, fuego y tambor emerged'; 'we wanted to keep doing what we want to do, what we love to do; 'we wanted to do something, but something different and with some sense, because we needed physical preparation, and wanted to give something to our community' (collective interview, july 2010)*

*'We wanted to do something by and for the community; 'for' because is for this community benefit; and 'by' because is made by us, we are from here, and we need the community to support us' (Diego 2010, personal interview).*

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<sup>31</sup> Liberia is known as the white city because in the past the sand of the street and potter of the houses were white some people say that because of that the moon have a nice view, but the fact is that people had create some identification of identify Liberia because of the *luna liberiana* (moon from Liberia).

During this process of becoming a group, *CFT*'s members were part of Guanared; through this network they got in contact with other groups, organizations and networks of artists and cultural promoters from Central America and South America that practice different types of what can be called 'community art'. By looking at these experiences, *CFT* started redefining their group's profile and action projects proposals beyond the *peñas culturales*:

*'We went to the berrinche<sup>32</sup> in Nicaragua. There we share about our practices with the peñas and they told us that what we were doing was called community art, so we keep calling it like that. We were very impressed with their work... (from Escuela de Mimo Caracol); see these people doing so much from nothing; they are nobodies like us, and were able to do the things they do' (collective interview, July 2010).*

### 3.3. *CFT*'s Community Art Practices in Liberia

During the interviews, the group provided me with information about their practices and intentions underlining it. The table #2 compiles a summary of this information classified by types of activities they practice, the reasons and desires of change behind it, examples of specific activities they did and key elements of the way they do it.

In general, *CFT* claims that they want to open spaces in every sense: '*queremos abrir espacios en todo el sentido de la palabra*' (Collective interview, 2010 August). However it is possible to identify six different types of activities proposed in their action plans: workshops in schools under social risk, free-open workshops in circus art for anybody in the community that wanted it; prepare accessible spectacles about social-environmental issues; make a free day for anyone that wants to come and use their circus toys to share, teach-learn techniques and art; they also continue with the *peñas*; and becoming a facilitator of information to other artists' colleges from the country that outside the country and they meet through networks.

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<sup>32</sup> An event called *el berrinche ambiental* (environmental tantrum) organized in Nicaragua by the *Escuela de Mimo Caracol* with Maraca (youth network platform in Central-America) and Caleidoscopio (Mesoamerica network).

**Table 2.**  
**Systematization of what CFT do? Why? What they want to contest? How it is done?**  
**And an example of activities executed**

<i>What they do?</i>	<i>Why they do it and what they are contesting?</i>	<i>Example's executed</i>	<i>How was done?</i>
Free workshops with kids in social risk	<i>Want to</i> promote playful practices as a way of make kids creators of what they want and how in class. <i>To contest</i> the lack of access to art, and different expressions of material-territorial marginalization	Escuela Capulin	- A diagnosis of the canton informs them which schools are under social risk. - Own resources, it is for free.
Social-environmental sensibility spectacles	<i>Want to</i> promote positive consciences and change; reproduce spectacles in communities with a lack of access (by doing it for free). <i>To contest</i> the lack of information and conscience	Pachama stories, variete, events in schools, recycling workshops.	- Own production with their diverse abilities, and with help from others in the community. - Own resources, it is for free.
Peña liberiana	<i>Want to</i> promote a share space, and promote artistic practices. To contest the lack of community life, and lack of recognition of the artists because of the commercialization of art practices.	Every month for almost two years	- Own production with their diverse abilities, and with help from others in the community. - Own resources, recycling, strategic use of resources*; hug as retribution; use of community own meaningful costumes to engage them**
Workshops to anybody	<i>Want to</i> promote voluntary and free approach to art from people of the community; coexistence (values of respect and perseverance); social encounter; and playful practices <i>To contest</i> the no recognition of art, lack of social encounter, lack of leisure and artistic alternative practices (no-football), expensive art.	Workshops of Trapeze, climb silks, juggling,	- Free workshop days (twice a week). - Sharing knowledge and materials with a worker of the LCA that was working with them from January-sept, 2010.
Free day	<i>Want to</i> promote voluntary and free approach to art from people of the community; teaching-learning sharing opportunities; learning process from informal sources (share experience knowledge without professional title) <i>To contest</i> expensive access to art and pedagogic institutions ownership of knowledge and information.	All Thursdays evening-night	Open a free-sharing space for the people to learn about circus art, by sharing their circus toys, and teaching and learning from each other. Share knowledge/ materials with a worker of the LCA that was working with them from Jan-Sept, 2010.
Facilitators of contacts	<i>Want to</i> give opportunity to artist colleagues to engage with others doing similar things. <i>To contest</i> ownership-exclusivity of certain institutions over artistic activities management and information, and the exclusion of non formal knowledge.	Theater group Tricletas from Argentina that came to Liberia	Facilitate all contacts and information to artists when they need it.

\*Example: use the sound equipment of one group that participates in the peña for the others.

\*\* They make the *peña* all full moon of the months because is a very know date in Liberia.

\*\*\*The information includes their proposal of action and purposes that include: executed actions and visualized-projected path of action and purposes.

**Source:** personal elaboration primary data from the diverse sources and techniques of fieldwork.



In their proposal, each way of doing these activities has underlining different types of intentionality, which they compile under the concept of *mejora social* (social improvement), understood as:

*'the facilitation of a meeting space, nice and healthy, that could be enough to promote changes; a space to learn, to share; that people can develop their creativity: give alternatives to enjoy life without reducing it to activities of home, work, school or any dominant traditional type of activities like football; to show the people that they can do it and we in Liberia can do it (Collective interviews, July and August 2010).*

The process of providing *mejora social* in their view is through the elaboration of specific practices that allow covering some needs and challenge some limitations in their community. In the last quota, for example they highlight as *mejora social* the coverage of lack of nice and healthy spaces to meet, share, learn, living alternatives, and encourage recognition of capacities. One way of addressing this is through the *provision of free entrance, use, and enjoyment* to spectacles, learning processes, etc. CFT mentions that accessing spectacles or learning how to do specific artistic practices is expensive, or are only provided in the capital city and not in a region like Guanacaste.

*'the idea is to bring art to the places where it never reaches because the offer is very limited like in Liberia because there are no spaces; we want people to try the sense of feeling art through workshops, because for example in the schools and high-school they usually only learn something of music; the idea is to bring art to the place where it haven't reach yet because of that we do community art; we want to create spaces in every sense of the word, for example we could go and present in any room, in the street, in the sidewalk; In San José exists the Melico, but to get into those places you need a lot of money. So we want to allow those people that cannot attend those places the possibility to taste art, enjoy it, and not undermine art' (Collective interview, July 2010)*

These are the reasons why CFT tends to provide free or very cheap workshops and to challenge income and territorial-base limitations (like going to schools under-social risk), as a way of opening spaces for people to come, enjoy and share artistic abilities if they want to. Between these intentions is also possible to observe that CFT aims to promote the *sharing of information others might need* and *appreciating others' knowledge despite not having formal credentials of what they know*.

*'here people come to share a space and use circus toys to have fun, those who want to learn can ask someone to teach them, the one that knows something help the others';*

*'we all teach and learn from and with others at the same time'; who want to do it, can do it'* (Notes from my participatory observation in a free day).

*'there exists people with a lot of experiences that don't have a title, we don't want a title to learn from them; I learnt more in the street than any other place'* (Collective interview, August 2010).

Among the activities *CFT* promotes, they propose what could be called as a *practice of teaching-learning and sharing* in activities like the free day, the *peñas culturales*, and all the workshops. The members of the group mentions that they do this because in Liberia, the known art-related institutions usually do not share information, or tend to favor only professionals with recognized titles as teachers of artistic abilities.

*'we are trying also to become facilitators. For example if you know how to work with recycling and you come here and tell us that you want to contact more people doing similar things we give you the information. The problem now for example is that if somebody goes to the artistic high-school nobody else in Liberia will know about that person because they don't share the information, they get owners of it and use it as private. We instead take the persons everywhere; we give them the contacts, etc.'* (Collective interview, august 2010.).

*'I had learnt more sometimes from the street than in high school, however people tend only to recognize those with professional titles'* (Collective interview, July 2010).

In summary *CFT* seek to open spaces, and therefore create *mejora social* by sharing and giving access to people to enjoy and practice different types of artistic abilities. The execution of this seems to contest different restrictions that the group can observe in the context of Liberia. In the next section I describe some of the tensions *CFT* face in order to put its proposal into practice.

### **3.4. CFT Dealing with Different Social Actors**

The possibility of doing the practical activities proposed depends on their access to different types of resources. Currently, they maintain the group with their own resources and through strategic actions in the coverage of certain costs. For example: Oruyo makes recycling materials, Chucho provides the group with strategic contacts, they all seek to take advantage of others' equipment, etc. On the other hand besides using their own resources, *CFT* also engages with different social actors in the process bringing into practice their proposals:

*Relation with governmental institutions* depends on the resources they required. For example the MCJD usually provides two options of funding through the *becas taller* and *prorates*. *Becas taller* only supports individual initiatives, and *Proartes* only formalizes groups. The problem is that until now, *CFT* cannot apply *prorates* because they are not a formal associations yet and *Becas Taller* does not ensure their access to resources because they have to compete with others, between the ones some might have advantages over them:

*'some people have 'patas' already there. We already applied before and despite some people told our proposal could win others got it so. We already applied individually again for becas taller but we have to wait and see...' (Kevin and Sergio 2010, personal interview).*

Despite these limitations, *CFT* mentions that they always try to maintain good relations with the MCJD and others in Liberia because sometimes they can obtain certain things from supporting them and participating in their activities:

*'we find out that by participating in the festivals of the Ministry of Culture we could get things. For example, in the last festival they leave us the lights of the stage' (Collective interview, August 2010).*

On the other hand, because of the absence inexistence of theater in Liberia, *CFT* needed a place to train and offer their workshops and spectacles. This is why they negotiated with the Municipality of Liberia for access to the abandoned building of the '*ex-comandancia*' (the *police-jail*).

*'Initially we went to the park but it was raining sometimes and people could steal the circus-toys, besides other groups like 'hip-hop' started also using the space; we needed a place to train and make some activities so one day we saw the old-empty building of the comandancia and convinced the municipally to lend us the space; now a lot of other artistic groups of the community also use the space to train, and in the next years they want the place to become the Guanacaste's museum' (Collective interview, july 2010).*

However despite being conscious of the necessity of public resources, they consider that the access is restricted. This is reason why they claim that they do not want to be dependent on bureaucratic and sometimes very political processes:

*'Other people have 'patas' (connections) to access resources, so we cannot depend on that' (Kevin and Sergio 2010, personal interview).*

*'sometimes they want us to be there without actually providing resources for us, is just for them to 'llenarse la boca...' (maintain appearances) that in the community they are supporting something'; 'sometimes we have to wait a lot to see if we can get something so we cannot depend on that'; 'we will not give spectacles to any political party, we don't want our group to be stain by a political color'(Collective interviews, July and August 2010).*

*Relation with civil society:* Taking this into consideration, the group counts on alternative sources of resources. For example the *networks give them information and contacts*, that is very important because its members can get internships, participate in events, people visit them and teach them or offer to support them with their workshops or other processes. They have also been capable of *establishing contact with nongovernmental organizations* (NGOs). For example, they found information that Ilaria from the Spain's NGO *La Casa Amarilla* (LCA) was coming to offer, in the UCR, trapeze training so they tried to get in contact with her and she finish not only providing trainings for them but also working together for 8 months. A similar story happened with the NGO *Circo fantástico*; the theater group *Tricletas* from Argentina; and others. Knowledge, information and cooperation are the type of resources *CFT* tend to obtain from civil society actors.

*Relation with the market:* *CFT* also does some spectacles with monetary cover charges, clarifying that they only charge to those that in its opinion have money like private schools, or in a campaign of the IOM, which they will participate at the end of this year. In this line, it is important to mention that they choose who to present spectacles for. They present spectacles in private schools or the IOM because are publics that do not aim to profit from them. *CFT* recognizes the necessity they have to access certain income to maintain the group<sup>33</sup>, but without aiming to make profits from it. The reason is that the

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<sup>33</sup> From the spectacles they charge from they save 30% for the maintenance of the group, and distribute the rest between the participant that went to the performance (Collective interview, August 2010)

group's view it then loses the sense of what they do and the reasons why they do it:

*'Now a lot of artists have been entertainment entrepreneurs for hotels and rich people parties, but for me that is very sad, it cannot satisfy me' (Randall 2010, personal interview).*

*'if we go for example to a wedding party to present, it will change the idea of the group. We can earn money to maintain the materials of the group, but we do art because we love to do it and we want to share it with our community' (Collective interview, July 2010).*

*Relation with the public opinion:* This group's position, at times, can cause tension for the group within the community and persona relations. The tension is because people think that what the group does is leisure and is not a real job:

*'people said in an ironic tone 'ohh look at them they are playing, they want to do leisure... when are they going to do something productive'; 'when are they going to be mature this is just a stage'; 'when they get a job with a salary they will stop playing'; 'I guess that a dentist should enjoy what he does, like us, we don't have to hate what we do to make it a job'; 'One day I was talking with my brother and he told me that this is a hobby, and that I'll stop doing it when I earn a stable salary, and told him, no, that even if this looks like a hobby it is what I want to do. I don't care about the money, and even if is only with applauses, or that a guy come and ask me to teach him something... then that is my profit' (Collective interview, July 2010).*

The importance of the paragraph above is that *CFT* discusses that people do not recognize the importance of the work of the artists beyond entertaining rich people. In this sense, the group's members claim that what they want to do is to convince the community that art and the artists' work is valuable. The group indicates that the way of doing is to keep working hard in their activities, and that one day, hopefully, the community will recognize it and provide the artists with 'dignity' or as they call it: *dignificación del artista*. This is the reason why they consider that once the community recognizes the value of their work, that the community itself will provide the resources for them to maintain, as a group, its proposal of community art.

### 3.5. Summarizing Findings

The experience of *CFT* shows the struggles a group of young artists face in order to execute their community art practices. Is clear that *CFT*'s actions and proposals are underlined by dynamics within the cultural field and

Liberia's community. Though this, it is possible to emphasize: first, during the conformation of *CFT* different factors interact including relational ties and networking influences<sup>34</sup>; second, *CFT* seems to argue against centralistic formal-institutional behaviors that limits accessibility to art-related knowledge and information within Liberia; but also in relation with the macro-cultural policies in the country that have benefited the regions outside the capital city; and third, most of its practices follow a proposal where the ideas of free-sharing values of others knowledge are key elements.

All of these elements underline the specific proposal of community art of *CFT*. However *CFT* *also* faces tensions related with the practical realization of its proposal, especially because of limited access to resources and the public opinion that reproduces some negative stereotypes. In the following chapter I provide an analysis of the data just mentioned, which I contrast with the theoretical framework proposed in the second chapter.

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<sup>34</sup> Their engagement in networks seems to be reinforced because of an artistic-identity.

## Chapter 4

### Analyzing CFT as a Political Actor: Purposes, Politics and Dilemmas

As was mentioned in the second chapter I define in broad terms, a political actor as one that get involved in power relations with a reflective-criteria that orients their actions and proposals. In this sense *CFT* as a political actor is supposed get involve in power dynamics by exercising a collective agency. Theoretical delimitations of the study required me to analyze *CFT* only in relation with their interaction in a public space, which I defined in opposition to the private; always conflictive; 'hegmonically structured'; and full of inequalities (based on Mouffe (2005) and Fraser (1990)).

Taking this into account, I analyze *CFT*'s experience in two sections: the first seeks to understand the meaning of the frameworks that underline *CFT*'s purposes; the second section discusses two politics, I identified, that *CFT* has put into practice. At the end of the third section, I call attention to the main issues exposed in the first two sections that let me understand *CFT*'s dilemmas as a political actor.

#### 4.1. Analyzing CFT's Purposes and Meanings behind it.

To understand *CFT* practices in the public space I first analyze its purposes behind it trying to answer: why *CFT* wants to do these practices that the group proposes? Which meanings frame its practices and proposals? In this line I can first say that *CTF*'s proposal suggests a claim for the recognition of art's enjoyment and practice as a public good; particularly because it reveals the existences of dominant dynamics that makes it a private good.

As mentioned in the second chapter, the public should be accessible and open to all, for the common/the whole, while the private is restricted to some (Starr 1998:7-8). *CFT*'s discursive meanings of their practices claim that practice and enjoyment of art is restricted in different ways in Liberia. In the next table I categorized three types of restrictions *CFT*'s discourses seems to

detect, which in my view expresses different ways the dominant orders creates marginalization.

**Table 3. Types of marginalization CFT's experience reveal.**

<i>Marginali- zations</i>	<b>Lack of recognition of art as a public good- interest (cognitive)</b>	<b>Lack of access to art- education and ap- preciation (privatization)</b>	<b>Income-base restric- tion to art (material)</b>
Whose is affected?	Artists but also all the people in the commu- nity that might even- tually enjoy it.	Everybody without contacts or relations within art-culture in- stitutional field	Poor people, the kids from social-risk schools, but also people that cannot prioritize access to art
Causal- effect rela- tion empha- sized	Centralistic cultural- policies in the country that restrict artistic training in Liberia; lack of recognition of art as a common good.	Information-training of art-teaching within specialized institu- tions; Lack of spaces for artistic apprecia- tion in the community; lack of resources.	Is an income-based exclusion, but also a territorial-based ex- clusion
Indication of hegemony	Beyond folklore and football-soccer any alternative of artistic- leisure practices are ignored.	Invisibility - de- legitimacy of informal artistic experience sources	In their view some- times people under- mine the possibility to develop artistic abili- ties because they do not have access to it

**Source:** personal elaboration after classifying primary data collected during fieldwork.

As was mentioned in the second chapter the concept of marginaliza-  
tion indicates a disadvantaged position/location which individuals and com-  
munities experience (Mehretu, Pigozzi and Sommers 2000:90). Considering  
this, the table shows that from *CFT*'s experience, it is possible to observe the  
existence of a dominant order build over inclusion-exclusion dynamics that  
create material, as well cognitive-cultural types of marginalization that restrict  
art as a public good (as a good for *all*).

On one hand, the *material types of marginalization* *CFT* is concerned about  
are two: an income-based marginalization and territorial-based marginalization.  
The *income-based marginalization* is characterized by the existence of people that  
have money to enjoy and practice art and those without. The *territorial-based  
marginalization* is found in *CFT*'s argument as a claim against different types of  
institutional *centralistic behaviors*. Let me then first clarify this term.



Karlsen (1999) following Levin and Young discusses the term decentralization<sup>35</sup> defining it as 'a territorial way of location of authority and power over formal rights to (...) decision-making' (Karlsen 1999). A territorial location of authority and power is de-centralized when it is not concentrated in a specific territory called the 'centre' but is also located in the 'periphery' (Karlsen 1999). Thus centralization could refer to the concentration of that power and authority in the centre, marginalizing the periphery.

In CFT's claim a territorial-based institutional centralization refers to Costa Rica's capital city (San José) as the centre, and Guanacaste as the periphery (refer to map in annex #1). The claim is that San José seems to hold the concentration of authority and power over formal rights to cultural politics of decision making. This puts Guanacaste in a disadvantaged position. The dynamic exposed was confirmed with the fact that an office of the MCJD was not created in Liberia until 2004, to cover all the necessities of the province of Guanacaste with a lack of resources, as was mentioned in the third chapter.

In this sense people living in San José benefited more by national budgets and institutional development in the cultural field, than the people living in Guanacaste. In addition, *CFT* goes deep in the expressions of another territory-base type of marginalization within Liberia. Among CFT's purposes they also want to address socio-economic residential segregation that limits people's access to art because of material disadvantages (like kids in schools under social risk).

On the other hand, the *cognitive-cultural types of marginalization* are interrelated with the material types. In *CFT's* members' view, some people do not practice/enjoy art only because of the lack of material possibilities to do so. In the group's perspective, some people do not even think about having the possibility of practicing and enjoying art, so they do not even question their material restrictions. It becomes then also a *cognitive limitation*.

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<sup>35</sup> These scholars define decentralization to understand education systems in Canada

However this cognitive limitation is not only among people with material disadvantages. As Foucault already indicated, the production of knowledge is historically determined by power relations within social and institutional practices and cultural representations (Sawicki 1991). To illustrate this argument, *CFT* identified other types of institutional centralism expressions. Following Karlsen (1999), again it can be defined as the location of institutional authority and power in specific recognized institutions (like the artistic-high-school, professionals with formal titles, and the capital city cultural-artistic institutions).

In *CFT*'s view these types of 'recognized' institutions become 'the owners/controllers' of information and knowledge about artistic-cultural issues. *Owners* because by not sharing with others, they are gaining ownership of it; and the *controllers* because once they are appropriated of the information and knowledge these institutions can regulate which practices to promote<sup>36</sup>, and which knowledge/information is recognized as valuable.

The different types of marginalization mentioned (material and cognitive income and territorial related) demonstrates that art is not accessible to *all*. Then it is not a public good because of the interaction of different material and cognitive marginalization related with income, territorial and institutional centralistic expressions. This already shows that the hegemonic order that make art a private good operates in very complex ways.

However to broadly understand *CFT*'s claims, it is important to recognize that *CFT*'s critiques go even deeper than what I just explained. *CFT*'s critiques also address the existence of marginalization based on artistic-identities. They claim that artistic practices are constrained to the limits the system imposes by creating a dominant notion of art as private.

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<sup>36</sup> Is important to mention for example that *CFT* tends to elaborate on people's possibilities to enjoy and practice art in relation with alternative artistic practices to folklore or football-soccer. In the case of the folklore for example it had been an artistic practice promoted within a hegemonic social order that use it to strength the national-identity politics of the country as was mentioned in the third chapter.

*CFT*'s members shared with me the fact that their practices in Liberia also aim to open up spaces to artists like them. In this sense *CFT*'s experiences illustrate the existence of a more complex causal relation in the expressions of marginalization the hegemonic order creates. For *CFT* the explicit material and less visible cognitive types of marginalization makes art something that *not 'all'* can enjoy and practice. Therefore only 'some' can think and feel that they are capable of accessing it, while others do not even consider it as a possibility to think or prioritize.

The problem is that when people do not even think to practice/enjoy art, or do not think that it is valuable to enjoy it the valorization of art as a public good (a good that all can have the alternative to access) is very limited. Then artistic practices become related only with private interests again. In this point, it is very clear that *CFT*'s connection with community art makes claims against the commoditization of art. The dominant system creates hegemonic dynamics that privatize art's influence in the fact that art's value is mainly focus on its productive role as a good for commercial exchange:

*'...a lot of artists have been entertainment entrepreneurs for hotels and rich people parties, but for me that is very sad, it cannot satisfy me' (Randall 2010, personal interview).*

*'for me this is important because if not life will be very boring'; 'it is a way of not living life in a lineal way, but something that people can enjoy'; 'what we do is because we love art. We do it because we love what we do, is not only about profit making'; '...we can earn money to maintain the materials of the group, but we do art because we love to do it and we want to share it with our community' (Collective interview, July 2010).*

*'I cannot believe that I am doing what I like, with people I love, and earning money. I cannot ask for more' (Kevin 2010, Facebook's quotes).*

These quotes illustrate that *CFT*'s members are not only concerned with people's explicit material and cognitive disadvantages. They are also unveiling that the hegemonic order dictates which role of art is valuable. By doing this the system only opens spaces to artistic practices in the private area of commercial exchange, putting artists in different disadvantaged positions. For example: they can only practice art in their private life as leisure; if they want to survive as artists they have to commercialize their abilities in the spaces that

could buy it; then only people that can afford it are able to appreciate it in their private life; therefore people cannot live their passions and artistic careers outside the practical parameters of the defined 'dominant system'.

The analysis so far has allow me to perceive *CFT* as a political actor involved in very complex dynamics where the hegemonic order has set the parameters of people's social horizon. As was described in the second chapter, Mouffe and Laclau defined hegemony as 'the political articulation of different identities into a common project that becomes our social horizon' (Carpentier and Cammaerts 2008:2). *CFT*'s experiences unveil the different levels in which the hegemonic order operates by creating a very complex system of interrelated types of marginalization.

The group becomes political actors because the meanings behind its practices show the aim to create shifts in hegemonic notions and dynamics and gives space for people to recognize art as something public. By doing this *CFT* is not only addressing emancipation politics to provide people's access to art; the group's aims are also related with life politics by contesting the alienation of artistic practices, and by struggling to give people the possibility of living life outside dominant parameters.

## 4.2. Analyzing CFT's Politics

The following section analyzes *CFT*'s experiences as a political actor by identifying two key politics that, in my opinion, *CFT* puts into practice: one is the provision of free access to art enjoyment and practice in Liberia; the other is their practices of sharing knowledge and information.

### *Providing 'free' access as a group's politic*

The notion of free access is used in most of *CFT* activities as the spectacles, the *peñas culturales*, and workshops illustrate. It seems to be related with the group's aim to open art practice and enjoyment for all people that want to access it, making it public in contestation to its current private character that makes it only accessible for 'some', and not all.

In social sciences different elaborations have been made about the notion of 'free'. Zapata (2004) mentions that this notion is usually connected with a public accessibility provided by the state, social assistentialism, voluntarism, help-support, charity, etc (Zapata 2004:108-109); and it shows an economic distinction between: what is related with price, individual interest, money, competence, etc; and what is associated with the free flow of goods that exclude possibilities of appropriation, reward, competence by promoting moral virtues as solidarity, charity, and sacrifice of own interest (Zapata 2004:109).

*CFT* seems to provide a notion of 'free' related with a material-oriented intention of facilitate people's access to art enjoyment and practice. However the group also aims to go beyond those material-concerns and promote the desire of practicing art as a way of challenging hegemonic notions. This could be interpreted as a rational-calculation of a marketing strategy to manipulate the public; however the goal does not seems to be profit-making, but the recognition of art and consequently the legitimacy of what the group want and enjoy doing with others.

In this sense the case of *CFT* shows an *interconnected relation between personal interest and what the collective believes are also common interest*. This cannot be explained by the simple dualisms Zapata (2004:110) mentions; of interest/disinterest and free/profit, it is a mix of it. *CFT's* experiences illustrate that personal interests are not necessarily always private. It could be enjoyed as a common interest if people have the alternative to do so. The group's voluntarism, by providing free spaces cannot be idealized as des-interested, charity or a sacrifice. *CFT*, as a political actor creates clear intentional actions (normative agency) that could be rationally planned or just given because it is what its members enjoy and want to do.

It is also important to stress that *CFT's* members are conscience about the group's resources requirements in order to make the activities proposed for 'free' possible. This issue presents an important tension *CFT* faces. When the collective seek to promote community art practices of public interest, *CFT* argues that it should be funded by the State. However the State's funds are

scarce, and are therefore regulated by formal normative structures that tend to *make them enter in formal competition with others*.

This *locates CFT within structural informal and formal power-relation dynamics* that define who can access resources. What is important for me to highlight with this information is that, as Mouffe (2005) mentions, the public space is full of conflictive relations, and, as Fraser (1990) mentions, people and social groups cannot access it with equality because it is full of un-equal power.

In relation with this, CFT locates itself in disadvantaged position because the group is still an informal-entity (not legally recognized), circus-art practices CFT promotes are considered in a disadvantage position in relation with folklore<sup>37</sup>; and the public opinions in Liberia are full of dualistic stereotypes that undermine the group's capacity and intentionality. Dualisms exist as 'they do leisure-they are playing/it is not a real job'; and 'they are youth-they are in a transitory stage of life/they will move on and find a real job'.

Currently, CFT is not only getting conscience of their disadvantage positions. Its collective agency is also shown because the group also tries to address the power relations in different way. First, *CFT* tries to achieve better locations in formal power structures by seeking legal-status and creating 'good relations' with state-actors<sup>38</sup>; and second, *CFT* also tries to find resources in the market by selling some spectacles to selected private actors as was mentioned in the third chapter.

The problem is that, as *CFT* recognizes, those two kinds of relations can create dependencies, and therefore leaves autonomy to the group's proposals. In this sense, *CFT's* collective agency is evident because of the deeper normative-oriented analysis the group makes. As was mentioned above, *CFT's* intentions of providing 'free' workshops/sharing spaces/*peñas*, etc. is not only

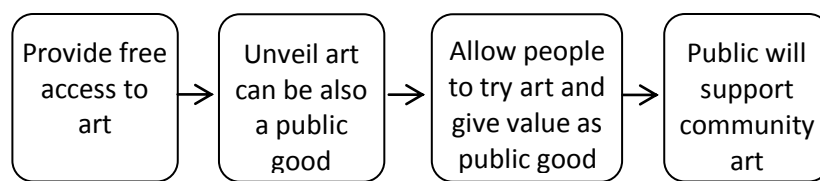
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<sup>37</sup> In terms of the folklore historical political importance and existence of stereotypes about circus art. Is important to mention that *CFT's* location in power relations can have different interpretations, however now I am only addressing their considerations.

<sup>38</sup> As is mentioned in the third chapter they try to have good relations with the MCJD by participating in all activities they invite them to, such as festivals, etc.

to confront material un-accessibility to art in Liberia, but also to unveil to people that art can be a public good that 'all' can access. In the group's view, this will allow people to 'try art' and feel desires to practice and enjoy it more. This implies the achievement of a shift in the public opinion about art as a private good; therefore Liberia's community will value art as a public good and give support to the artists that practice community art.

**Figure 1.**  
**Causal process of changing public opinion through the provision of free access to art in CFT's view**



**Source:** personal elaboration

These lineal causal relations *CFT* seeks to achieve by providing free access to the enjoyment and practice of art might be naïve and ideal, but is an expression of its ongoing collective reflective agency that aims to address structural changes in the public response. *CFT* also promotes alternative practical solutions to the group's current resources necessities with the politic of 'sharing knowledge and information' I will now analyze this.

### ***The sharing of knowledge and information as a group's politic***

The sharing of knowledge and information can be considered one of *CFT*'s practical politics. It consists of different types of practices. On one hand, it is a sharing of teaching/learning between informal sources of knowledge they practice during the 'free day' or the workshops. The sources could be friends, NGO's workers, etc. It could be any person that offers its knowledge for free.

This type of 'sharing' is possible because of certain principles *CFT* has, such as: the valorization of the 'other' as source of knowledge no matter if is informal and non-recognized knowledge; it is a voluntary provision/acceptation of knowledge where whoever knows offers to teach who

wants to learn; the teaching/learning positions can vary because the 'knower' sometimes can be also in the position of the 'learner' and vice-versa; there is also a certain notion of reciprocity, however the informality of the space does not impose formal tensions of claiming it. It is more like a process that is experienced in the daily life of socializing with others through leisure-enjoyment activities (like the 'free day'), or encounters with people the group's members meet in their engagement with networks<sup>39</sup>.

On the other hand the politic of 'sharing information and knowledge' also includes *CFT*'s role of becoming a node for the provision of information and contacts for those who need it. The two types of practices *CFT* addresses with this politic seems to have two non separated functions: one is to contest the ownership and control of knowledge and information of recognized institutions; and in the other is in my view an alternative strategy *CFT* uses to provide 'free access' without depending on external structural transformations. In this sense I consider that these practices provide *CFT* with a certain level of autonomy.

This level of autonomy is mediated by different types of opportunities *CFT* have. First, *CFT*'s members, as ex-students of the artistic high school, have the possibility to know formal structure dynamics and locate themselves outside it and open alternative spaces. Second, the promotion of 'sharing' as a value permits them to ensure the accessibility to knowledge for 'free', contesting the norms of ownership/property of knowledge. Third, their engagement with artistic/cultural networks<sup>40</sup> expands their possibilities to find alternative sources of knowledge that can be professional or not; and finally the circus art

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<sup>39</sup> Example of this is the relation with Ilaria from LCA, or other professionals they contact through their subscription to artistic/cultural national networks (as Guanared) and regional networks (as Maraca, Caleidoscopio or RFCS).

<sup>40</sup> Networks are characterized by integrating groups and organizations that engage with diverse artistic-related practices. This integration is made possible through regional encounters and the technological-communication facilities (Internet blogs, Facebook, etc.). In these spaces, networks facilitate the interchange of information about each organization's practices, initiatives, interest, etc. This allows organizations to 'publicize' of their practices, and open opportunity to share initiatives with others.



*CFT* practices are open to varied types of artistic-abilities and knowledge. The valorization of the difference is essential for their process of opening more accessible spaces that at the same time seems to be more inclusive<sup>41</sup>.

The two types of politics identified in *CFT*'s experience makes me understand this group as a political actor because it demonstrated that it provides a practical continuity of the critiques about the hegemonic order. The free access politics show that it is a way of creating alternative access to art and demonstrates that it should be of public interest. However opening these spaces brings, dilemmas that *CFT*'s collective agency has to face in an ongoing way.

Among the dilemmas, it is possible to observe *CFT* in a constant reflection about its initial purposes and critiques. For example, the fact of needing resources to address the activities puts the group under the risk of establishing dependent relations with the state and the market. Falling into dependency could locate the group in a more weak position to contest the hegemonic order, and the distinct possibility of reproducing it at the end.

To avoid dependency the group appears to be capable of addressing alternative strategic solutions to achieve a better position within the value of others' informal knowledge and the shared politics. By engaging networks, *CFT* acquired more opportunities to obtain alternative resources. In this way, *CFT*'s collective agency is expressed in the fact that the group established relations with multiple types of social actors. These relations are addressed under ongoing processes of reflection as a way of maintaining harmony with the group purposes and practical achievements. So far, all the different issues analyzed in this chapter have lead to some concluding analytical remarks that I address in the next section.

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<sup>41</sup> Inclusive in the sense that the circus allows the integration of different artistic abilities, and practices: juggling, playing music, climbing silks, theatre, etc.

### 4.3. Analytical Conclusions

The information collected illustrates that *CFT* is a political actor because it expresses collective agency in its involvement in Liberia with complex dynamics of power relations. Its experiences demonstrate the different types of power relations the group interacts in. As a consequence, the research question *how a community art collective's experience exposed dilemmas that make it a political actor?* Can be answer considering the following four main:

The *main dilemma* *CFT's* members confront is that *they are claiming art enjoyment and practice as a public good in a context where it is mostly a private practice*. In the last sections, the group experiences showed me that art as a private practice is hegemonic because it illustrates a 'political articulation of different identities into a common project' as Mouffe and Laclau indicates (Carpentier & Cammaerts 2008:2).

On one side, Costa Rica's cultural governmental policies are centralistic. It means that the state's cultural policies concentrate institutional power in specific territories and recognized formal institutions that are not capable of catering to *all people* in Liberia. On the other side, market values prevail within Liberia's public opinions and dynamics too. Different quotes of *CFT* members illustrates it when they argue that their families, neighbors, politicians, groups of artists, etc. undermine the importance of their practices, calling it leisure, temporal, not a real job, etc.

Taking this under consideration, it is possible to observe then that governmental institutional-policies, public opinion and market dynamics are giving prevalence to the productive role of art as a private good. *CFT's* experiences are providing a particular context-specific reading of community art movements main critiques. Liberia's complexity clearly illustrates the existence of cultural hierarchies created by the commoditization of art.

A *second dilemma* *CFT's* experiences expose is that the *expressions of marginality created within these cultural hierarchies are very complex*. Explicit material types of marginality create other less visible cultural-cognitive marginalities. This affects people under socio-economic disadvantages in Liberia that *CFT* tries to

address with its community art practices. But this is not only about other people's marginalization, it is also about artist's communities whose artistic practices are restricted to market interests.

Furthermore, a *third dilemma* shows that CFT's collective agency has a normative orientation *seeking to provoke long term structural shifts on the hegemonic order*. The group's aims are to contest hegemonic cultural hierarchies that cannot be addressed only by explicit outcomes and, because of this, CFT proposes actions that also unveil people's alternatives to the hegemonic order. For example, giving money to people to access art does not have the same outcome as giving it for free. If all can access art because they have money to do it, it is still a private good. Free access, instead, breaks the systematic order that gives privilege to competition, ownership, regulation of alternatives, etc. Sharing knowledge and information, uncovers that which is marginalized by cultural hierarchies (as the informal-recognized sources of knowledge, and the fact that people can be sometimes in the position of the knower and sometimes in the position of the one that learn).

Finally, a *fourth dilemma* CFT's experiences reveal is that *the group is involved in ongoing power dynamics struggling to maintain its autonomy*. To explain this point, the concept of 'relative autonomy' is useful. The Marxist-Althusserian's concept of 'relative autonomy' is inserted in the discussions about the interactions between economical (the base), cultural-ideological and political (the super-structures) instances within the capitalist system (Barker 2000:73). The interaction of these instances is characterized by showing different levels of determination between each other, but economic reductionist perspectives have focused on the economic determination over the superstructure (Barker 2000:73-74). Althusser, instead, include the concept of relative autonomy to argue that 'social formations include relative autonomous practices articulated together in complex and unevenly determining ways' (Baker 2000:74).

CFT's experiences show that the group needs economic-resources. However, falling into dependent relations with the state and the market is a concern because of the risk of reproducing the same dynamics that privatize art. To deal with this dilemma the group executes different strategies. On one

hand, CFT is open to maintaining relations with the market and the state, but without becoming dependent. On the other hand, to avoid dependency, CFT make use of its group's politics<sup>42</sup> and the opportunities generated from its engagement in networks and informal spaces of socialization.

In this sense its relative autonomy can be explained, because despite the group requires funds to maintain its activities and members, it also counts with alternative sources. These alternative sources are provided because of its engagement in networks and because of the open nature of circus art, as was mentioned in the last section. Considering this, CFT's relative autonomy is given thanks to its ongoing reflective interaction with multiple and different social actors.

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<sup>42</sup> CFT's collective agency highlights the importance of maintaining specific values and principles that contest dominant ones (that had privatized art in first place) as ownership, control, appropriation. In contrast CFT promotes values like sharing, reciprocity, voluntary learning-teaching variable positions, etc.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusions

From the outset this research, I was concerned with how can a community art collective be understood as a political actor. This allowed me, first, to discuss mainstream conventional understandings of the political that tend to follow a liberal representative democracy tradition as was indicated by Scott (2008). Under this perspective, the center of attention prioritizes top-bottom readings that are mainly focused on power and decision making processes within the state's structures 'through the use of electoral and administrative mechanisms' (Scott 2008:29).

The problem was, under that perspective, I did not have enough room to discuss CFT's experiences. CFT is a group of young artists between 15-22 years old. They juggle, climb silks, theater, clown, and others, with training clothes and have fun. The group provides a type of social work going to schools 'under social risk' to teach them circus skills and open to them playful spaces, they make performances in their community, etc. However, I was concerned if it could really be conceptualized as political. All of those characteristics gave me some information to understand the group as a political actor. Therefore I had to go deep into the group's experiences as a whole, including discourses, practices, actions, meanings, relations, tensions and dilemmas.

To define it as political, I first used a people center approach using subaltern studies' concept of 'the subaltern'. It brings out a discussion about the position of people in power dynamics. The subaltern is one that is not part of the elites or 'dominant ruling classes' (Galfarsoro 2007). Therefore subaltern studies claim that the subalterns' experiences are those that had been 'drastically reinterpreted, lost, or ...swept away' (Gaeddert 2007). The claim then, was against knowledge production processes that tend to marginalize non-elite experiences.

Taking this into account I decided to define, in broad terms, the concept of a political actor. To do this, I used the concept of agency because that allowed me to highlight the possibility that people can reflect about their loca-

tions in power-dynamic structures and act within them. In this sense, I understood a political actor as one that is involved in power relations but expresses agency. Following with a theoretical delimitation I also used the concept of 'public' as one of the different types of spaces where political actors can interact with power dynamics.

To define this concept, I followed Mouffe's (2005) and Fraser's (1990) critiques to Habermas' definition of the public sphere, which in their view idealizes the possibility of reach consensus through rational deliberation under the existence of certain conditions (Fraser 1990:58-59). Conversely, Fraser (1990) claimed that 'the public' is actually a space full of inequalities and exclusions (Fraser 1990:60). While Mouffe (2005) on the other hand argued that the public, as a political space, is always conflictive, full of antagonisms and 'hegemonically structured' (Mouffe 2005:156-158).

Is important to mention that at the begging of this study the research problem was how can a community art collective could be understood as a political actor. I can now answer this question. CFT is very likely a political actor, but the answer is more complex. This is the reason why I redefine the main research's question as *how the experience of a community art collective exposes dilemmas that make it a political actor?* Four key types of dilemmas were identified in the analysis.

The *first dilemma* refer to the fact that CFT is claiming art enjoyment and practice as a public good in a context where it is mostly a private practice. In relation with this, the *second dilemma* indicated that the focus of art as a private good exposed the existence of cultural hierarchies the dominant system promotes. In this process CFT's experiences unveil very complex and interrelated expressions of marginality between the ones the group is not only seeking to address, like socio-economic disadvantages, but also the constriction of artistic practices relative to market interests. By doing this, the group contests hegemony.

The *third dilemma* comes out when CFT's agency, as a community art collective, recognizes that these complex interrelations of marginalities requires

long term structural shifts in the hegemonic order. In this sense, CFT's experiences show me that contesting hegemony is an ongoing process where the group has to deal with multiple types of social actors. In these relations, the group might find common interests with others, but also confront differences. This makes it a political actor, the *fourth dilemma* then, comes out when the group addresses this fact by coexisting with others, but at the same time having to constantly defend its autonomy.

As Mouffe (2005) mentioned, the political is the recognition of the conflictive nature of social life where differences always emerge. However, CFT's experiences show that a dominant social order seeks to eliminate the differences by marginalizing alternatives. CFT is then as a political actor that seeks to open space to different proposals, by doing so the group brings the political back to where it is being denied. *CFT* is not defining the market, the state, the public opinion as enemies, but as the adversaries that reproduce the logics that privatize art. *CFT*, then, is against this logic, but not against the actors that reproduce it. In this sense, the group is maintaining relations with them, but by aiming to create structural changes in public concerning art as a public good.

*CFT's* agency should be understood as one that is constantly reflecting and acting upon values and principles that follow its particular community art identities against different types of cultural hierarchies. As was indicated at the introduction of the document, scholars argue that community art practices have not reached the shape of a unified movement. However, emerging networks in Latin-America seem to be providing a counter space without necessarily imposing an unified movement. In my opinion this is a key role of networks, provide encounter without making differences invisible but making its existence more clear.

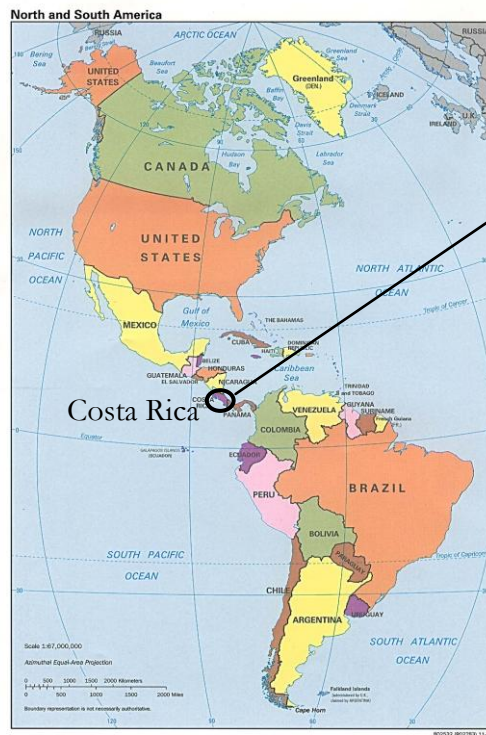
Similar to CFT, specific place-base organizations or groups identified with community art in the region could provide different context-based meanings to its practices. In this sense, it could be opening space for further related research that aims to recognize such interpretations and unveil more complex ways in which marginality is caused by cultural hierarchies and beyond. How-

ever more than unveiling the hegemonic order, it might show that hegemony can be contested in different ways, among the ones that community art plays its role.

My initial concerns reflect on the notion of being a political actor. The specific experience of CFT might show different issues to be considered political, but the fourth dilemma specifically took my attention. The notion of autonomy, acquired by CFT's experiences, is significant in different ways. Some examples include, the independence from resources or political color, the ability to create alternatives, acquire recognition and value from others, live the life the way you want, enjoy it, and relate with different social actors. In this sense, I learnt from CFT's experiences that, as Mouffe (2005) mentions, being political is coexisting with others in difference, it is not about breaking social relations to achieve what one wants, but to actually to be able to engage with others.



## Annex A. Locating Liberia, Guanacaste in the map and socio-economic data



Source: own elaboration with maps from <http://www.vmapas.com/>

## Annex B. Factors Influencing Agency

A lot of theoretical perspectives had being developed to define how human agency is created. Although because of the limits of this paper instead of presenting the different theoretical approaches<sup>43</sup> I will only aggregate different factors influencing agency mentioned already by several authors.

### Different scholars inputs about factors that influence creation of agency

<i>Factors underlining agency</i>	<i>Inputs from different scholars discussing about agency</i>
Agency as reflective and dialogic-deliberative in multiple non linear social relations	<p>Emirbayer and Mische (1998) (<i>Following Mead action theory</i>): Agency is in relation with three processes: <i>structural temporalities</i>; <i>changing historical situations</i>; and <i>relational processes</i> that shape people's capacity to act. The agency is created by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A 'reflective' process were people constantly decide if taking or not action considering the past, their future expectations, and the present possibilities of achievement and risk (Fowler 2009) that consider the 'emerging situations' (Emirbayer and Mishe 1998:963-968).</li> <li>- These reflective processes develop deliberative capacities allowing dialogical processes with multiple actors (Emirbayer and Mische 1998:969-973). By doing this they update their identities, self-awareness, express meanings and preferences that might be in 'correspondence or divergence with others' (Fowler 2009). But events are not lineal, coming one after another (Emirbayer and Mische 1998:968-69, 973).</li> </ul>
Agency as projected project with normative	<p>Agentic action can be understood as a project visualized in the future and 'realized through practical action' (Fowler 2009). These projects are oriented towards normative directionalities, and his study he make specific reference to civic orientations</p>

<sup>43</sup> For example some scholars give lot of emphasis in the determination of the structures on peoples actions, like Bourdieu with his concept of habitus, and Giddens with his 'routinized practices'; others depart point are the individual intentionality of action like the emphasis on goal achievement of rational choice theories, and the concept of purposivity of phenomenology theory (Emirbayer & Mische 1998:963). However Emirbayer & Mische (1998) argue that these approaches do not concentrate in full complexity of agency as an analytical category, discussion that for it is important to show the 'dynamic interplay' among different dimensions and different structural contexts (Emirbayer & Mische 1998:963).

orientation	of action however it could have other type of orientations like: the involvement with formal institutions (Owen 2009:7), other everyday life politics that are not institutionalize and could happen within small structures as family and small communities (Tria 2009:232).
Place as cultural-meaning source for agency	Agency as located in particular time and scales of space where cultural meanings (ideological structures) are created (Bauder 2001:279-281). This scholar following Lefebvre maintain that space is a social production that embody 'complex symbolism, sometimes coded, sometimes not, linked to clandestine or underground side of social life' (Bauder 2001:279-280).

**Source:** Bauder (2001) 'Agency, place, scale: representations of inner-city youth identities' *Tijdschrift voor economische en sociale geografie* 92:3 (279-290); Emirbayer, M. & A. Mische (1998) 'What is agency?' *The American Journal of Sociology (AJS)* 103:4 (962-1023); Fowler, A. (2009) 'Civic agency'. Helmut K. Anheier & S. Toepler *International Encyclopedia of civil society* Springer Science+Business Media, LLC 2010. 10.1007/978-0-387-93996-4\_69

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- Ernesto Elizondo. CFT's member. *Individual Interview*. Liberia, Guanacaste, Costa Rica. 28-July, 2010.
- Ilaria Cieri. Artist and socio-cultural animator from Barcelona, Spain NGO La Casa Amarilla (LCA). Stay with CFT between January-September 2010. *Individual Interview*. Email based-interview. 1-September, 2010.
- Josué Rodríguez. CFT's member. *Individual Interview*. Liberia, Guanacaste, Costa Rica. 28-July, 2010.
- Katia Ramírez. Architect of the Municipality of Liberia. *Individual Interview*. Liberia, Guanacaste, Costa Rica. 28-July, 2010.
- Kevin Ugarte. CFT's member. *Individual Interview*. Liberia, Guanacaste, Costa Rica. 28-July, 2010.
- Kira. CFT's member. *Individual Interview*. Skype from Netherlands-Costa Rica. 27-August, 2010.
- Olman Briseño. Cultural promoter and communications facilitator of Guanared. *Individual Interview*. Internet-Skype Netherlands-Costa Rica. May, 2010
- Oscar (Oruyo). CFT's member. *Individual Interview*. Liberia, Guanacaste, Costa Rica. 12-August, 2010.
- Randall Díaz. CFT's member. *Individual Interview*. Liberia, Guanacaste, Costa Rica. 28-July, 2010.
- *Sergio Mendoza*. CFT's member. *Individual Interview*. Liberia, Guanacaste, Costa Rica. 28-July, 2010.
- Vera Vargas. Guanacaste's regional director of the MCJD. *Individual Interview*. Skype from Netherlands-Costa Rica 31-August, 2010
- *Collective interview*. Participants: Ernesto Elizondo, Randall Díaz, Sergio Mendoza, Kevin Ugarte, Oscar, Paul, Ilaria Cieri. Liberia, Guanacaste, Costa Rica. 27-July, 2010.
- *Feedback and collective interview*. Participants: Ernesto Elizondo, Randall Díaz, Sergio Mendoza, Kevin Ugarte, Oscar, Diego Cubillo. Liberia, Guanacaste, Costa Rica. 12-August, 2010.

### **• Other field work's techniques and sources of information:**

- Participatory observation during free day. La Comandancia building, Liberia, Guanacaste, Costa Rica. 28-July, 2010.
- Non participatory observation during school presentation. Escuela La Victoria, Liberia, Guanacaste, Costa Rica. 28-July, 2010.
- Non participatory observation during peña cultural de Alajuela. Municipal Theater, Alajuela, Costa Rica. 08-August-2010

- Non participatory observation during trapezium and silks free workshops. *La Comandancia's* building, Liberia, Guanacaste, Costa Rica. 13-August, 2010.
- Non participatory observation during Variete Spectacle. *La Comandancia's* building, Liberia, Guanacaste, Costa Rica. 12-August, 2010.