CATTLE CULTURE IN AMAZONIA: THE RISE OF RANCHING IN ACRE, BRAZIL

By

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To my family and the people of Acre
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It was due to this connection with home, and my mom’s desire for me to share my research, that I began to write a column entitled “Postcards from the Amazon” for my
hometown newspaper. Mike Kelly and Tim Archuleta at the San Angelo Standard-Times helped make this happen, and guided me through the early transition to writing for the newspaper. I thank San Angelenos, and others who read my articles online, for their interest and support, for giving me the opportunity to refine my ethnographic writing skills, and for helping me to not lose sight of how to communicate with non-academics.

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<td>Institute for the Defense of Agro-Cattle Raising and the Forest</td>
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<td>IMAC</td>
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CATTLE CULTURE IN AMAZONIA: THE RISE OF RANCHING IN ACRE, BRAZIL

By

Jeffrey Andrew Hoelle

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Chair: Marianne Schmink
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This dissertation focuses on the practices and beliefs associated with cattle in the western Amazon state of Acre, Brazil. By examining cattle raising in Acre, where decades earlier the rubber tapper social movement confronted cattle ranchers and became a global symbol of environmentalism, we can gain a deeper understanding of the economic, social, and cultural changes occurring in one of Amazonia’s most politically significant regions.

Data collected using participant observation and semi-structured, structured, and key-informant interviews were analyzed to understand the growing economic and cultural significance of cattle in the lives of Acreans. The expansion of cattle raising among three rural social groups (rubber tappers, colonists, and ranchers) is the result of political economic changes, shifts in inter-group relationships, and the growth of positive cultural perceptions of cattle. Each group’s use of cattle is based on their unique social identities, relationships with political institutions, and traditional forms of economic practice.

Distinct uses of cattle give rise to specific relationships with cattle, and subsequently to unique forms of cattle culture, which contribute to and are subsumed by
a dominant cattle culture, based on a ranching mode of production. Acrean cattle culture emerged in part from local economic practices, but its primary features were diffused directly and indirectly from traditional cattle ranching centers in Brazil and the United States.

Cattle culture is expressed through participation in popular cultural events associated with cattle, the construction of cattle-centered landscapes in which nature is dominated by humans, and agreement with perceptions that attribute superiority to a vision of rural life based on cattle raising. This dissertation analyzes the extent to which different groups, from environmentalists to cowboys, participate in cattle culture activities and events. Cultural consensus analysis is used to compare the extent to which different groups agree with perceptions of cattle culture. This dissertation contributes to our knowledge of the relationship between material and conceptual drivers in the creation, circulation, and appropriation of cultural forms related to cattle.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION: ACRE THROUGH THE LANDSCAPE

When I first arrived in Rio Branco, Acre in 2007, the billboards of Chico Mendes were fresh and new. Most of what I had read about Acre was focused on how Mendes and the rubber tapper movement had captured the world’s attention by defending rubber tapper lands against cattle ranchers in the name of environmental and social justice. “Chico Mendes Vive!” (“Chico Mendes Lives!”), the sign said. Indeed, he does as a symbol of global environmentalism and a local political commitment to forest-based development.

Testaments to Acre’s forest heritage and forest future dotted the urban landscape, from the Estadio da Floresta (Stadium of the Forest) on the Via Chico Mendes to the sleek Museu da Floresta (Museum of the Forest). These modern-looking constructions of the Governo da Floresta (“Forest Government”), as the current state government refers to itself, rarely melded with the hodgepodge assortment of brightly painted, crumbling buildings and rambling streets that surrounded them. They also stood in contrast to the presence of cattle-centered cultural and commercial establishments, such as barbecue restaurants and butcher shops, and contri (country) bars and clothing stores, which increased every year that I was in Acre from 2007-2010.

This “city of the forest” provides an interesting point of departure for introducing some of the central concerns of this research, which, to a large extent, emerged from walking around the city and talking with people, paying careful attention to the surroundings, and attempting to capture the acknowledged, yet elusive significance of cattle in Acrean society. This description will provide history and context on the state of Acre, and preview some of the key themes that will be explored in this dissertation,
namely the social and cultural changes taking place as cattle assume a greater role in the Acrean economy, and the relationship between cattle economies and cattle culture. This journey through the Acrean landscape begins in the city of Rio Branco with a focus on Acrean history as revealed through governmental, educational, and infrastructural projects, then heads on to the countryside, and finally returns to the city with an eye on cattle, cattle raisers, and cattle culture.

The majority of Rio Branco’s tourist spaces serve as official testaments to Acre’s forest heritage, with an almost singular focus on the rubber tapper cultural legacy. At the Museu da Borracha (Museum of Rubber), you can journey through depictions of Acre’s 1903 independence from Bolivia to life-sized displays of a rubber tapper rotating a ball of rubber over the fire, transforming the liquid latex into Amazonian “white gold.”

The first wave of rubber tappers came to Acre from northeastern Brazil with the onset of the “rubber boom” in the mid 1800s. The rubber boom officially ended in 1920, after plantations in Southeast Asia, using seeds smuggled from the Amazon, broke the Amazonian monopoly (Dean 1987; Santos 1980). During World War II, when U.S. rubber supplies from Asia were cut off, the industry briefly rebounded, and a wave of “rubber soldiers” migrated to Amazonia from the northeast to tap rubber for the Allied war effort (Martinello 2004).

From 1870 through the mid 20th century, Acre was one of Amazonia’s most productive rubber regions (Bakx 1988). Throughout this period, rubber tappers worked in a system of debt-peonage, and were forced to exchange their rubber for essential goods with the seringalista, or rubber baron, who owned the land that they worked (Resor 1977). Following World War II, the price of rubber steadily declined, and many
rubber barons fled the region, leaving the rubber tappers “a class of autonomous rubber producers in effective control of the land on which they lived and worked” (Bakx 1988: 143).

On the second floor of the Museu da Borracha, there is a small archive filled with local newspapers and magazines from the 1970s and 1980s. During this period of Acrean history, the military government’s plans to “colonize the Amazon” brought tumultuous changes that interrupted the frozen rubber tapper life depicted in the downstairs portion of the museum. The cover of the December 1979 issue of Varadouro, a local magazine, attests to some of the changes brought about by the arrival of migrants, specifically large scale ranchers, and the ways that groups, practices, and cultures were opposed (Figure 1-1).

In this illustration by Acrean artist Helio Melo, a cow has taken over the home of a rubber tapper family, and expelled them to search for another place to live. The fallen rubber tree (evident by the lines on its trunk), which sustained the rubber tapper, has been chopped down to make room for cattle pastures. Four key processes are illustrated: 1) the shift in the Acrean economy from rubber, or forest extractivism more generally, to cattle; 2) the clash of cultures, resulting in the displacement of native rubber tappers by foreign migrants; 3) the association of rubber tappers with the forest and migrants with cattle; 4) the association of migrants and their cattle with environmental destruction. Many of these key symbols and oppositions remain, and will be analyzed in relation to the political, economic, and cultural context of the present.

The sense of invasion is further reinforced at the Biblioteca da Floresta, (Library of the Forest), a recent construction by Acre’s forest government. Upon entering the
building, a dramatic wall display entitled “O Acre Como um Pasto de Boi” (“Acre as a Cattle Pasture”) lays out the political forces behind the environmental destruction and social conflict that took place in Acre during the period of colonization.

In the first photo, a military officer aims his binoculars to the distance—to the frontier. The colonization of the Amazon was a centuries old aspiration, with former president Getulio Vargas calling it the “the highest task of civilizing man” (1940 quoted in Davis 1977: 21). Widespread colonization of the Amazon began in the 1970s when the military government opened the region to settlement by smallholders, landless populations, and urban poor from other parts of Brazil (Almeida 1992; Moran 1982). Incentives and subsidies were also provided for large scale cattle raising, attracting entrepreneurs and ranchers from central-southern Brazil (Hecht 1993). Migrant groups and native Amazonians battled for land, resources, and political power in the “contested frontier” (Schmink and Wood 1992).

To the right of the text, there is a map of Brazil with blood-red lines traversing Amazonia, indicating the network of roads constructed to facilitate migration into formerly isolated regions. A logging truck and mottled Gyrolandia bull stare out from the map, showing the predatory extractivist business model that developed in the region. In the foreground, a man with a machine gun stands behind a forbidding wooden fence denoting the entrance to a ranch. The face of the pistoleiro (hired gunman) is concealed beneath a cowboy hat, which has been appended, it would appear, to the original photo of the man. This was no doubt a creative way to conceal the pistoleiro's identity, but the choice of a cowboy hat is appropriate for the Acrean recasting of the
frontier, in which the rubber tappers banded together to defend themselves against the ranchers and cowboys, who assumed the role of villains (Keck 1995).

The rubber tapper movement initially framed the defense of their land in Marxist terms, forming a class-based alliance against the wealthy migrant ranchers (*Ibid.*). *Paulista* (native of São Paulo state) ranchers were armed with a developmentalist discourse, in which they were “pioneers,” who through “improvements” to the land (converting the forest to economically productive pasture), contributed to the “progress” of the nation. The rubber tappers’ need to defend their land coincided with a growing global concern for the environment, and Brazilian and international academics and environmentalists sought to bring attention to the environmental and social destruction taking place in the Brazilian Amazon (Allegretti 2002; Keck 1995; Revkin 1990).

The resultant message of the rubber tapper movement challenged the developmentalist discourses of “empty lands” and “technological backwardness” imposed upon the Acrean landscapes and people (Esteves 1999, quoted in Kainer *et al.* 2003: 875), stressing social equity, land tenure, and forest conservation as the basis for livelihoods (Allegretti 2002). Amid escalating violence in the late 1980s, the rubber tappers began to slow down rancher deforestation and appropriation of tapper lands around the city of Xapuri, and moved toward securing rights to their land.

Nestled under tall palm trees in the plaza in front of the Governor’s Palace, there is a statue of Chico Mendes holding the hand of his young son. In December 1988, Chico Mendes, the most prominent rubber tapper leader, was murdered in his home by the son of a rancher (Revkin 1990). News of Mendes’ assassination first appeared in the *New York Times* six days after his death, under the title “Brazil Burns the Future.”
Brazilian governments commonly shrug off criticism of the cowboy strand in their society. That strand is evident in the environmental holocaust sweeping the Amazon rain forest and the cold-blooded murder of a trade unionist who dared to challenge slash-and-burn land developers (28 December 1988)

In the aftermath of global media attention, the movement gained an even broader appeal, and, in 1990, the rubber tapper movement achieved one of its primary goals with the establishment of the extractive reserve (RESEX) system. This novel tenure model was based on the rubber tapper patterns of resource exploitation, and emphasized that people could both use the forest and contribute to the preservation of natural resources (Schwartzman 1989). Following the success of the rubber tapper movement, similar use-based conservation units were subsequently implemented throughout Amazonia (Kainer et al. 2003). The rubber tappers also became a symbol for the emerging global environmental movement (Tsing 2005). The widespread appeal of the rubber tapper movement stemmed from its ability to frame environmentalism:

Not as an amenity, but as essential to a struggle around basic rights to subsistence, catapulting environmentalism to a new universal value upon which a variety of such claims could be made (Keck 1995: 417).

With the 1988 election of Jorge Viana as governor of Acre, the “forest government” was born. The administration built on the ideals of the rubber tapper movement to promote forest-based development, and sought “to demonstrate to present and future generations that development does not depend on the destruction of the forest, but rather on its survival” (Government of Acre 1999, quoted in Kainer et al. 2003). The forest government also implemented a cultural program based on valorization of the forest and forest populations called florestania, or forest citizenship (Schmink and Cordeiro 2008; Schmink 2011). Florestania attempts to “celebrate the population’s
roots in the rubber tapping economy, while breaking from previous development policies to favor environmentally-friendly policies” (Vadjunec et al. 2011b: 75).

The policies of the forest government culminated in unprecedented transformations of Rio Branco and the Acrean landscape. From the Estadio da Floresta on the Via Chico Mendes, with its bike lanes and potted plants, on out to the Via Verde, a highway that now encircles the city, there have been vast urban infrastructural improvements in Rio Branco over the past decade. All of them are stamped with the same symbol: a tree in a box, with Governo da Floresta written underneath.

One of the forest government’s most enduring legacies will likely be the conversion of a swampy ditch running through the middle of the concrete jungle of Rio Branco into a pleasant oasis known as the Parque da Maternidade (Park of Motherhood). While I was in Acre, lycra-clad women and men in sleeveless shirts walked and talked in the evenings along the sidewalks of the park. Workers returned home from a day’s work on their bikes, toting other family members or packages on the back platform, as they passed the Museu da Floresta and Museu dos Povos da Floresta (Museum of Forest Peoples). On the sidewalks, teenagers congregated to listen to loud sertaneja (Brazilian country) or brega music. Youths played soccer and volleyball on numerous sand courts, arguing about who would retrieve the ball from the ankle-high black water that bisected the park from its beginning until it entered the market on the edge of the river.

At the edge of the market, the stream and the plastic bottles that float on the surface merge with the muddy waters of the Rio Acre, eventually emptying into the Atlantic Ocean some 3000 kilometers downstream. Upriver, the murky waters pass
under a futuristic white bridge that carries young environmentalists from the World Wildlife Fund offices across the river to the newly renovated *mercado velho* (old market), where they often sip draft beer in the fading afternoon sun.

Proceeding upstream, the Rio Acre meanders through the upper Acre region, through Xapuri and down to Brasiléia on the Bolivian border, and then on to Assis Brasil, before heading into Peru and its source somewhere in the Andes. The recently paved (2002) BR-317 highway roughly follows the river for 330 kilometers through the upper Acre region. Completed under the Viana administration, the BR-317 forms part of the “Inter-Oceanic highway,” which links Brazil with the Peruvian coast. The road is generating economic, ecological, and social changes along and beyond its course (Perz *et al.* 2011).

This region of upper Acre, along with lower Acre, which encircles Rio Branco and proceeds east, constitutes the most heavily populated and denuded parts of the state, which otherwise boasts around 88% forest cover. From the BR-317, much of that missing 12% is apparent in the form of pastures, where white cows graze amidst the hulking skeletons of Brazil nut trees charred at the base. The cows, with little white *garças* (egrets) always close behind, circulate in the green pastures, which fade to brown in the summer, with the emerald forest in the distance. The soil is a rusty red-orange that punctuates the otherwise lush grass in veins running down hills and three-foot-tall termite mounds. From the *ramais* (unpaved side roads), dirt spills out onto the highway and eventually fades into the blacktop.

Along the highway, elaborate gates frame vast seas of pasture. These are the large cattle ranches of the *fazendeiros* (ranchers). Chico is a rancher who came to Acre
from Minas Gerais in 1980. He initially thought of himself as a pioneer, and arrived with a desire to desbravar (tame) the frontier. He initially planted rubber trees, but eventually switched to cattle, and his picture-perfect pastures now sustain 5000 head of cattle.

Running beside the big cattle ranches, the ramais pass through the settlement projects, which now look like little ranches, and proceed back for thirty kilometers or so. Bahiana lived just off a side road, settling there after following the opening of the frontier with her now-deceased husband. Long an agriculturalist, she owned 80 head of cattle before she sold her land to a man from the city in 2009. Leopoldo, another colonist, lives across the highway. He grew up a rubber tapper, but decided to get his own land when the colonization project came to Acre. Although he maintains some of the rubber tapper ways, his house is surrounded by pasture, as are those of his neighbors, who are a mixture of former rubber tappers, migrants from southern Brazil, and native Acreans from the city who have bought land recently.

At the end of the ramais, the forest thickens, the temperature cools, and the road disintegrates into little footpaths that connect rubber tappers with their neighbors and the rubber and Brazil nut trees upon which they rely. The forest dominates here, one shaped by nature and centuries of human habitation. Jatobá lives here. Unlike most of his neighbors, Jatobá had an ideological problem with cattle, but he decided to buy a bull a few years ago. The bull pulls his ox-cart and comes to his door in the evenings looking for salt. Jatobá’s son, Espimar, guided me to the homes of other rubber tappers in the seringal, strumming on his guitar and singing country music as we walked.

Planes often flew over the seringal, and rubber tappers would ask me where they were going. Since they were usually heading north or south, I responded with
references to places that they knew: the United States or São Paulo. From above, the forest is mostly an uninterrupted mass of green, and it is the gaps—the pastures mostly—that capture international travelers’ attention. At night during the dry season, only fires break the black expanse below.

The gaps in the forest, alarming red swaths and gray fishbone patterns on the maps, have been studied extensively, as have the various processes that produce them, lumped together as deforestation. None of the rural people that I talked to necessarily think of pastures as gaps, but rather as the focus of their economic and social aspirations, a landscape that both makes sense in response to, and is representative of a unique configuration of social, political, economic, and historical factors. Other gaps seen from above, and as geometric blurs on the maps, are the cities, where 75% of Amazonians now live (Goulding et al. 2003).

From out of the forest, and along the BR-317 heading back to Rio Branco, there are four rodeo arenas, three of which have been built in the last five years. Up the road in Capixaba, you pass the “Country Bar,” with a woman painted on one side and a bucking bull on the other. At the end of town, there is a new rodeo arena and dancehall called the Celeiro Beer (Beer Barn), with a wagon wheel mounted above the front door. Next to the Celeiro there is a small store where Olessio, a cowboy, stopped so that he could get a new belt before we headed to the annual Expo-Acre celebration. Big men’s silver belt buckles, and some with pink accents for women, gleamed under a glass case, next to tins of American smokeless tobacco.

On the outskirts of Rio Branco heading toward Porto Velho, Rondonia, a foul smell and black smoke announce the presence of the two new slaughterhouses, where
Acrean cattle end their journey from the seringal, the colonia (settlement project), and the fazenda (large scale ranch). The cattle stand about and occasionally jostle for position in the pens as water from a sprinkler cascades over them. They then proceed single file into a warehouse, where they are transformed into Acre’s famed “boi verde” (green cattle), and shipped down south.

Forty-percent of this beef, however, stays within the borders of the state, where it is consumed by Acreans, who have the highest rate of annual beef consumption in all of Brazil (IBGE 2010; Valentim n.d.). On the weekend, the smell of roasting meat is heavy in the air, with churrascos, or barbecues, serving as the central ritual for social gatherings. A churrasco without beef is not acceptable to most, and, as one colonist reported, meatless meals “are eaten with our eyes closed.” In every town, it seems that on almost every block there is either a butcher shop, or a churrascaria, a self-service restaurant featuring roasted meat.

Along with agricultural supply stores, these establishments are often painted with majestic white bulls. Sometimes there are idyllic scenes of cattle grazing in a verdant, mountainous countryside that call to mind a Swiss landscape. Inside a butcher shop in the Sobral neighborhood, a white bull looks out over a pasture bisected by a small stream, and down to a glass cases with meat on hooks. On the wall it says, “Deus é meu pastor.” (God is my pastor.).

Driving around Rio Branco on the Vía Chico Mendes or the Vía Verde, there is ample evidence that raising and consuming cattle has been accompanied by the growth of cattle culture, a view of rural life in which cattle is central. Little ranchos have popped up on the on the outskirts of the city, where young urban professionals practice roping in
the evening. There are also chacarás, little semi-rural properties, where urbanites with means go to interact with an acceptable form of nature, one with ponds stocked with fish and houses tucked amid fruit trees and manicured lawns. As you go around Rio Branco you will likely hear sertaneja music down low in the restaurants, and louder in the contri bars, where local singer Bobnei belts out sertaneja hits, along with American country songs “Chattahoochee” and “Jambalaya.” You may also hear sertaneja blasting from cars parked on the sidewalk, with young men sitting in a circle and sipping tereré (cold herba maté tea), a tradition adapted from the gaúchos some 4,000 kilometers to the south. You might also stop at the recently opened “Cowboys Ranch” to buy cowboy boots, hats, blue jeans, leather belts, or a shiny belt buckle. These components of the urban landscape attest to the growing centrality of cattle culture, and the manner in which it draws on American and regional Brazilian influences.

It is said that the frontier was opened by “the hoof of the bull,” but in Acre cattle were recast as the “eaters of the forest.” Since the arrival of cattle some forty years ago, they have become widespread, from the rancher’s prize bull lazing in manicured pastures to the forest, where Jatoba’s beloved ox carries his son to school on the rubber trails. In this dissertation, I focus on cattle in all of their economic and cultural forms, those in the countryside and those painted on the side of the “Country Bar,” and the idealized vision of rural life that is sung about inside. From the centerpiece of the churrasco, to the bucking bull under the cauboi (cowboy), and the leather boots on his feet, a focus on cattle allows us to see the changes in Acrean society, the connections between places and people, as well as the relationships between economy and culture.
Figure 1-1. “A Portrait of Acre” Varadouro Magazine, December 1979 issue
CHAPTER 2
OVERVIEW OF DISSERTATION, RESEARCH AREA, AND METHODS

This research began with an interest in understanding the rise of cattle ranching in Amazonia from an anthropological perspective. Cattle are often the beginning or the end of the analysis in research on Amazonia: a driver of deforestation, or a result of economically rational individuals responding to political and economic constraints. Those who raise cattle are “linked with deforestation,” or are called criminals or villains by those more critical. Amid the environmental fervor surrounding the Amazon region, a rich anthropological terrain, and perhaps a key component for understanding the rise of ranching has been overlooked. Beginning with cattle, rather than the forest, as a point of departure provides a unique window to the changes and contradictions of modern day Amazonia.

In the western Amazon state of Acre, Brazil, cattle have been a source of contestation and conflict since their arrival in the 1970s. In an attempt to defend their land, the Acrean rubber tapper movement confronted cattle ranchers, and became a global symbol of environmentalism. The subsequent rise of cattle raising among Acrean groups, including the rubber tappers, makes Acre an intriguing site for exploring the meanings and uses of cattle.

Cattle are well understood as an economic resource, but they are also cultural objects with contested and shared meanings. The focus of this dissertation is on cattle, cattle raisers, cattle raising, and cattle culture—the cultural constructions associated with cattle raising. I argue for attention to cattle as a site of convergence for group-specific and broader conceptions of economy, culture, symbol, and politics.
A focus on cattle allows us to see similarities and differences between groups, and draw out economic and cultural connections with other regions. Cattle culture emerges from specific forms of interaction between humans and cattle, but is also informed by broad circuits of diffusion, from the Iberian Peninsula to the Southern Cone pampas, from the studios of Nashville to São Paulo rodeos, and then to Acre, where belt buckle-wearing caubois (cowboys) now live the vida contri (country lifestyle).

Cattle culture is expressed through participation in popular cultural events associated with cattle, the construction of cattle-centered landscapes in which nature is dominated by humans, and agreement with perceptions that attribute superiority to a vision of rural life based on cattle raising. By analyzing the roots of these cultural expressions, and showing how cattle culture is related to the ways that different groups use and conceptualize cattle, this dissertation contributes to our knowledge of the relationship between material and conceptual drivers in the creation, circulation, and appropriation of cultural forms related to cattle.

The Acrean case presents interesting contradictions and riddles: “carnivorous” environmentalists; pastures in the rubber tapper forest; ranchers that reject cattle culture; and the explosion of the cattle industry under the administration of the state “forest government.” By comparing the ways that different social groups appropriate or reject features of cattle culture, we can better understand the ways that ideologically opposed groups understand themselves in relation to historical and contemporary debates about environmental conservation and economic development, and gain an updated view of the people of this important Amazonian region.
Literature, Context, and Chapter Overviews

In the following subsections, I lay out the local context, academic literature, and theoretical perspectives that frame my questions and guide my examination of different topics related to cattle in Acre. Each chapter is constructed to add to our knowledge of the region and its people, provide theoretical and conceptual contributions, and build toward a comprehensive account of cattle culture.

The Political Economy of Cattle Raising

Given Acre’s history and environmental image, it is surprising that cattle raising has exploded in the state, which had the highest percentage increase in cattle in all of Brazil between 1998 and 2006 (IBGE 2008). The majority of the recent growth of the Acrean herd is the result of smallholders shifting to cattle raising (Toni et al. 2007). Those expanding their herds include the rubber tappers, who once mobilized against cattle raisers, and laid the foundation for Acre’s environmental image (Gomes 2009).

In the 1970s, with the military government’s push to “develop” the Amazon and the arrival of migrant settlers and ranchers to the region (Almeida 1992; Moran 1982; Smith 1981), the issues surrounding cattle attracted scholars’ attention. The majority of this research on cattle in Amazonia has focused on three themes: 1) explaining the rapid expansion of cattle raising by analyzing political and economic factors (e.g. Hecht 1993; Smeraldi and May 2009); 2) analyzing social changes and the reactions of Amazonian social groups engendered by the arrival of migrants and their cattle (e.g. Hecht and Cockburn 1989; Schmink and Wood 1992); and 3) chronicling the environmental destruction associated with cattle raising (e.g. Faminow 1998; Kaimowitz et al. 2003).

Ranching was a key component of the government’s plan for developing the Amazon in the 1970s (Schmink and Wood 1992). Initially, raising cattle in Amazonia
was only profitable because it was propped up by generous government incentives and subsidies (Hecht 1993). Once these incentives were withdrawn, however, cattle raising did not decrease or become unprofitable. This was due to the development of the regional economy and the associated increase in urban demand for beef (Faminow 1998).

In comparison with agriculture, raising cattle is also less risky, requires less up-front investment, and is less labor intensive. Additionally, cattle are a liquid asset that maintain their value and are easily transported to markets (Margulis 2004). Furthermore, establishing pasture is the most recognizable way of gaining title to and increasing the value of land (Hecht 1993). Recent analyses of Amazonian cattle raising explain the explosion of cattle in the region by analyzing political and economic factors, and examining market linkages across scales (Arima et al. 2006; Smeraldi and May 2008; Walker et al. 2009).

In Chapter Three, I ask: what political, economic, cultural and social factors have combined to create a situation in which cattle raising has expanded, across Acrean groups, since 1990? In order to answer this question, I analyze two time periods: 1970-1990, when settlers and cattle arrived and there was conflict over land, and 1990-2010, a time when Acre became a globally important symbol in environmental debates, and, concurrently, cattle raising exploded.

Three distinct social groups are compared: rubber tappers, colonists, and large scale ranchers. I will demonstrate how policies and economic fluctuations have made cattle the most appealing livelihood strategy across groups. I will also show how groups are uniquely inserted into these political economic structures, and how their responses
are based on their historical practices, cultural identities, and relationships and perceptions of one another. Throughout the dissertation, political economy and political ecology frameworks inform the discussion of the structures that constrain action, and the ways that groups engage those structures to produce certain outcomes (Gezon and Paulson 2005; Schmink 1994).

Cattle Economies and Cattle Cultures

Despite the importance of cattle ranching and the rich cattle cultures spanning from the Canadian plains to the pampeas of Argentina, little has changed since Rivière asserted that “studies of [pastoral] people in the new world are nonexistent” (1972:1). This is especially the case in Amazonia, where a great deal of attention has been devoted to the drivers of cattle expansion, but less is known about what cattle mean to different groups. The rich legacy of research on African pastoralists has produced some of anthropology’s most famous concepts, from Herskovits’ “cattle complex” (1926) to Evans-Pritchard’s “bovine idiom” (1940), and provides a starting point for elaborating on the cattle cultures of the Americas.

In Chapter Four, I will on draw on Africanist scholarship on cattle to build toward an understanding of the relationship between economies and cultures. I first analyze the manner in which African pastoral and American ranching modes of production give rise to unique cattle cultures (Herskovits 1926; Strickon 1965). On this broad level, cattle cultures can best be understood by focusing on the unique ways that groups exploit cattle within the constraints of two distinct modes of production: subsistence-oriented pastoralism in colonial East Africa and market-oriented ranching in the Americas. Groups are compared under three interrelated categories to reveal cultural differences and similarities associated with distinct forms of cattle keeping: economic
(degree of subsistence or market orientation); ecological (form of interaction between humans and cattle); and social (ways that social relationships between people constrain forms of exchange).

From this broad perspective, I then focus on the different ways that groups in Acre use cattle, examine the cultural constructions that result from distinct forms of interaction, and show how cultural constructions surrounding cattle culture combine to create cattle culture. I use this discussion as a foundation for establishing the ways that cattle cultures are formed through dialectical interplay of material and cultural forces across time, and to emphasize that cattle are at once economic and cultural objects.

**Shifts in Economic Practice and Social Identity**

**Rubber tappers and colonists**

In recent years, the nature of Acrean cattle raising has changed, as smallholders are increasingly associated with deforestation for cattle pastures (Toni et al. 2007). Scholars have chronicled the transition of groups traditionally oriented to forest extractivism and agriculture to cattle, demonstrating the ways that their social histories and identities inform their decisions (Ehringhuas 2005; Gomes 2009; Salisbury and Schmink 2007; Toni et al. 2007; Wallace 2004).

Social Identity is one’s sense of affiliation with a set of characteristics thought to embody a social collectivity. Identity situates people within a collective “location,” with distinctive social memory, consciousness, and position within the social structure (Hale 1997). Among rural Amazonian groups, Harris sees identity as the “dialectic product of people’s historical experience and their continual engagement in the lived world” (2000: 8). The practice-based identities of extractivist rubber tappers, agricultural colonists, and large scale cattle ranchers are the result, as their labels indicate, of dedication to
specific economic practices. But these labels obscure the confluence of other factors integral to both practice and self-definition.

Practice theory provides a framework for understanding the relationship between economic practice, the manner in which rural populations use their land to make a living, and social identity, the ways that groups perceive and express themselves culturally in articulation with a mode of production (see Bourdieu 1977). I use practice theory “to conceptualize the articulations between the practices of social actors ‘on the ground’ and the big ‘structures’ and ‘systems’ that both constrain those practices and yet are ultimately susceptible to being transformed by them” (Ortner 2006: 2).

Economic practice is thus the result of structure and agency, and it is also highly meaningful to those who undertake certain forms of practice, and to outsiders who perceive them as practitioners of a specific practice.

Political economic changes may render one practice more desirable than another, leading to a shift in practice. Although economic practices are motivated to respond primarily to material needs, the ways that these practices are linked with ideas about practices, and those who practice them, makes a shift in practice socially meaningful and politically consequential.

How does the shift to cattle raising affect rubber tapper and colonist notions of social identity? In Chapter Five, I outline components of seringueiro (rubber tapper) and colono (colonist) identity in relation to their respective histories, traditional economic practices, and transition to cattle raising. Understanding the effect that a change in practice has on each group’s identity requires analyzing how they envision themselves, how they are uniquely positioned to respond to political and economic developments,
and how their shift in practice is perceived by outsiders who associate them with traditional economic practices.

**Ranchers**

With the exception of Riviére, who studied ranchers in a less controversial era and place (1972), there is a gap in the literature since ranchers’ arrival in Amazonia triggered conflicts with native populations and other smallholder groups (Hecht and Cockburn 1990; Schmink and Wood 1992). The ranchers form an elite group that exercises greater political and economic power than other rural groups, and is often viewed negatively for their role in environmental destruction and the displacement of subordinate groups.

In Chapter Six, I attempt to “study up” to another stratum of society (Nader 1972) and locate Acrean *fazendeiro*, or large scale rancher, ethnographically, and contribute to our anthropological understanding of this understudied group. Rancher migration to Acre is examined in relation to demographic and economic factors, as well as the ideology of frontier settlement. I then analyze rancher political and economic relationships with subordinate rural groups. Perspectives of these groups (cowboys, rubber tappers, and colonists) are compared to show how the rancher embodies elite status in Acre. From the perceptions of other rural groups, who associate the rancher with positive social attributes, to the international view of them as “villains,” I attempt to understand how the ranchers position themselves in relation to other groups, Brazilian history, and local and global political debates about the environment.

**The Diffusion and Appropriation of Cattle Culture**

Amidst the testaments to rubber tapper cultural legacy and the signs denoting the policy initiatives of the state “forest” government, a growing number of country- themed
bars and clothing stores, and rodeo arenas have emerged in the capital of Rio Branco, and throughout the upper Acre region. These expressions of “cattle culture,” based on the ranching practices and traditions, go hand in hand with the explosive growth of the Acrean cattle industry in the past decade. The focus of cattle culture, however, is not the vaqueiro or the northeast, or the gaúcho of the southern Brazil, but rather the cauboi (cowboy) and his vida contra (country lifestyle).

The arrival of migrants and their cattle produced land conflict, and native Amazonians, including the Acrean rubber tappers, formed social movements to defend their land and way of life (Bakx 1988; Hecht and Cockburn 1989; Schmink and Wood 1992). A less-chronicled result of the convergence between native Amazonian and migrant populations was the mixing of cultural traditions. Through the merging of foreign and traditional practices, vibrant new cultural forms and practices arose.

My aim in Chapter Seven is to draw out the origins and paths of diffusion that have given rise to Acrean cattle culture, to analyze the reasons that it has taken hold in this unlikely place, and compare the extent that different groups, from cowboys to environmentalists, participate in cattle culture. This chapter is structured to gradually narrow the scope of analysis from a historical and continental perspective to the present-day actions of distinct Acrean social groups. In addition to drawing out linkages between scales, each level of analysis introduces a concept that builds towards an understanding of Acrean cattle culture: direct and indirect diffusion, appropriation, and participation.

**Ideology and Landscape**

When cattle raisers arrived in Acre in the 1970s and threatened rubber tapper lands, the rubber tapper social movement was one of the first to define their struggle in
terms of environmentalism (Allegretti 2002; Keck 1995). One of the rubber tappers’ key achievements was the establishment of the extractive reserve, a use-based land tenure model based on the rubber tapper livelihood strategy, which proposed to reconcile environmental conservation and economic development (Schwartzman 1989). Since 1998, the state government of Acre, known as the “forest government,” has emphasized forest-based development through the concept of florestania, or forest citizenship (Kainer et al. 2003; Schmink and Cordeiro 2008; Vadjunec et al. 2011a).

Throughout the Americas, the material conflicts played out on the frontier were expressions of dichotomous ideologies related to the nature-culture divide, including civilization and barbarism (Sarmiento 1868) and progress and wilderness (Turner 1920). In the Amazonian frontier, similar oppositions undergirded developmentalism and environmentalism (Keck 1995). Cattle culture is a reincarnation of the nature-culture divide after the frontier has passed, promoting a vision of the rural lifestyle that is based on the valorization of cattle and cattle raisers, and a disdain for the forest and those who inhabit it.

Cattle culture resides in perceptions and cultural practices, but my focus in Chapter Eight is on the ways that cattle culture is expressed through the construction of landscapes and urban places of Acre. Historical ecology takes the landscape as the unit of analysis, seeing it as a product of human interaction with nature across time (Balée 2006). Cultural geography provides a lens for finding meaning by analyzing the material and cognitive “traces” that connect places to the identity of the cultural groups that make them (Anderson 2009). These perspectives emphasize that the material world is
actively shaped and constructed by humans, and can thus be read as material culture or text.

In Chapter Eight, I argue that by analyzing the landscapes of Acre, from the forests and pastures of the countryside to urban rodeo arenas and governmental testaments to the rubber tappers, we can see how the nature-culture dichotomy continues to be expressed ideologically after the material conflicts of the frontier have passed. I examine how the divide structures the ways that landscapes are judged and perceived, and the ways that the distinct worldviews of cattle culture and florestania are imprinted upon the material world as rural landscapes and urban places. An examination of beef consumption and perceptions demonstrates how landscapes and practices linked with cattle may be acknowledged and negated, and also shows how groups participate in cattle culture despite their ideological opposition to cattle.

**Cultural Consensus Analysis of Cattle Culture**

Cattle culture comprises beliefs, preferences, and perceptions that attribute economic, symbolic, and social superiority to people, practices, spaces, and cultural constructions oriented to cattle. Cultural consensus theory (CCT) is a collection of analytical techniques and models that can be used to measure cultural beliefs and the degree to which individuals know or report those beliefs. (Weller 2007). With cultural consensus analysis (CCA) (the application of CCT principles), we can measure the extent to which perceptions of cattle culture are shared across groups, and, based on the most common responses, identify the “culturally correct” answers to the questions.

In Chapter Nine, I use cultural consensus analysis to see to what extent different groups agree and disagree with propositions associated with cattle culture. Six groups are included in the consensus analysis: rubber tappers, colonists, ranchers, cowboys,
policy makers, and environmental NGO workers. CCA also facilitates analysis of inter- and intra-cultural variation, allowing me to investigate the assumed cohesiveness and shifting boundaries of social groups historically defined by their economic practices. Systematically comparing group agreement with cattle culture can give us an idea of the social and cultural changes occurring among groups that have yet to or may never emerge in their expressions of identity.

We can probe the supposed opposition of ideologies by comparing the responses of cattle raising groups with NGO workers and policy makers, who are more oriented to environmentalism. One of the main goals of this dissertation is to investigate the interplay of material and cultural factors in the spread of cattle raising and in the formation of cattle culture. By comparing data on perceptions with a survey on group practices, we will see the extent to which agreement with cattle culture translates into participation in the practice of cattle raising and cultural activities associated with cattle culture.

**Research Area**

**Southwestern Acre**

I conducted field research in southwestern Acre, with the majority of the field research taking place in the *Alto Acre*, or upper Acre region. Some ranches were located in *Baixo Acre*, lower Acre, which includes the capital city of Rio Branco, where I often met with key informants. These regions are named according to their location in the Acre river basin, which flows east from the city of Assis Brasil, on the Peruvian border, before passing through upper and then lower Acre. Upper Acre includes the municipalities of Assis Brasil and Brasília, where I conducted the majority of my research with colonists and rubber tappers. Upper Acre covers 1,589,690 hectares,
almost 10% of the state and has among the highest rates of anthropogenic disturbance in the Acre (Governo do Acre 2006). Figure 2-1 shows the location of Acre in relation to the rest of Brazil, as well as the Alto Acre region, which is shaded. The municipalities of Assis Brasil and Brasiléia are the westernmost of these shaded areas.

Lower Acre extends from the municipality of Capixaba to the capital of Rio Branco to the north until reaching the borders of neighboring Rondonia and Amazonas. Lower Acre covers 13.55% of the state and 2,225,337 square hectares (Governo do Acre 2006: 100). The BR-317 highway, paved in 2002, runs the length of upper Acre, roughly following the course of the Acre River. It continues on to the Peruvian coast and is thus also known as the “Inter-oceanic highway.”

Selection of Research Sites

I chose to work primarily in the upper Acre region because of its history of land conflict surrounding cattle, the presence of all three social groups, and the rising popularity of cattle raising. A large number of suitable communities were identified based on the presence of social groups, and the list was narrowed down by my ability to obtain governmental and community permission. I attempted to work with communities that were located in the same general area to limit differences in infrastructure, ecology, and access to markets and political resources. I accomplished this with colonist and rubber tapper communities, which were both located in the upper Acre region between Brasiléia and Assis Brasil. Ranchers, however, due to their large, dispersed landholdings, did not constitute a sufficient sample in this area, although I did include those that were open to speaking with me. The majority of ranchers that I worked with lived in Rio Branco and owned ranches in either upper or lower Acre.
Each group is associated with a distinct land tenure system, which I explain briefly below, but only in relation to the discussion of the sample and research site. In order to demonstrate how groups are situated in relation to each other. A schematic representation of social group’s spatial distribution is presented in Figure 2.2.

The figure demonstrates different social group's landholdings in relation to each other in the research area. Groups have different sized landholdings, which vary from approximately eighty hectares (colonists) to three hundred hectares for rubber tappers, and around 5,000 hectares for average rancher. Rubber tapper landholdings, the boundaries of which are determined by the distribution of rubber trees, are not uniform in their dimensions, and may overlap with their neighbors.

The figure also shows different levels of access to transportation. The BR-317 highway is passable throughout the year. Ranches are usually located near the highway. Colonists might also be located on the highway, or further up the unpaved side roads, which may not be passable during the rainy season. The side road may enter the extractive reserve, but most rubber tapper households are accessible only by foot.

**Rubber tapper communities: São Cristovão and Pindamonhangaba**

The rubber tappers in this sample live in the Chico Mendes Extractive Reserve (CMER), a sustainable use conservation unit established in 1990, with a total territory of 930,203 square hectares, or 5.66% of the state. Collectively, conservation units and indigenous lands constitute over 45% of Acrean territory (Governo do Acre 2006: 103).

I conducted research in two former *seringais*, or rubber estates, São Cristovão and Pindamonhangaba. Entering the *ramal* (unpaved side road), located at the 52 kilometer mark between Brasiléia and Assis Brasil, one passes through the landholdings of settlers from southern Brazil for about twenty-five kilometers before
entering the CMER. The road penetrates into parts of São Cristovão, but not Pindamonhangaba, which is further north. Rubber tapper households are spread throughout the forest in accordance with their colocações (rubber holdings) and are connected by footpaths. Each family has about three hundred hectares of land, an amount that generally corresponds to three rubber trails.

**Colonist communities: Quixadá directed settlement project**

The second type of tenure area where I conducted research is a government sponsored settlement project for agriculturalists. In Acre, settlement projects constitute 1,955,870 square hectares, or 11.9%, of Acrean territory. Between the CMER and the BR-317 highway is located the massive Quixadá Projeto de Assentamento Dirigido, (PAD), or Directed Settlement Project (DSP), where I conducted research with colonists. It covers 76,741 ha² and is home to an estimated 998 families (Governo do Acre 2006: 116). Quixadá is crisscrossed by side roads extending up to thirty kilometers to the north of the BR-317 and until the Acre River, to the south, which is the border with Bolivia. Households and landholdings are generally located along these side roads. Landholdings are not based on resource distribution, as was the case of the tappers, but rather, were drawn by INCRA (Brazilian Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform) officials, who settled the colonists here. The average size of colonist landholdings was around eighty hectares.

**Ranches: upper and lower Acre**

All of the ranchers that I interviewed do not live on their ranches. They are based out of the state capital of Rio Branco, and the majority of them own ranches in upper Acre, although some had ranches in the neighboring municipalities of lower Acre. A rancher, as defined in this study, owns approximately 5 thousand head of cattle and 5
thousand hectares of land. This total can come from one contiguous landholding or through multiple ranches. According to figures presented by Toni et al., there are eight private properties with between 1000 and 10000 hectares of land in the municipality of Assis Brasil, and nineteen in Brasiléia (2007:42). As previously mentioned, rancher interviews were conducted throughout the state, but these figures, along with Figure 2-3, serve to illustrate the distribution of social groups and landholdings in the primary research area.

Figure 2-3 shows the general location of the research sites by identifying the administrative units where research was conducted. The area indicated by the number three is an unspecified ranch, which was not included in the surveys. I have included it here to show the scale of a ranch and the manner in which the different tenure systems are situated in relation to one another. The side roads of the settlement projects are visible around the areas marked with the number “2”.

Urban settings: Rio Branco and Brasiléia

In addition to these rural spaces inhabited by the three main social groups, I also conducted research in the capital city of Rio Branco, where I interviewed key-informants, policy makers, academics, and workers at socio-environmental NGOs. I also spent a great deal of time in Brasiléia, tracking commodities and relationships through interviews with family members who had moved to the city, and learning about regional history from governmental institutions.

Methods and Data

I collected data over four separate field seasons from 2007-2010, for a total of 18 months of fieldwork. In this section, I will give the primary methods that I employed to
collect data, the data collected, the way that data were analyzed, and the manner in which I use the data to support my observation and conclusions.

**Participant Observation: Daily Life, Rituals, Symbolic Representations, Economic Transactions, and Debates**

My first two field seasons were primarily concerned with understanding the economic and cultural roles of cattle in the lives of Acreans. I lived with rubber tapper and colonist families for weeks at a time during the tenure of my fieldwork, allowing me to understand their daily lives, and the context in which they make decisions. I participated in the daily productive lives of the residents, including tapping rubber, harvesting Brazil nuts, planting crops and clearing fields, and vaccinating and selling cattle. After these activities, back at their houses, we discussed the meaning, history, and functions of these practices. Living among the different groups, I gained greater understanding of the challenges that each group faces, and the political and economic factors that most affect them. I also learned that although different people and households can be categorized as members of distinct social group categories, there is also a great deal of variation from household to household.

My experiences living with the families also revealed to me other important factors for consideration if I were to understand the economic and cultural components of cattle. I attended social events and rituals in which the cultural meanings of cattle were exhibited, including *churrascos* (barbecues), *rodeios* (rodeos), *Expo-Acre* (the state agricultural fair) and similar municipal-level events, as well as country music concerts and dances, and the annual *cavalgada*, or cavalcade through Rio Branco to the fairgrounds to inaugurate Expo-Acre.
I also sought out places where cattle are valorized economically and symbolically: agricultural supply stores, butcher shops, cattle auctions, country clothing stores, and country themed bars and restaurants. Additionally, I analyzed the contents and messages of institutions/spaces that sought to articulate contrasting forest-based ideals, such as the Museu da Borracha (The Rubber Museum), the Museu dos Povos da Floresta (Museum of Forest-Dwelling Peoples), and the Biblioteca da Floresta (Forest Library). All of these spaces are attempts by the forest government to valorize forest-based citizenship (florestania). I also attended government events in which deforestation, burn bans, cattle raising, and rural issues were debated.

**Survey on Economic and Political History and Perceptions of Cattle**

In 2009, I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with members of each social group (rubber tappers (n=7), colonists (13), and large scale ranchers (11)). The interviews covered their economic practices across time, the factors that caused them to change their practices, perceptions of cattle and of their own and other social groups, and their relationships with other groups. These data enabled me to understand the histories of each group, and the way that they have been and continue to be impacted by political economic developments.

This survey also included cognitive methods, specifically pile sorts. I gave respondents cards that represented cattle/cattle raising, agriculture, and forest extractivism, and asked them which practices were most associated in their minds with words such as poverty, governmental support, and progress. I also asked them to tell me the characteristics of their own group and other groups, so that I might better understand their perceptions of themselves and others. I used these data to formulate my cattle survey, which I administered in 2010.
Key Informant Interviews

I conducted key informant interviews with functionaries and extension agents at governmental agencies, such as INCRA, EMBRAPA (Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation), SEAPROF (Secretariat for Agriculture and Family Production), IDAF (Institute for the Defense of Agro-Cattle Raising and the Environment), SEAP (Secretariat for Agro-Cattle Raising), IBAMA (Institute of Biodiversity and the Environment), and IMAC (Institute of the Environment-Acre). I also spoke with members of local NGOs: S.O.S. Amazonia, World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the Center for Amazonia Workers (CTA), the Group for Agro-Forestry Research of Acre (PESACRE), and the Pro-Indian Commission (CPI). Members of these institutions were included in my 2010 cattle culture survey as “policymaker” and “NGO,” respectively. I also spoke to private businesses that sell to rural producers, leaders of the rubber tapper union and the Federation of Agriculture, an interest group associated with the ranchers. These interviews helped me to understand the broader processes at play, and the roles that institutions and their policies have in the lives of rural social groups.

Cattle Culture Questionnaire

Drawing on all of these experiences and data, I constructed the characteristics of the cultural domain of cattle culture. I searched the data for key themes related to or indicative of cattle culture, which I then divided into five categories: 1) the belief that raising cattle is the best way to use one’s land, socially and economically (compared to other forms of land use); 2) the ascription of positive cultural attributes to people or groups that have cattle, especially compared to those that practice agriculture or extractivism; 3) valorization of a cattle-based lifestyle through participation in popular culture and the expression of cultural values through dress and activities related to
cattle; 4) frequent consumption of and belief in the positive social and symbolic meanings of beef; and 5) perceptions that raising cattle is superior to other forms of human-environment relations. After consulting with key informants on the construct validity of my categories, I constructed a questionnaire of 71 questions (see Appendix A).

Twenty respondents from each of the following groups participated in the survey: rubber tappers, colonists, ranchers, cowboys, policy makers, and NGO workers. Results from three additional urban surveys in different regions of Brazil (Rio Branco, Acre; Cerqueira Cesar, São Paulo; and Guaxupé, Minas Gerais) are not included in the analysis, but inform the discussion of cultural diffusion and rural/urban differences. Sampling is detailed in Appendix B.

I analyzed 39 questions dealing with cultural attributes using cultural consensus analysis in UCINET. A more detailed discussion of cultural consensus analysis is presented in Chapter Nine, where I also present the majority of the results, although data from this survey are employed throughout the dissertation.

Survey of Colonists Households

I also draw on a survey of 266 colonist households conducted by myself and other members of an international research team studying the socioeconomic impacts of the BR-317 highway in 2008 and 2009. These interviews covered seven different communities that represent four different kinds of INCRA settlement models. This experience helped me to understand the general situation of colonists in southwestern Acre, and the differences between sub-regions and different types of settlement models.
Drawing out Links of Cattle Culture

Chapter Seven, on the diffusion of cattle culture, draws on fieldwork conducted in 2010, when I traveled over 3000 kilometers from São Paulo to Acre by land. I spent a week in small towns of Minas Gerais and São Paulo, areas where Acrean cattle culture originated, but which now are dedicated to agriculture (coffee and sugar cane, respectively). I also spent a week in the pantanal, the seasonal wetlands of central-western Brazil, and, with the assistance of the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (EMBRAPA) Pantanal research station, I visited ranches and interviewed pantaneiros (cowboys of the pantanal region) and ranchers. I was also able to visit Argentina and Uruguay for a brief period in May. Collectively, these experiences allowed me to trace some of the important origins and undercurrents of cattle culture, and draw out connections that otherwise I would have not have recognized in Acre. Additionally, I was hosted by the families of Acrean ranchers that stayed behind in São Paulo and Minas Gerais, allowing me to understand the factors that led some ranchers to Acre, the perspectives that they brought with them, and their family histories.

“Postcards from the Amazon”

From February through September 2010, I submitted a series of sixteen biweekly articles about Acre to the San Angelo Standard-Times newspaper. These accounts were designed to describe daily life in Acre to a foreign audience (my hometown). Topics were often related to my research, including profiles on the history and daily life of rubber tappers, colonists, and ranchers. I mention my writing these columns as a “method” because they provided valuable data that will be presented throughout the dissertation.
Writing for the newspaper forced me to put my observations into a coherent form that could be understood by a non-academic audience, and explore the foundations of issues that otherwise I might have taken for granted. The articles were published in print and online. I was surprised that some Acreans were alerted of my articles based on internet tags, opening many new doors for discussion. The articles turned out to be an important way of improving my rapport and trust with the ranchers, who were distrustful of me as a foreign researcher. Once they saw that I was evaluating their situation critically, and digging deeper than the “villain” trope, my access to the ranchers increased considerably, although there were always issues of trust.

The knowledge that I was writing for a diversity of audiences forced me to come to grips with issues of representation, as I was often torn between essentialism and cultural relativism, two opposing sides of a controversy, academic text and accessible story, and what I felt to be the “truth” and popular representation. Overall, writing the columns was not only a valuable method of data collection and cultural exchange, the experience also forced me take a position as a researcher and find my authorial “voice.”

I have incorporated some of the “Postcards” into the text, and included others with their full content at the end of the dissertation (see Appendix C, D, E, and F). Footnotes indicate instances when material that was originally used in an article is incorporated into the text. The articles in the appendices provide additional context and depth on members of different social groups, and provide an interesting comparison between modes of academic and popular representation.
Figure 2-1. Upper Acre region
Figure 2-2. Schematic view of social group spatial relationships
Figure 2-3. Overview of primary research area

Note: 1=RESEX Chico Mendes; 2= DSP Quixadá; 3= Ranch; 4=City of Brasiléia
Adapted from Luzar (2006:41)
CHAPTER 3
CONVERGENCE ON CATTLE: POLITICAL ECONOMY, SOCIAL GROUP PERCEPTIONS, AND SOCIOECONOMIC RELATIONSHIPS

Introduction

The initial expansion of cattle into the Brazilian Amazon in the 1970s and 1980s, limited mostly to large scale ranchers in the eastern Amazon states of Pará and Mato Grosso, was the result of land speculation and government credit and subsidies (Browder 1988; Hecht 1993; Mahar 1989). In areas of forest extractivism such as the state of Acre, rubber tappers fought against the conversion of forest to cattle pasture in the name of environmental and social justice (Keck 1995), making them symbols for an emerging global environmentalism (Tsing 2005).

Recent research has documented the alarming expansion of cattle raising in the Amazon region over the past decade. This is the result of the integration of the Amazon into regional and global markets (see Perz et al. 2010), the suppression of hoof and mouth disease, favorable agro-climatic conditions, and cheaper land prices, which have made the Amazon an attractive destination for cattle displaced from centralized production regions (Arima et al. 2006; Smeraldi and May 2008).

From 1998-2008, Acre experienced the greatest percentage increase in head of cattle of all Brazilian states (IGBE 2008). Improved enforcement of environmental controls has slowed Amazon deforestation since 2005 (Nepstad et al. 2009), especially among large ranchers, but smallholders, including rubber tappers, who lack support for agricultural and forest extraction activities and face strict deforestation constraints, subsequently became the main drivers of cattle expansion, their only economically viable livelihood alternative (Toni et al. 2007). These policy shifts have thus, inadvertently, led to a generalized tendency to gravitate to cattle raising, even among
groups previously unaccustomed or even opposed to cattle (Ehringhaus 2005; Gomes 2009; Salisbury and Schmink 2007; Wallace 2004). Beneath these general trends, however, lie important differences in the ways distinct groups now understand and practice cattle raising.

My objective is to understand how different social group’s economic practices, the primary manner in which they use their land to make a living, have gradually shifted to cattle raising. Three different groups are compared: forest-extractivist rubber tappers, agriculturally-oriented colonists, and large scale ranchers. I analyze the manner in which these groups were positioned within a political economy from 1970 to 1990, and how they have responded to political and economic changes in the twenty years since 1990. Acre presents an interesting case for analysis due to the presence of three groups that were differentiated by distinct economic practices, identities, and tenure systems and the conflict between large scale ranchers and rubber tappers over cattle prior to 1990 (Bakx 1988; Revkin 1990). Over the last 20 years, however, smallholder rubber tappers and colonists have decreased their respective traditional economic practices of forest extractivism and agriculture, and become increasingly reliant on cattle (Toni et al. 2007), joining the ranchers in the pursuit of cattle-based livelihoods.

In addition to the structuring role of political and economic factors, I focus on group-specific cultural factors that mediate group’s responses, emphasizing perceptions of cattle and changes in intergroup relationships. I employ a framework that draws from political ecology, economic anthropology, and anthropological literature on the meanings of cattle, to examine the spread of cattle across groups in Acre.
Theoretical Framework

Economic practice is structured by political economic factors, such as governmental development policies and market fluctuations, which penetrate unequally at different levels and among groups (Blaikie and Brookfield 1987). Political ecology builds on political economy to study the role of power relations in human-environment interactions, as well as the drive of capitalism and its influence on local systems and decisions (Biersack 1999:10). I draw on a comparative political ecology framework to examine the ways that political and economic factors affect different groups in unique ways across time (Gezon and Paulson 2005).

Political-economic factors delimit, but do not determine the manner in which groups make decisions and provision for their household or the market (Chayanov 1986; Netting 1993; Wolf 1982). Perspectives from economic anthropology emphasize the importance of grounded cultural phenomena in mediating social group responses to macro-structural processes and changes (Polanyi 1958; Sahlins 1972; Wilk and Cligget 2006). The economic practices of social groups are also based on historical, socio-ecological, and ideological factors that are constitutive of their practice-based identities (Barth 1956; Toni et al. 2007).

Within a shared biophysical setting, distinct identities also clash with, and are reinforced and otherwise influenced by other groups with whom they interact, each with different ways of perceiving, using, and contesting resources (Bennett 1969; Ingold 1980; Robben 1989; Schmink and Wood 1992). The spaces that social groups exploit through distinct economic practices may be implicitly linked to their practice-based identities when they are institutionalized in land tenure systems (Schwartzman 1987; Toni et al. 2007).
The encounter between groups, however, may produce changes in both perceptions and practices (Atran et al. 1999; Rudel et al. 2002). These changes could be at odds with traditional land tenure systems, and may or may not accurately reflect aspects of a group’s putative identity. For example, political economy shifts that render the traditional practices of one group economically unviable could produce tensions between cultural identity and tenure rules (Ehringhaus 2005).

The interplay of factors across scales is both political economic and cultural in nature. Cattle engender strong cultural beliefs in settings throughout the world (Evans-Pritchard 1940, Herskovits 1926; Harris 1966) and cattle raisers are often accorded greater prestige than those without cattle, such as agriculturists in Africa (Schneider 1957; Spear 1993) and the Americas (Bennett 1969). By focusing on cattle in more recent contexts, where broader connections are drawn out and constraints emanate from multi-scalar political projects and capitalist markets, we gain a window into social change, conflict, and the changing role of the cattle raiser in the modern world (Comaroff and Comaroff 1990; Ferguson 1990; Hutchinson 1996; Sheridan 2007).

In summary, this framework recognizes that several factors—political and economic structures, cultural factors, including on-the-ground identities and circulating ideas of the meaning of cattle, and relationships between groups—may affect economic practices. Political economic factors channel, but do not determine economic practice alone because groups within a shared setting may have identities based on different economic practices, which guide the manner in which they respond to structural influences. The establishment of distinct types of land tenure among groups may also reaffirm traditional identities that may or may not correspond to economic practice.
Although both practice and identity are dynamic, the tenure system is less flexible, a product of a preexisting configuration of political economic factors and cultural preferences.

Changes in the political economy, then, may make some economic practices more viable than others. When the economic practice is cattle raising, a practice generally associated with positive cultural values, the incentives may be magnified for smallholders to adopt cattle. In a context where wealthy cattle raisers interact with poor agriculturalists and extractivists, and a cattle-based lifestyle is valued in popular culture, the appeal of cattle raising is enhanced further. These changes may or may not accurately reflect each group’s putative identity, creating tension between historical notions of identity and institutionalized tenure system rules on the one hand, and economic practices encouraged by political economy on the other.

**Background**


Prior to 1990, each social group in Acre was dedicated to distinct forms of exploiting their environment to fulfill their subsistence and economic needs: rubber tappers relied mostly on the collection of forest products (rubber and Brazil nut); colonists dedicated themselves largely to agricultural pursuits; and large scale ranchers raised cattle. The creation of distinct land tenure systems in the 1970s and 1980s institutionalized group identities based on these specific economic practices in specific spaces.

The colonists arrived to take part in some of the first nationally-sponsored agricultural settlement projects that were implemented throughout the country in the
1970s and 1980s. INCRA, the Brazilian Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform, settled families from overcrowded and impoverished parts of the country in the sparsely populated Amazon region. These migrants were expected to convert forest to agricultural plots and produce for their own subsistence, as well as for the market (Moran 1981; Smith 1982). Acrean colonist families reported that demonstrating “progress” through forest conversion was essential to maintaining their land claims in these early years.

At the same time, the Brazilian government supported the establishment of large scale cattle ranches by offering generous fiscal incentives, attracting entrepreneurs from other parts of Brazil (Hecht 1993). The Acrean state, at that time headed by Governor Wanderley Dantas (1971-1975), courted investors from the south, and facilitated the sale of the vast rubber estates to the ranchers (Bakx 1988). Young members of the rural elite based in Minas Gerais and São Paulo were drawn the new frontier in Acre, where they could acquire cheap land and subsidies for cattle ranching.

The arrival of migrants in the form of affluent ranchers and, to a lesser extent, colonists hungry for land resulted in clashes over land with the native rubber tappers, who were already scattered over much of southwestern Acre. Rancher legal rights, backed by governmental policy of the time, were superimposed on top of tapper use rights. When ranchers sought to claim the land that they had purchased, and convert the forests to pastures, there was intergroup conflict (ibid.). As a result of rubber tapper mobilization against rancher deforestation and displacement, the extractive reserve (RESEX) was created in 1990. The model institutionalized territorial and use rights for
the rubber tappers around their traditional economic practice of forest extractivism (Kainer et al. 2003; Schwartzman 1989).

From 1970 to 1990 different groups with different practices came together and clashed in Acre. Through the establishment of tenure systems based on specific economic practices and political objectives, social groups became linked to distinct identities, practices, and spaces. Political economic factors, cultural perceptions, and intergroup relationships, however, would all change drastically after 1990 producing a rupture in the apparent unity of practice, identity, and tenure, and a convergence on cattle among groups.

**Research Questions**

I examine the manner in which structural factors stemming from the evolving political economy are mediated by social group perceptions and relationships to understand the convergence on cattle in Acre. My examination is guided by three key concerns related to the theoretical framework outlined above: 1) structuring effects of political economic factors; 2) social group perceptions of cattle; and 3) intergroup relationships.

Three different types of tenure systems were created for distinct social groups dedicated to specific economic practices during the process of opening the Amazon during the 1970s and 1980s. The establishment of tenure systems institutionalized culturally distinct group boundaries and economic practices for rubber tappers, agricultural colonists, and large scale ranchers, which were reinforced through governmental support for extractivism, agriculture, and cattle raising. Over the last 20 years, what political and economic factors have made cattle raising a more viable economic practice than agriculture and extractivism?
Cattle were confined mostly to large scale ranchers in Acre until the 1990s. Lack of technical knowledge and capital limited their adoption by smallholder colonists and rubber tappers, who also disdained cattle for their role in social conflict and environmental destruction (Bakx 1988; Toni et al. 2007). In the last 20 years, however, all groups’ tenure systems have become more restrictive due to environmental laws, while their practices have continued to respond to evolving political economic and cultural cues. On the surface, the actions of colonists, and especially rubber tappers, can be understood as diverging from their tenure systems and identities. The notion of unified social group practice based on shared identity and the institutional rules of tenure systems occludes the ethnographic fact that groups have always adapted to structural constraints within cultural guidelines, which are also subject to change. How do these different social groups in Acre now view cattle?

The assumed unity of practice-perception-tenure also betrays the fact that groups live side by side, interact with, and are influenced by each other. The essential function of cattle in the production system of each group can be distilled as such: rubber tappers value cattle for the liquidity and function as a savings account; colonists view cattle as their last option as a result of deforestation regulations that inhibit agriculture; and ranchers continue to raise cattle on a large scale for the beef market. Although groups use and think about cattle differently, their common participation in the cattle economy facilitates exchange and cooperation between them. Once a vehicle of conflict, how do cattle now mediate intergroup cultural and economic exchanges?

In summary, I examine the structuring effects of political and economic factors before and after 1990, the way that social groups now perceive cattle, and changing
intergroup relationships to understand the convergence on cattle in upper Acre.
Disentangling the confluence of factors that have led to cattle expansion in Acre will contribute to a more nuanced account of cattle raising in the Amazon, which is occurring at the intersection of group-specific cultures and larger structural factors, producing unexpected and unintended consequences.

**Methods and Data**

Research for this paper was conducted over 18 months from 2007-2010 in the upper Acre region of Acre, Brazil, where each group resides or works in unique tenure systems associated with their traditional economic practices. The majority of my fieldwork with colonists was conducted in the Quixadá Directed Settlement Project (DSP). All ranchers were based out of Rio Branco, with the majority of them owning ranches in upper Acre, although some owned ranches in neighboring municipalities. The rubber tappers in this sample lived in the Chico Mendes Extractive Reserve (RESEX) in the former rubber estate of São Cristovão.

I lived with families in each tenure area for weeks at a time from 2007-2010, allowing me to participate in and better understand their daily lives and the context in which they make their decisions. In 2009, I conducted semi-structured interviews with members of each social group (rubber tappers (n=7), colonists (13), and large scale ranchers (11)) covering their economic practices across time and the factors that caused them to change their practices; perceptions of cattle and of their own and other social groups; and the manner in which they acquired their land and their relationships with other groups. These data enabled me to understand the histories of each group and the way that they have been and continue to be impacted by political and economic developments.
In 2010, I administered a questionnaire to 20 respondents of each group chosen through purposive sampling (Bernard 2000:176). I asked respondents to choose which practice (cattle raising, agriculture, or extractivism) was most associated with a series of descriptors, including: wealth, poverty, social status, and decadence. They also answered yes/no questions about their perceptions of economic practice and other social groups. These data and additional ethnographic material collected over the course of fieldwork are used to understand social group’s perceptions of themselves, other groups, and cattle.

**Political Economy after 1990: Neoliberal and Environmental Policies**

Over the last 20 years, different social groups in Amazonia have been heavily impacted by political and economic factors that are consequences of neoliberal and environmental policies. There has been a pronounced decline in governmental support for rural family production, including decreased support of agricultural livelihoods and the removal of subsidies for rubber. In addition to government investment in roads, these actions can be understood as part of broader neoliberal agenda by the Brazilian government (Perz *et al.* 2010). Environmental policies have also played a role in changing the practices of rural groups. Strict enforcement of deforestation and burning regulations in Acre, beginning around 2000 with the onset of Acre’s “forest government,” have also seriously impacted rural livelihood strategies. Each of these interventions has produced unique and unexpected effects, but collectively they have made pre-1990 economic practices of extractivism and agriculture less competitive with cattle raising, and in some cases impossible.
Neoliberal Policies: The Decline of Governmental Support for Rubber and Agriculture

In 1990, the government established the first RESEX in Acre, responding to the rubber tapper movement’s demand to secure their rights to forested land for tapping rubber. Shortly thereafter, however, the government discontinued the subsidy that had propped up rubber prices for decades, undermining the viability of extractivist livelihoods. The removal of the rubber subsidy was the final straw for many extractivist families in Acre (Salisbury and Schmink 2007). Families in São Cristovão reported that it was during the 1990s that Brazil nut became their primary source of income, replacing rubber, and cattle began to enter the picture as a strategy for storing wealth. By the late 1990s, the herd size of Acre had exploded, much of it from smallholder adoption of cattle (Toni et al. 2007). Cattle spread throughout the RESEX, particularly in households bordering settlement projects and ranches (Gomes 2009).

Some families in the RESEX were threatened with expulsion for exceeding deforestation limits to raise cattle. In the words of A Tribuna, an Acrean newspaper: “the [RESEX] was born from the dreams of the rubber tappers to be protected from cattle raising. This same activity [cattle raising] has now returned to threaten them” (Lobo 2008). This press account and others like it imply that raising cattle in the RESEX is a violation in and of itself, which it is not, as long as deforestation limits are observed. The move to cattle is also considered a violation of rubber tapper identity as forest conservationists, which they invoked to secure their land tenure rights. More than any other group, the rubber tappers feel the tensions of an evolving political economy that renders their traditional economic practices less viable than cattle, and they struggle to reconcile their cultural values with the material needs of their households.
There is also a disconnect between the colonists' traditional and current economic practices, but colonists, especially migrants from other regions, were never ideologically opposed to cattle. Colonists report that up through the 1980s there was governmental support and markets for their agricultural goods, but this is no longer the case. For most products, such as rice and corn, the costs of getting the harvest to market outweigh potential profit. Governmental support for agriculture was not removed through a conscious policy decision, but the colonists were essentially left to fend for themselves after the first big push to develop the Amazon (Smith 1982). For rubber tappers incorporated into the smaller plots (~80 hectares) of the settlement project, extractivism, which requires more extensive landholdings (~300 hectares), was never possible.

Due to the decline in agricultural support and the impossibility of traditional extractivism on small plots of land, colonists began to opt for cattle in the 1990s. Many reported farming for their own consumption through the 1990s, but this subsistence agriculture decreased in the early 2000s when deforestation regulations began to be strictly enforced.

**Environmental Policies: The Enforcement of Deforestation Regulations**

Prior to 1998, colonists and ranchers were allowed to deforest up to 50% of their landholdings in Amazonia, leaving the remainder as forest reserves. In 1998, the general limit, which began to be enforced with colonists, ranchers, and other groups not residing within a conservation unit (*i.e.* rubber tappers), was lowered to 20%. Rubber tapper lands maintain the 10% rule that was established with the creation of the RESEX.
The creation of national environmental laws for the Amazon responded to growing national and international pressure, but the enforcement of these laws varies from state to state. The “forest” government of Acre has demonstrated the political will to combat deforestation over the past decade and is seen by all groups as an effective enforcer of deforestation laws. Technological advances have also contributed to enforcement; remote sensing and the geo-referenced mapping of property enable governmental environmental authorities to monitor deforestation in previously “invisible” or inaccessible areas.

Given that political factors distinctly affect different social groups due to tenure regulations, swidden agriculture is increasingly uncommon among colonists, but continues with rubber tappers. Most colonists have already reached or exceeded their deforestation limits, and burning, which they consider necessary for successful agricultural production, is currently highly controlled. Tappers that have not reached their 10% limit are still able to burn and plant one hectare a year, if they obtain permission from the state environmental authority.

Those who surpass their deforestation limits are placed in “environmental debt,” which restricts their access to credit and other government programs, further limiting their options, particularly among colonists. Many colonists are selling their land and moving to the city: two of the thirteen colonist families that I interviewed in 2009 sold their land later that year to a rancher, who now uses the land exclusively for grazing his cattle. Those who have stayed are struggling, and while many of them find ways to plant, either illegally or through the use of new techniques such as green manures, they
invariably report being completely reliant on cattle for money to buy staple foods that they once produced.

The concurrent application of neoliberal and environmental policies from 1990-2010 made extractive and agricultural livelihood strategies less economically viable among rubber tappers and colonists. The enforcement of deforestation regulations made agriculture, in particular, extremely challenging for colonists. The regulations favor forest preservation, but have not been accompanied by the development of significant markets for forest products, or sustained governmental support for alternatives to deforestation-dependent production, such as colonist swidden agriculture. In this unique configuration of factors, colonists and rubber tappers now adopt cattle or expand their herds through the conversion of former agricultural lands or clearing new forest illegally to establish pasture. For these populations, cattle represent their best or last option for making a living within current political and economic constraints.

**Positive Perceptions of Cattle**

Although cattle were disdained in the 1980s for their role in rubber tapper/rancher conflicts and forest destruction, most rubber tappers now agree that raising cattle is an appealing way to make a living. The barrier to cattle ownership was less ideological for colonists; it was a matter of cattle becoming more available and affordable, and then creating pasture. Acrean smallholders are increasingly likely to view cattle in a positive light, given the material success of cattle raisers and the decline of extractivism and agriculture. In addition to the daily interactions between social groups that highlight the socioeconomic distinction of ranchers, the development of “cattle culture” in Acre reinforces positive images of a cattle-centered rural lifestyle.
Despite Acre’s image as the land of the rubber tappers, and the social conflict and environmental destruction brought about by the arrival of cattle in the region, positive messages about the cattle raising lifestyle are increasingly reinforced in popular culture. When I arrived in the region in 2007, there was one rodeo on the side of the highway in upper Acre; there are now five rodeos in the region catering largely to colonists, but also to rubber tappers. In a survey of 20 members of each group, 85% of colonists, 65% of ranchers, and 50% of rubber tappers agreed that they enjoy attending rodeos.

The cultural constructions that surround the rodeo draw on and reinforce “cattle culture,” a specific vision of the rural lifestyle in which cattle, cattle raisers, and cowboys are privileged. Positive messages about this cattle-centered lifestyle circulate through sertaneja music, contri (country) dress (boots, tight jeans, and plaid shirt), rodeos, and rural-themed festivals. The annual Expo-Acre fair in the capital of Rio Branco, the state’s biggest festival, is largely a celebration of a cattle-based lifestyle, with hulking bulls and prize horses on display, performances by national sertaneja acts, and cowboys from all of Brazil competing in rodeo events. Smaller, municipal-level celebrations, also centered on a rodeo, have spread throughout upper Acre, as have stores selling contri clothing, belt buckles, and smokeless tobacco. This cattle culture is present in tapper communities, such as São Cristovão, where rubber tappers have been exposed to the culture through their labor for ranchers as cowboys, the rodeo circuit, and television and radio. Members of each group report that they enjoy listening to sertaneja music (95% of colonists and ranchers and 90% of rubber tappers). The cultural messages that express a preference for a cattle-based rural livelihood reach members of each group.
While the rodeo cowboy is the symbol of cattle culture, the rancher is a model of socioeconomic success in Acre. Smallholders assume that the rancher’s wealth comes directly from cattle. There are also numerous examples, to the point of being scripted narratives, of upward social mobility enabled by cattle. These stories center on the poor colonist or tapper who started with one cow and is now wealthy.

Twenty respondents in each group were asked to choose which of the three principal economic practices (extractivism, agriculture, or cattle raising) was most associated with the words “wealth,” “poverty,” “progress,” and “decadence.” The top (sum of most chosen) responses of each group are presented in Table 3-1.

These findings indicate that positive attributes of wealth and progress are associated with cattle raising among all groups. Conversely, poverty is even more strongly associated with extractivism among all groups. Ranchers, and a little over half of rubber tappers, believe that extractivism is associated with decadence or decline. Colonists associate their traditional economic practice, agriculture, with decline. These practices extend to the members of social groups associated with them: all colonists, 90% of ranchers and 85% of rubber tappers surveyed said that raising cattle is the economic practice most associated with high social status.

The rancher is esteemed precisely for the fact that most think that he doesn’t really “work,” but is above the toils of physical labor. Smooth hands imply a socioeconomic position of privilege and the “good life” in the minds of all smallholders, and calloused hands serve as an indicator of physical labor. Only 10% of cowboys, 25% of ranchers and 32% of rubber tappers agreed that ranchers have calloused hands, but 70% of colonists agreed with this statement. When envisioning a rancher, many colonists
referenced former colonists who had built up enough land and cattle to be considered “ranchers,” although other groups might not consider the same person to be a rancher.

Despite a sustained program by the Acrean Government to valorize the rubber tapper way of life and heritage, only 35% of rubber tappers, 15% of colonists, and 50% of ranchers agreed that rubber tappers were more respected in Acrean society than ranchers. Colonists and rubber tappers were aware that their economic practice and lifestyle are not valued in popular culture to the same extent as cattle raisers.

In summary, cattle raising and those who practice it are viewed more positively across groups, signaling that cultural perceptions are linked with the expansion of cattle ranching across all groups. The emergence of cattle raising as a viable economic practice during a time of decline in agriculture and extractivism, and the expansion of cattle culture, has led to positive perceptions of cattle raising and cattle raisers. It is not clear if perceptions paved the way for a change in practice, or if their perceptions followed positive experiences raising cattle. It is apparent, however, that as the cattle economy becomes more central to Acrean social groups, so too does cattle culture assume a more central role in Acrean society, combining with and overtaking other cultural traditions.

Twenty years ago, though, rubber tappers were hesitant to adopt cattle, a symbol of habitat and livelihood destruction. It was only through time, as the memories of the conflict faded, younger generations took control of households, and political economic factors came to overwhelmingly favor cattle, that they took the leap to cattle. There were also preconditions—knowledge of cattle raising and the availability of cattle for
them to buy, both of which were facilitated by a social context that transitioned from one of intergroup conflict to one of interaction, cooperation, and exchange in cattle.

**Socioeconomic Relationships: From Conflict over Cattle to Cooperation in the Cattle Industry**

Interactions between groups can facilitate the spread of cattle, cattle know-how, and the belief that cattle is the route to a better life in comparison to traditional agricultural or extractive livelihoods. With the help of government fiscal incentives, ranchers paved the way for the expansion of cattle by bringing cattle and a cattle industry to Acre in the 1970s and 1980s. Their success—the growth of their herds—meant that cattle were more available and affordable, and that smallholders saw cattle as a route to a better life. Additionally, a service industry sprouted up to support cattle-raising in small towns of upper Acre, from agricultural supply stores to slaughterhouses, butcher shops, and intermediaries to pick up and deliver cattle.

Government supported research on improved pastures, cattle breeds, and techniques also helped, to the point that Acrean cattle raising has achieved levels of productivity unparalleled in other parts of Brazil (Valentim and Andrade 2009). Credit was available for the purchase of cattle. Smallholders also used credit destined for agricultural pursuits to invest directly and indirectly in cattle (Toni et al. 2007). The state government went to unprecedented lengths to secure the cattle industry in Acre against hoof and mouth disease by establishing IDAF (Institute for the Defense of Agro-Cattle Raising and the Forest), part of a sustained effort by the federal government to avoid an economically catastrophic outbreak (Smeraldi and May 2008).

Essential information on basic cattle raising, such as castration, general health, vaccination, and birthing generally flows from migrants to native Acreans, who have less
experience with cattle raising. For example, native Acrean rubber tappers in São Cristovão call their colonist neighbors, who live along the dirt road leading to the RESEX, to help them vaccinate or castrate their cattle. Although many tappers still lack knowledge of basic cattle raising skills, some tappers who have worked on ranches can perform these services. Many tappers admit that their lack of knowledge of cattle raising, along with environmental restrictions, are the main factors that prevent them from adopting cattle.

It is common for youths in the settlement projects or rubber tapper communities to seek work on the large ranches, where they may start as general laborers and work their way up to peão de fazenda, or cowboy, the most highly esteemed rural laborer. When cowboys return to their communities, they spread an enthusiasm for the labor arrangement of the ranch, where they eat meat every day and are protected by the labor code, and for cattle, which they believe gave the rancher his wealth.

Ranchers, or their gerentes (ranch administrators), also enter into direct contact with smallholders, particularly colonists. These arrangements aim to secure calves to be fattened on rancher land or to rent pasturage on smallholder land to fatten their cattle. Tappers and colonists who raise cattle usually sell the calves to ranchers and intermediaries (usually members of smallholder communities) for ranchers and private entities. Selling calves, although not as economically advantageous in the long run for smallholders, makes sense because they usually have a limited amount of pasture, which is strained by raising calves to slaughter size. The calf sold for around $250 after 8 months will fetch around $700 for the rancher 2 years later.
These relationships underline not only cooperative participation in the cattle industry, but also the difference in socioeconomic positions between ranchers and smallholders. Ranchers are able to make a greater profit, operating at an economy of scale with direct links to the market, while smallholders are unable to engage the market on such terms. Ranchers generally have greater economic security, and can weather ups and downs, and usually have investments in the city as well. For smallholders, cattle are sometimes the only source of income, a savings account that must be liquidated in times of need.

Ranchers also have access to technologies and the capital to implement them, which enable them to raise more cattle per hectare than smallholders. In the past decade, ranchers have employed herd rotation, high labor inputs, and improved grasses to increase their production. Colonists and rubber tappers do not have enough land or capital to invest in many of these improvements. The rise in cattle among these populations has resulted from conversion of agricultural land and/or forest to pasture.

The socioeconomic disparities between these groups remain, but have, in some cases, and can be, in the minds of many, overcome through cattle, further contributing to the appeal of cattle raising. The lines that once neatly delineated social groups along the lines of their tenure systems are less discernable. The shift from intergroup relations of conflict to those of cooperation in cattle, has, in addition to political, economic, and cultural changes, facilitated the spread of cattle ranching among many Acrean social groups.

**Conclusion**

The relationship between political economic factors, cultural perceptions, and intergroup relationships, and the manner in which they collectively promoted cattle
raising among different groups in Acre is summarized as follows. The period from 1970-1990 was a formative time of intergroup conflict in which separate and distinct tenure systems were established within a political, economic and cultural context that encouraged group-specific economic practices. The vision of separate groups within their respective tenure systems, economic practices and practice-based identities downplays the inherent fluidity of groups, and the complex interaction of general and group-specific cultural, political, and economic factors that have since led to a rise in cattle.

The foundation laid in the period from 1970-1990 paved the way, both intentionally and inadvertently, for the explosion of cattle after 1990. Beginning around 1990 the retraction of government policies for agricultural and extractivist livelihoods made cattle an appealing economic practice for colonists and rubber tappers. This trend was further reinforced at the end of the 1990s by the enforcement of deforestation regulations, which pushed colonists in particular toward an almost singular reliance on cattle.

During this period, ranchers began amassing their wealth through the growth of their herds. An industry developed to support them, and young rubber tappers and colonists sought employment on ranches. Cattle became more available, and knowledge of how to raise cattle began to circulate. The rancher also became a model of success in rural Acre, while agriculture and extractivism went into decline. In the past decade, popular cultural constructions based on a cattle-centered vision of the rural livelihood spread throughout Acre though the diffusion of music, rodeos, and dress. Cultural perceptions across groups now indicate overwhelmingly positive perceptions of cattle and cattle raisers. This confluence of cultural factors, the evolution of intergroup
relations, and political economic incentives all contribute to a context that now favors cattle raising over other livelihood strategies.

Political economic and policy-oriented analyses dominate the study of cattle in the Amazon, often with a concern with slowing cattle-driven deforestation. Research on the cultural meanings of cattle in other settings can be used to formulate a multi-part theoretical framework that takes into account group perceptions of cattle and political economic determinants to provide a more complete understanding of the expansion of cattle in the Amazon. In Acre and throughout Amazonia, cattle are concurrently disdained for their role in social conflict and environmental destruction and desired for their singular ability to provide economic security. A cattle-centered vision of the rural lifestyle, celebrated in festivals, music, and dress, has entered the region and is growing alongside the cattle in the fields of smallholders. Incorporating these cultural considerations into the analysis could lead to a more nuanced understanding of the expansion of cattle in Amazonia, which is occurring at the intersection of group-specific perceptions, broader cultural constructions, and political economic structures.
Table 3-1. Top social group classifications of economic practice (cattle, agriculture, and extractivism) associated with wealth, poverty, progress, and decadence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Wealth</th>
<th>Poverty</th>
<th>Progress</th>
<th>Decadence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rubber</td>
<td>Cattle</td>
<td>Extractivism</td>
<td>Cattle</td>
<td>Extractivism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tappers</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cattle</td>
<td>Extractivism</td>
<td>Cattle</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonists</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>55%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Cattle</td>
<td>Extractivism</td>
<td>Cattle</td>
<td>Extractivism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranchers</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 4
CATTLE ECONOMIES AND CATTLE CULTURES

From Evans-Pritchard’s “bovine idiom” to Herskovits’ “cattle complex,” some of anthropology’s most famous concepts describe the cultural constructions related to African pastoralists’ dedication to cattle raising. Despite the economic importance of cattle raising and rich cattle cultures spanning from the Canadian plains to Patagonia (Slatta 1990), little has changed since Riviére asserted that “studies of [pastoral] people in the new world are nonexistent” (1972:1). In this paper, I will on draw on the rich legacy of Africanist scholarship on cattle to elaborate on the cattle cultures of the Americas, building toward an understanding of the relationship between economies and cultures; specifically, the manner in which African pastoral and American ranching modes of production give rise to unique cattle cultures. I argue that a predominantly capitalist ranching mode of production throughout the Americas has produced a unique ranching cattle culture. Primary research conducted in the Brazilian Amazon, however, reveals that within this overarching capitalist mode of production, there are varying levels of capitalist and subsistence orientation among different social groups, and thus distinct forms of cattle culture in the same setting.

This chapter is organized around two questions: 1) How do distinct cattle raising modes of production in Africa and the Americas relate to the formation of unique cattle cultures? 2) How do three different social groups currently use and perceive cattle in the western Brazilian Amazon? In order to respond to the first question, I reviewed the relevant literature to compare cattle raising practices and cultures in Africa and the Americas. On this broad level, cattle cultures can best be understood by focusing on the unique ways that groups exploit cattle within the constraints of two distinct modes of
production: subsistence-oriented pastoralism in colonial East Africa and market-oriented ranching in the Americas. Groups are compared under three interrelated categories to reveal differences and similarities associated with their respective forms of cattle keeping: economic (degree of subsistence or market orientation); ecological (form of interaction between humans and their cattle); social (ways that social relationships between people constrain forms of exchange).

For the second comparison, I analyze data collected from primary fieldwork (2007-2010) in the western Amazon state of Acre, Brazil. I compare the uses and beliefs surrounding cattle among three groups historically dedicated to distinct forms of economic practice, but increasingly reliant on cattle: forest extractivist rubber tappers, agriculturally-oriented colonists, and large scale cattle ranchers. Ethnographic descriptions reveal the ways that different groups use cattle within a range of overlapping subsistence and market-oriented economic objectives. Each group’s uses of cattle are then related to distinct ways of viewing cattle, which interact with and at times contradict the dominant ranching cattle culture.

The chapter seeks to engage foundational theoretical debates concerning the relationship between humans and animals, and the role of material and conceptual forces in the construction of cultural forms. I examine the relationship between the material value and symbolic meaning of cattle using Levi-Strauss’s famous polemic, asking: are cattle cultures pervasive because cattle are “good to eat” or because they are “good to think (with)” (1969:89)? Harold Schneider noted that the most salient feature of the East African cattle complex was not solely the symbolic attachment between human and beast, but the expression of this relationship in ritual (1957). Both
symbolic connection and cattle-centered rituals are present in Acre, but the connection between symbol and ritual is not direct, and is related to instead to local historical factors in conversation with a dominant American ranching cattle culture.

**Background: Cattle Cultures in East Africa and the Americas**

**Pastoralism and the East African Cattle Complex**

In East Africa, researchers have chronicled the central cultural, economic, and social importance of cattle in the lives of pastoral groups (Herskovits 1926; Schneider 1957; Evans-Pritchard 1940). Melville Herskovits assumed the presence of cattle in eastern Africa to be the “orienting feature of the culture” (1926: 247). It was not the mere presence of cattle, but the cultural traits surrounding cattle that were the defining features of these societies (*ibid.*: 653) of “various racial affinities” (*ibid.*: 252). The boundaries of the culture area were defined by the presence of certain traits reflected in material culture, such as tools, technologies, and spatial relationships. In social and symbolic realms, myths, rituals, behavioral mandates and taboos provided guidelines for understanding and interacting with the material world (*ibid.*: 241).

Within the East African cattle area, in modern-day Sudan, E.E. Evans-Pritchard attempted to understand the manner in which modes of livelihood influence political organization. He believed that one must “look to the cow” (*cherchez la vache*) as the central organizing principle of Nuer life through which all other beliefs and practices can be understood. Evans-Pritchard chronicled the cultural constructions regulating the economic use of the cow, as well as their role in linking people in social relationships. He called the overarching dedication to cattle, and the manner in which the Nuer define social processes and relationships in terms of cattle, the “bovine idiom.” Cattle, then, were at once economic and cultural objects for the Nuer. With a “herdsman’s outlook on
the world” (Evans-Pritchard 1940: 16) and a “pastoral mentality” (*ibid.*: 18), the Nuer dedication to cattle was reflected in cognition.¹ It is assumed that these cultural constructions and their expression is the result of a prolonged co-evolution of African peoples and their cattle.

The majority of this analysis focuses on colonial-era Africa, but it is important to mention that the study of cattle has changed significantly as a result of transformations in post-colonial Africa beginning in the second half of the 20th century. The concurrent decolonization of African nations and Africanist anthropology led researchers to study societies not as discrete units, but as connected to broader political and economic transformations (Moore 1993). Schneider represented a point of transition from the research of his mentor, Melville Herskovits, arguing for attention to these broader economic processes (1957). Similarly, Hutchinson sought to update the work of the famed Nuer. In 1979, she found the self-contained society once described by Evans-Pritchard to be “by no means as culturally unified or socially harmonious” (Hutchinson 1996). Works by Ferguson (1985) and Comaroff and Comaroff (1990) also represent a broadening of the analysis, with a focus on understanding social and cultural perseverance and change among pastoralist societies inserted into post-colonial political and regional economic transformations. These authors juxtaposed traditional readings of cattle with contemporary phenomena, and chronicled the tensions arising from the conscious renegotiation of traditional meanings in the face of widespread

¹ The “Sacred Cow”: Outside of Africa, the materialist reading of cattle culture origins was perhaps most famously demonstrated by Marvin Harris’ account of the formation of cultural beliefs surrounding the sacred cow. He argued that the *ahimsa*, the religious doctrine placing the cow in a sacred sphere within Hindu-based Indian society, was the result of reliance on agriculture, not cattle per se. For Indians, cattle played a key role in agricultural production, providing fertilizer and drafting. Harris asserted that agriculture, the primary food source for most Indians, would be compromised without cattle. The relegation of cattle to the sacred sphere thus ensured food security through agriculture (Harris 1966).
social change. When relevant, I reference the post-colonial African context, but the majority of this analysis is focused on colonial-era Africa and the foundational texts of Evans-Pritchard and Herskovits.

**The Euro-American Ranching Complex**

In the New World, it is possible to trace processes of diffusion and adaptation that contributed to the formation of a uniquely American ranching cattle culture. Early Iberian cattle ranching came from sheep herding in medieval times, but its differentiation into ranching was related to the use of the horse, and the scale of the herds, which increased as market-based systems of exchange emerged in the Iberian Peninsula in the 15th century (Butzer 1988). Iberian cattle arrived in the New World in 1494, and the first cattle on the American mainland landed in Mexico in 1521. In this land, well suited to the needs of cattle, herds increased rapidly and became feral (Jordan 1993). In broad structural terms, the relationship between humans and their cattle took on a unique character in the Americas due to a distinct mode of production comprised of extensive ranching with cattle raised for capitalist market exchange (Strickon 1965). In addition to this distinct ecological and economic pattern, cattle raisers drew on common Iberian practices and technologies (Jordan 1993). As a result of these similar features, common similar ranching systems developed throughout the western hemisphere (Strickon 1965).

New World elite ranchers’ disdain for manual labor and rampant cattle rustling necessitated the development of specialized caretakers to manage the herds. As a result, the first New World cowboy group was born—the Mexican vaquero, who would, in the coming centuries, contribute to the formation of the North American cowboy (Dary 1981). Cattle were introduced in other parts of the Americas, and similar cowboy
groups developed by adapting a common set of Iberian practices and technologies to unique ecological, political, and economic contexts (Bishko 1952; Dary 1981). These include the *llaneros* of the tropical plains in Colombia and Venezuela (Loy 1981), and the gauchos of the southern cone pampas (temperate grasslands) (Nichols 1968). These cowboy groups shared similarities in material culture, an emphasis on horsemanship, and associated ideals of courage (Slatta 1990). The extensive nature of cattle ranching, coupled with the need to perform physically demanding labor in the absence of direct supervision, also gave rise to common cultural attributes associated with masculinity, freedom, and prestige in relation to other rural laborers (Strickon 1965: 243).

**Cattle Economies: Economic, Ecological, and Social Considerations**

Colonial-era African pastoralists of Eastern Africa and ranchers in the Americas have historically exploited the same resource in very different ways. Their use of cattle is structured by the mode of production, which constitutes the “fundamental organization of society” (Plattner 1989: 379). The key questions for examining the mode of production are: What is produced? How is it produced? In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to analyze three features of cattle modes of production. Three questions guide this comparison: 1) Do cattle fulfill material needs through subsistence or market exchange? (economic factors); 2) What is the relationship between cattle raisers and their cattle? (ecological); and 3) To what extent is exchange of cattle governed by relationships between society and the broader economy? (social). The final section on social factors includes a discussion on broader political economic changes associated with the spread of capitalism in post-colonial Africa and the Americas.
Economic Considerations: What is good to eat?

On the surface, the “what” is the same for both groups--cattle, but the products are different. The focus of this sub-section is on the material value of cattle on a basic level, or in terms of the ways that cattle directly contribute to the social reproduction of the people that in some way rely upon them. Among East African pastoralists, it is thought that “subsistence or survival imperatives” gave rise to unique social attitudes towards cattle (Deshler 1965: 154). For the Nuer, the cow is a source of the vital milk, dung, and blood, which are all harvested from a live animal and consumed or used on a daily basis within kin-based societies (Evans-Pritchard 1940).

Despite the centrality of cattle to pastoral cultural beliefs, in many societies agriculture provided equal or greater sustenance than the products of the cattle (Comaroff and Comaroff 1990; Dove and Carpenter 2007). A strictly crop-based diet was disdained in comparison with the protein-rich products of cattle, and agriculturalists were generally accorded less prestige than cattle raisers (Spear 1993). Although cattle were eaten under socially defined conditions, their primary value was their unique capability to provide continued sustenance in the form of milk and blood, as well as dung for cooking. At a basic level, the cultural valorization of the cow among the Nuer was due not to the fact that it was “good to eat,” as much as its milk was good to drink and eat with millet (Evans-Pritchard 1940). It is thus not a crude measure of sustenance derived from a product or activity, but the fact that cattle were able to “to store value in a world of flux” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1990), which made them valued on a household and societal level, and made them the basis of exchanges among and for other people (Schneider 1957).
For the American cattle raiser, however, the products that are central to pastoralist subsistence (milk, blood) go largely unexploited. The value of cattle is realized through the sale of the beast’s flesh when slaughtered and converted to hides, tallow, and beef. Although cowboys may often eat the products of the cow, their daily and long term sustenance is derived from wages earned by securing the delivery of the product to market. Their reliance on cattle is secondary, as a commodity, one which they do not own or harvest on daily basis, but rather tend to in order to secure an ultimate harvest of meat and tallow to be exchanged for money.

Despite the bonds between the Nuer and their cattle, whose slaughter was highly regulated, “the end of every beast is, in fact, the pot” (Evans-Pritchard 1940: 38). Although both cattle raising systems have a strong material reliance on cattle, beef is not explicitly “good to eat” for either group. For pastoralists, milk, and to a lesser extent, blood is good to drink, and dung is good for preparing food. For the cowboy and his boss, the rancher, cattle are good with which to make money, which is then used to buy food. Thus, the subsistence or capitalist economic orientation of groups channels the nature of their material reliance on cattle, contributing to the formation of distinct cattle cultures.

**Ecology: Relationships between Humans and Cattle**

I now focus on the “how”-- the manner in which distinct products are cultivated and harvested, and the ways that people interact with their cattle. Harvesting milk, blood, or dung from a live cow requires a different form of human interaction than does raising beef cattle. In colonial East Africa, pastoralism was characterized by moving livestock, and the family that owned and relied upon them, in accordance with seasonal variation and resource availability (Herskovits 1926). The family unit cared for cattle and
consumed the cow’s products on a daily basis. From this relationship of mutual nurturing and proximity between animal and human, the connections between pastoralist and cattle become profound. Pastoralists naturally demonstrated affection and a symbolic attachment to their beasts, and ate them only on socially prescribed occasions (Herskovits 1926; Evans-Pritchard 1940; Schneider 1957).

Similar to pastoralism, ranching involves herding cattle over large areas of land, but the scale of the herds is much larger, and land is often privately owned (Strickon 1965). Furthermore, a capitalist arrangement between owner (rancher) and proletarian (cowboy) structures a form of interaction between cattle and cattle raiser that does not facilitate the development of strong bonds. From the saddle, the cowboy evaluates cattle in terms of their cash value, seeks to control them, and ultimately deliver them to the slaughterhouse for the profit of the rancher.

The extensive nature of ranching makes the horse an invaluable tool. A connection with the horse, rather than the cow, is considered the defining feature of American cowboy groups (Slatta 1990), including the gauchos of Argentina (Nichols 1968), the vaqueiros of northeastern Brazil (da Cunha 1944) and the llaneros of Venezuela and Colombia (Loy 1981). From his vantage atop the horse, cowboys push, pull, rope, and drag cattle from above. Unlike the pastoralists, who tend to their stock from the ground and develop a relationship with their cattle, the physical and spatial relationship between mounted cowboy and cattle does not facilitate such a connection, but rather emphasizes human domination over animals. While a Nuer pastoralist is likely to know the name and traits of their cattle, the same bond does not form between cowboys and cattle because of the sheer scale of the operation and the fact that
cowboys are workers, not owners. Furthermore, cowboys do not sleep among the cattle, as did the Nuer, nor do they harvest any form of daily sustenance from cattle.

Although cowboys may not form symbolic connections with the rancher’s cattle that they work, their horses are often named and given special attention. Cattle are often secondary to horses in defining these cattle keepers. As Tinker noted, the gauchos “lived in the saddle and could ride anything that wore hair. ‘Man without a horse,’ they said, ‘was nothing’” (Tinker 1961:3). While skill and masculine attributes associated with horsemanship are considered important among American cowboys, cattle ownership is associated with rank and prestige among African pastoralists. Indeed, Schneider noted that in Africa “while a man with 100 head may be considered rich, and one with 10 is poor, a man with no cattle is considered ‘dead’” (Schneider 1957:280).

Both proletarian cowboys and pastoralist cattle owners can be described as “parasites of the cow,” as Evans-Pritchard referred to the Nuer (Evans-Pritchard 1940), but for different reasons. Unique forms of exploiting the same resource, and the nature of the ecological relationship between humans and cattle is structured by the product to be harvested—what is good to eat. Reliance on live cattle produces a close relationship, and naturally produces symbolic associations between human and cattle among pastoralists. For the cowboy, however, cattle, particularly the bull (and unbroken horses), are thought of as wild, fierce animals over which cowboys seek domination (Lawrence 1990). The daily tasks of the cowboy, and the symbolic meaning of dominating wild nature is reconstructed in the rodeo (Ibid.; Stoeltje 1989).
The Social Context: Cattle and Commodities in Colonial and Post-Colonial Africa

The distinct ways that pastoralists and cowboys use and perceive cattle are related to the manner in which cattle are defined socially through the process of exchange. A discussion of commodities helps to better understand different forms of exchange, as well as social changes related to the value and meaning of cattle within an evolving political economy. It is generally agreed that the value of a commodity is created through exchange for money (Stone et al. 2000). The definition of commodity, however, depends on where it is studied, either in capitalist or non-capitalist contexts. The central debate centers on use and exchange value, the value for obtaining other things or for generating currency. For those who associate exchange value strictly with monetary exchange, a characteristic of capitalist and market-based economies, exchange that occurs outside of this sphere is not based on commodities (ibid.). According to this perspective, cattle would not be considered a commodity among colonial-era pastoralists, who did not exchange their cattle for money, but cattle would be a commodity for ranchers and cowboys.

Taussig (1977) follows Marx and Mauss in seeing commodities as the key in the transition to capitalist exchange. In this view, commodities come into being conceptually only when they are exchanged through capitalist relations, i.e. exchanged for money and based on prices. Such a conception makes it difficult to explain pre-capitalist modes of production and social formations in which exchange value is non-monetary and products may be rich in prestige or status, but devoid of any material “use.” For example, Malinowski’s (1922) study of the Trobrianders’ kula exchange showed that trade objects may serve general social needs, but have no use value in the strict sense of the concept (Wilk and Cligget 2007).
Appadurai (1986) outlines a wider conceptualization of commodities as anything intended for exchange, be it through barter, gift or the market. The study of commodities is also a way of connecting local practices and traditions with a series of broader historical exchanges between places and people (Mintz 1980; Wolf 1982). These perspectives are vital for understanding the ways that the same object, cattle, can be perceived as a commodity in some contexts and not in others, and how these categorizations change across time.

Among colonial African pastoralists, the cultural and economic valorization of cattle was related to their status as “the main repositories of value, allowing producers to both create and preserve wealth in ways that agriculture does not permit” (Schneider 1981: 38). As pastoral societies increased their emphasis on cattle, the unique value of cattle became the foundation for broader networks of mutual obligation (Deshler 1965: 154), most notably as a source of bride-wealth (Colson 1955). It is the unique ability of cattle to fulfill material needs on a social level, more flexibly than agriculture, and on a greater scale than other forms of livestock, that gave them a unique place within pastoral cultures, and made them the primary medium of exchange among East African groups (Schneider 1957).

Social relationships between people, often based on kinship relations, or the extension of kinship through marriage, were enacted through the exchange of cattle, which served as the most valuable form of currency. Owning more cattle enabled a person to provide for their family and solidify links with other members of the broader group through loaning and exchange, increasing their economic and social standing. The value of cattle was recognized among like-minded neighbors, with whom they were
exchanged, and between rival groups, who raided one another to obtain more cattle (Evans-Pritchard 1940). Among colonial pastoralists, the value of cattle was determined in a social matrix informed by real and potential kinship ties, as well as a subsistence orientation in which cattle were one of the few ways of storing value.

In post-colonial Africa, capitalist forms of exchange increased, but the transition of cattle to commodity status was not straightforward. Among the Basotho in Southern Africa, political and economic changes, including migration for wage-labor jobs by many men, created a situation in which there were two dominant outsider views on cattle. One was that the spiritual value of cattle made them “overvalued” as one of the last vestiges of a traditional mode of production to be replaced by modern, capitalist exchanges. The utilitarian view, on the other hand, held that the economically “irrational” behavior of pastoralists is, in fact, rational given the social and economic priorities of pastoralists working within local constraints and opportunities (Ferguson 1985: 648).

According to Ferguson, these perspectives failed to comprehend the “bovine mystique,” a complex set of historical-cultural factors that dictated that cattle could be bought for money, but which limited the sale of cattle in all but the most extreme circumstances (ibid.: 647). The mystique, Ferguson argued, can only be understood in relation to a set of cultural rules which define and valorize livestock as a special domain of property; and that these rules are maintained and re-created as a product of contesting forces articulating around the oppositions of men/women…senior/junior…and patron/client (ibid.: 649).
The barriers against the sale of cattle persisted, Ferguson concluded, “because they are made to persist…owing nothing to the ‘inertia’ of primordial ‘Sotho’ sentiments and everything to real contemporary social forces” (665).

Comaroff and Comaroff focused on cattle as a commodity, and a “medium of transformation in a total economy of signs and practices, between a material economy of things and a moral economy of persons” (1990: 196). By the time the Comaroffs conducted research among the Tshidi in 1969, the cash economy had replaced the total economy of cattle. Money was called “cattle without legs.” Cash was unable to fulfill the social obligations of cattle, and thus left men with a sense of powerlessness (ibid.). The disillusionment associated with the transition of cattle from the basis of social life to a commodity is a repeating theme in post-colonial Africa.

Sharon Hutchinson’s *Nuer Dilemmas* (1996) provided an update on the Evans-Pritchard’s classic, but as the subtitle “Coping with Money, War, and the State” implies, one must look to more than the cow to understand the current plight of the Nuer. She painstakingly examined the manner in which Nuer attitudes toward money can be ambivalent and contextually differentiated (1996: 57). The Nuer spoke of money as not having any blood, a reference to the inability of money to sustain the larger group in the same way as cattle. The loss of control over cattle was related to, but is not the defining feature of an overall restructuring of social organization (kinship, incest taboos), political organization (loss of power of male elders, encroachment of the state and military), and ritual practice. Perhaps one of the developments that would have most surprised Evans-Pritchard was the non-sacrificial slaughter of cattle for the purposes of meat.
consumption, which Hutchinson attributed to a more open identification between cattle and cash, and the spread of Christian doctrine (ibid: 299-350).

These cases from post-colonial Africa illustrate that cultural beliefs and practices associated with cattle are subject to change with multiscalar political economic transformations. The “social life” of cattle may change from a medium of social cohesion and identity without a cash value to a commodity exchanged under general or locally specific norms. Post-colonial perspectives tell us that the meanings of cattle must be analyzed in relation to local and broader social and historical factors, as well as political and economic changes. These insights will be useful for understanding the meanings of cattle among Acrean groups, for whom the arrival of cattle signified the expansion of broader political and economic structures that would result in tumultuous local changes.

**The Imperfect Reach of Capitalism**

The key difference between early African pastoralists and cattle raisers in the Americas would seem to be their degree of insertion into the capitalist system. In terms of a continuum, with socially defined calculations of value informing exchange on one end, and market-orientation on the other, colonial-era pastoralists would be the least market-oriented. Post-colonial pastoralists, embedded in capitalist systems of exchange, but nonetheless guided by pre-capitalist social guidelines, would then follow. In the Americas, however, cattle raising has always been related to capitalist systems of exchange.

Still, the case is not so straightforward. Within both continents the reach of capitalism is imperfect, and different regions experience unique relationships with market exchange. Historically, American cattle raisers operated in peripheral areas—
frontiers (Strickon 1965). The ranchers of Roraima (Brazil) did not have access to markets for the sale of their cattle in the late 1960s. They were not “primarily economically-oriented. Indeed it would be difficult to understand the actions and ideals of these people solely in economic terms” (Riviére 1972:1). For these ranchers, prestige was not attained through material accumulation as much as it was through the extension of social bonds, and helping others attain a similar status (ibid.: 86). These characteristics are more in line with African pastoral societies with less market orientation (Herskovits 1926; Evans-Pritchard 1940).

Roraima, which Riviére referred to as the “fossilized frontier,” exhibited characteristics of previous cattle ranching frontiers that continued to evolve through their articulation with capitalist markets and systems of exchange. Although always based on capitalist exchange, the modern ranching mode of production was catalyzed by technological innovations of the industrial revolution in the late 1800s in both Argentina and the United States (Strickon 1965). Capitalism did not spread unencumbered throughout the New World, but penetrated new frontiers unevenly (Cleary 1993). Some regions are more affected by these broader influences than others, operating as enclaves (Ferguson 2006). Different regions and different populations within those regions may be more or less market-oriented in their cattle raising, and these differences should be reflected in the resulting cattle culture.

**Cattle Culture in the Western Amazon**

Cattle raising in Acre, Brazil is a relatively novel mode of livelihood, arriving only in the last half-century. The arrival of cattle, cattle ranchers, and cowboys in the 1970s and 1980s was the result of a two-pronged policy by the Brazilian military government to colonize the Amazon by offering fiscal incentives to large corporate ranches, and
establishing settlement projects for impoverished populations from central and southern Brazil (Schmink and Wood 1992). In Acre, the arrival of migrants gave rise to conflict over land, resulting in the displacement of forest-dwelling rubber tappers (Bakx 1988). The rubber tappers mobilized against the ranchers and their cattle using an environmental discourse, securing rights to their land and extractive way of life (Kainer et al. 2003). For many Acreans, cattle remain a symbol of migrant encroachment, the dislocation of native cultures, and environmental destruction. Despite these negative associations with cattle, political economic shifts have led the rubber tappers, along with smallholder agricultural colonists to gradually incorporate cattle into their traditional livelihood strategies (Toni et al. 2007).

Acrean social groups are distinguishable in relation to their unique economic practices and associated cultural identities as large scale cattle ranchers, agriculturally-oriented colonists, and forest extractivist rubber tappers. Ranchers own herds of as many as five thousand head of beef cattle or more. They arrived in the region with the opening of the Amazon to settlement and colonization, as did the colonists: smallholders historically dedicated to swidden agriculture. The rubber tappers have historically practiced forest extractivism, gathering rubber and Brazil nuts for local markets since their arrival in the region with the “rubber booms” of the mid 19th and early 20th centuries (Weinstein 1983). Over the last decade, these smallholder groups have become increasingly reliant on cattle raising and less focused on their traditional economic practices.

For the most part, cattle, and certainly cattle ranching, are recent arrivals to the region, but there are exceptions within groups, and important differences between
groups. Many ranchers and colonists may have grown up around cattle before migrating to Acre with the intention of raising cattle. Alternatively, some of them have made the move to cattle only recently, transitioning from urban professional and small scale agricultural pursuits, respectively. It was not uncommon for a rubber tapper family to own a cow or two dedicated to milk and transportation of goods, prior to the widespread introduction of cattle in the region.

In this context, with the recent move to cattle and differential insertion into capitalist exchange systems, there are observable differences between groups’ uses and cultural perceptions of cattle. These differences can be most easily observed through comparison between smallholders (colonists and rubber tappers), who have fewer cattle and a mixed subsistence-market exchange pattern, and large scale ranchers, who raise cattle on a much larger scale, selling beef to regional markets. Differences in cattle culture will be explored through an examination of the familiar themes of capitalist (exchange for currency) or subsistence use; social context of exchange; and the relationship between humans and animals. The following descriptions, collected from 2007-2010, begin with the rubber tappers, the most socially, geographically, and economically isolated group, and proceed to colonists and ranchers, who participate more actively in capitalist market exchange and dominant cattle culture.

**Cattle Use and Cattle Culture among Social Groups**

Jatobá lives in the Amazon forest with his wife, Luanna, and his son, Espimar. Their home sits amid fruit trees, and is surrounded by a two-hectare clearing planted with rice, cassava, and beans, and pasture for grazing. The homestead is otherwise enclosed by dense forest interspersed with foot trails, which connect the home to rubber
and Brazil nut trees, as well as the homes of other rubber tappers, also known as forest extractivists.

Cattle were relatively uncommon in this rubber tapper community until the past decade, when they became more available as the herds of ranchers and colonists, who live between the rubber tappers and the cities, grew. In 2008, Jatobá entered into the world of cattle raising when he purchased a young bull, which the family named “Tchoa.” The name came from the English word “show,” which the family heard on television during one of their visits to the municipal capital some eighty kilometers away across rubber trails, a seasonally passable dirt road, and the BR-317 highway, paved in 2002. Tchoa grazed on the hectare of pasturage surrounding Jatobá’s house and often lazed on the adjoining soccer field, where the community gathered for weekend matches.

Jatobá and his family demonstrated great affection toward Tchoa, rubbing him often on the back and head. The young bull often stuck his head through the kitchen door, looking for salt, which he licked out of their hands or from small heaps poured on the front step. When they knocked oranges from the trees, the bull was there to take a piece with his raspy tongue, or gobble the fruit whole. The relationship between Tchoa and the family demonstrates affection, and a symbolic component of naming that is not common among other groups, including some of Jatobá’s rubber tapper neighbors.

Although Tchoa was cherished by Jatobá and his family, it was the promise of his usefulness that kept the bull in their good graces, and justified their allocation of otherwise scarce resources to him. In 2009, they put a ring, made of old insulated wire, through his nose, allowing them to tether and lead the bull. Espimar often ran a rope
through the ring to fashion reins, and rode Tchoa to school. Riding cattle for transportation is a common practice among the rubber tappers, but outside of this community, humans only temporarily mount cattle in the form of bucking rodeo bulls.

When I arrived to visit Jatobá in 2010, Tchoa was waiting when the truck pulled into the clearing that serves as the town center, fastened to an ox cart with a neighboring bull. Tchoa was beginning to realize his function as a pack animal by carrying goods on the oxcart. Only through collaboration with his neighbor does Jatobá have a complete team to pull the cart, reinforcing social relationships between the family and their neighbors. Tchoa was rowdy on the way back to the house, and Jatobá confided that it was time for the bull to be castrated, a relatively simple procedure that caused anxiety in Jatobá. Like many rubber tappers, he lacked basic cattle management knowledge; he also confessed reluctance to inflict pain on Tchoa.

A few days later, Luisão, (Big Luis), puttered up the trail to Jatobá’s house on a motorcycle. Luisão is a colonist, a migrant from southern Brazil, who settled just outside the rubber tapper community. He and his kinsmen lined the side road that eventually empties onto the paved highway. These colonists also used cattle for milk and transportation of goods, but they usually had larger herds, which they raised for the beef market. Due in part to the increased scale of their herds, the separation between colonist and cattle was usually more absolute in both physical and psychological respects, with fences clearly distinguishing the realms of humans and cattle.

Bahiana, another colonist, lives up the highway on a different side road, about 50 kilometers from Jatobá. Her father was an agriculturalist in the arid northeast, where she grew up around cattle before marrying and leaving home in her teens. She and her
husband, who often worked as a cowboy, followed the frontier before settling in Acre in early 1980s. Shortly after their arrival, her husband died when he was thrown from his oxcart and crushed under the wheels. Despite this painful memory, Bahiana had no bitterness toward her two aged bullocks, which were usually tethered to a mango tree a few feet away from her house. In the late afternoon, when the oxen were no longer needed for the day, she gave them a handful of salt before releasing them to join the rest of the herd. In the morning, her sons would collect the bullocks again, using them to carry firewood or other cargo. In 2009, she had eighty head of beef cattle that grazed the forty acres of pasture surrounding her house.

Bahiana developed a strong connection with these oxen, but she did not name them. When she sold her land later that year, she also sold the majority of her cattle, but she could not reconcile the thought of her two bulls, who had served her so well, heading to the slaughterhouse. Although she could have sold the two trained oxen for a handsome price, she made her son promise that he would allow the oxen to graze out the remainder of their years on his property.

The cases of smallholders Jatobá and Bahiana, a rubber tapper and colonist, demonstrate that the exchange value of cattle is determined by their use value. Cattle that provide subsistence functions, such as transportation and milk, require a sustained investment of labor. This form of interaction may produce a bond between human and animals, and in some cases a symbolic connection results. When an emotional attachment was observed, certain cattle, usually an animal considered to have been especially valuable over its life course, may be deemed unsellable. No systematic barriers, however, were observed with regard to the sale of cattle among smallholders.
It is not uncommon to convert a useful cow to a beef cow, but such a decision is based on a number of factors, with immediate household needs often the most important consideration.

The African metaphors that distinguish cattle and money, the “bovine mystique” and “cattle without legs,” demonstrate the conflicted process of renegotiating cultural values in the transition from subsistence to currency-based exchange. Conversely, Acreans, speak of cattle as a poupança, a savings account, and dinheiro vivo, live money. Both expressions reference the capitalist system. The ability of cattle to store wealth, however, is at the base of all of these expressions.

Bahiana’s son, known as “Tatu” (his nickname, which means “armadillo”), is indistinguishable from a typical colonist while at home or at work in the country, but when he heads to the city, he dons tight jeans, a plaid shirt, and a large belt buckle, and becomes a cauboi (cowboy). In town, he may see his older brother “Branco” (nickname: “white guy”), who drives a delivery truck, but “lives for” the weekends, when he rides bulls in the local rodeo circuit.

When Bahiana decided to sell her land and move to the city, she threw a farewell party. All of her neighbors and friends came, along with relatives who had already moved to the city. They were drawn, many of them admitted, by the promise of churrasco, or barbecue. For the occasion, a calf was slaughtered, dressed, and laid over a huge pit some six foot long and four feet deep. Strips of meat were roasted on a grid of barbed wire that covered the hole, and eaten by the attendees, who picked limes from a nearby tree to season the salty meat.
Bahiana appears to perform some of the core features of the East African cattle complex. She has a symbolic attachment to her oxen and participates in rituals centered on the consumption of beef (*churrascos*). There are, however, substantial differences. She was attached to her oxen because they were useful. The beef that she ate at the farewell *churrasco* was a commodity purchased with cash. The object with which she developed a symbolic connection was not the same as the one that she consumed at the ritual. Similarly, the cowboy culture that Tatu and Branco participate in is a direct outgrowth of a cattle ranching mode of production, not a smallholder-subsistence system. The differences in categorization are related to distinct economic functions of the same object, serving either subsistence needs or for sale in the market.

The man who bought Bahiana’s land is considered a *fazendeiro*, or rancher, because he has consolidated a number of smaller properties to acquire enough land to raise beef cattle. He is essentially a businessman who lives in the municipal capital, and uses hired labor (cowboys) to raise the cattle. He thus has very little personal interaction with his cattle. For the rancher, cattle are reduced to their function as a commodity, and their value is determined in terms of carcass weight. Rancher appreciation for cattle is more of an abstraction related to institutionalized popular culture and regional traditions; it is not an outgrowth of their relationship with cattle. Interestingly, though, some of the ranchers who have recently gotten into the cattle business explain their decision in terms of profit, but also in terms of reconnecting with the countryside and related ideals of tradition.

Even among the ranchers, the most market-oriented group, there exist norms of reciprocity and social solidarity that on some occasions influence the nature of
A handful of ranchers hold auctions of “elite,” or pure-bred Nellore cattle, in the capital of Rio Branco. Ranchers sit at long tables, surrounded by their rancher friends and relatives, drinking whiskey, and nibbling on pieces of barbecued beef and sausage. Waiters in white shirts and bow ties constantly circulate, refilling the plates and glasses throughout the event. At the auctions, ranchers may buy a bull or cow because they need it. It is common, however, to hear them explain their purchase of an unnecessarily expensive animal in terms of “paying back” or “helping” the rancher who is putting on the auction. They are demonstrating a socially defined form of reciprocity on these occasions, and if they are making a cost-benefit analysis, it is based on interconnected social and economic ends.

The purpose of these descriptions was to illustrate that there exist many ways of using, exchanging and perceiving the same resource within an economic context that is predominantly capitalist. There are similarities and differences with African pastoral groups. Different uses for cattle are premised in large part on degree of market orientation, but profit, symbolic attachment, and social connections influence the ways that cattle are exchanged in different contexts and among different groups.

Conclusion

This examination of cattle raising practices and cattle cultures has shown that distinct ways of using the same resource may constrain practices in remarkably similar ways, as seen by the similarity of cattle raising structures and practices throughout the “cattle areas” of the Americas (Strickon 1965) and East Africa (Herskovits 1926). We can initially understand these differences to be based on subsistence or market-based economic orientations, which delimit the nature of exchange: either as socially meaningful cattle or as commodities. On this broad level, the relationship between
humans and their cattle is also markedly different. Among pastoralists who rely on and harvest the products of live cattle, a bond is formed. In contrast, with American ranching systems wage laborers herd large amounts of cattle and convert their flesh to rancher profits. From the saddle, a relationship between humans and cattle based on separation and domination is reinforced. In short, distinct cattle modes of production give rise to different cattle cultures on a broad level.

Comparison of cattle uses and perceptions among three groups in Acre, Brazil showed that the dominant cattle ranching mode of production has not penetrated equally within the same region. The mixed subsistence-market orientation of the rubber tappers and colonists was related to different ways of viewing cattle. The daily routine of caring for cattle that provide subsistence milk or transportation inevitably produces a closer relationship, and at times a symbolic connection was demonstrated through naming and a resistance to sale. In general, market orientation among smallholders was related to larger herds, which impedes the development of connections with cattle. On the household level, there may also be different ways of viewing cattle, with differentiation between cattle used for transporting goods, and beef cattle destined for the market, which remain nameless commodities.

In addition to the ways that groups use cattle, groups have unique identities and histories, which guide the manner in which they perceive cattle. The rubber tappers were slow to respond to political and economic factors that rendered cattle the most economically viable way to use their land. This was due to group-specific reasons: a lack of knowledge and experience with cattle raising; deforestation regulations which limit the establishment of pasture in the rubber tapper reservation; and ideological
factors related to their political mobilization against encroaching cattle raisers in the 1970s and 80s, which focused on cattle as a symbol of displacement and destruction. More recently, cattle have come to be associated with wealth and social status. Many smallholders believe that acquiring cattle is the first step to a better life and a form of livelihood that is more respected than agriculture or forest extractivism. Even wealthy urban businessmen have purchased ranches to make a profit, and to fulfill a common Acrean and Brazilian dream of owning land and cattle.

Schneider asserted that the essence of the African complex resides not just in traits and practices, but in a "kind of identification with cattle which leads to their association with ritual" (Schneider 1957: 278). As seen in Acre, a symbolic attachment may form between cattle raisers within a mixed subsistence-market orientation. Cattle-centered rituals are present in Acre in the form of rodeos and churrascos (barbecues). Although both cattle symbol and ritual exist in Acre, they are largely unrelated: symbolic attachment is the result of subsistence orientation, but popular rituals emanate from the dominant ranching mode of production. Cattle rituals, rodeos and churrascos, reenact and reinforce a relationship of human domination over animals, characteristics of dominant cattle culture based on ranching.

The material culture (principally cowboy clothing, tools, and a focus on the horse) and rituals (rodeo, barbecue) of dominant cattle culture are derived from the everyday practices of the cowboys, and reflect a capitalist orientation in which humans exploit and dominate cattle. This dominant cattle culture draws heavily on North American cowboy influences, including music, dress, and popular culture, which resonate with and are
incorporated into regional Brazilian traditions before being institutionalized in local expressions of dominant cattle culture.

To varying extents, this dominant cattle culture is appropriated by all rural groups, who find it to be one of the few avenues for expressing a rural identity that is both recognized and socially valued throughout Brazil, and especially in the region. Rubber tappers, who once resisted cattle raising on ideological grounds, may limit their participation in rodeos due to conscious resistance and/or lack of access. Barbecues are a cherished social institution across groups, and are commonly used to celebrate important events, such as birthday, graduations, and to mobilize labor for communal work sessions in the countryside.

In summary, there are distinct cattle modes of production, which lead to distinct cattle cultures on a broad level. An overarching market or subsistence oriented social context constrains the rules of exchange and the relationship between humans and cattle. As a result of these common features, distinct cattle cultures emerge. A positive symbolic association between human and beast is apparent among East African pastoralists, who rely on the daily products of live cattle. Alternatively, a relationship of domination exists between proletarian cowboys and large herds of beef cattle in the Americas. Both of these symbolic associations are repeated in rituals that reassert this relationship. There is a mixed subsistence-market orientation among some Acrean groups, however, and they exhibit many features of the East African cattle complex, including the formation positive symbolic relationships with cattle within the dominant American mode of production and cattle culture.
CHAPTER 5
SOCIAL GROUP IDENTITY AND THE SHIFT TO CATTLE

The focus in this chapter is on economic practice, essentially the ways that rural people provide for their material needs, and social identity, how they define themselves and are perceived by others. The social identities of rubber tappers and colonists as extractivists and agriculturalists were formed through their dedication to specific practices over time, but how does the shift to cattle raising affect their notions of social identity?

In order to address this question, it is necessary to identify the factors that have been central to the formation of specific practices, and the identities which are expressed as a reflection of these practices. Political economic structures play an important role in constraining economic practices, making some practices more economically valuable than others, or defining land in ways that restrict how it can be used. Social groups respond to such constraints using their knowledge and a sense of self fashioned through years of engaging the material world in a specific way. Local expressions of cattle raising, agricultural, or forest extractivist identity are also related to broader definitions of what it means to raise cattle, plant crops, or extract products from the forest in other parts of the world. Social identities and practices thus lie at the crux of structure and agency, and also as a point of convergence for local and broader definitions of what it means engage in a specific form of economic practice.

The purpose of this chapter is to understand the ways that the shift to cattle raising is related to perceptions of social identity by groups who self identified, and were popularly defined by their distinctive economic practices. After outlining the relevant tenets of economic practice and social identity to provide a theoretical foundation, I
outline components of *seringueiro* (rubber tapper) and *colono* (colonist) identity in relation to their respective histories, the ways that political economic developments have affected them and how they have responded, and how they envision themselves and how they are perceived in relation to their shift in practice. Ethnographic descriptions and survey data are analyzed to compare groups’ perceptions of themselves and each other.

**Theoretical Framework**

Social identity is one’s sense of affiliation with a set of characteristics thought to embody a social collectivity. Identity situates people within a collective “location,” with distinctive social memory, consciousness, and position within the social structure (Hale 1997). Identity can be based on, but is not limited to, a number of factors, including ethnicity (Barth 1969; Clifford 1988; Hale 1997) and a bond with place (Tuan 1974).

The identities of non-indigenous Amazonian social groups are largely based upon the manner in which they exploit their natural environment (Harris 2004). They are defined by common forms of access to resources, and their participation in similar social relations based on economic practice (Schmink and Wood 1992). Groups may exploit the same resource, but their unique modes of production will give rise to distinctive values and identities (Barth 1956; Robben 1989). Over time, the distinct practices of different groups within a shared ecological setting are attributed to cultural factors, and their actions are understood in terms of their unique identities (Atran *et al.* 1999; Rudel *et al.* 2002).

Practice theory provides a framework for understanding the relationship between economic practice, the manner in which rural populations use their land to make a living, and social identity, the ways that groups perceive and express themselves.
culturally in articulation with a mode of production (see Bourdieu 1977). I use practice theory “to conceptualize the articulations between the practices of social actors ‘on the ground’ and the big ‘structures’ and ‘systems’ that both constrain those practices and yet are ultimately susceptible to being transformed by them” (Ortner 2007: 2). Practice theory thus provides a way of locating practice at the intersection of broader structures and group agency.

We can also use practice theory to conceptualize practices at the “fulcrum between the material and the referential” (Knaft 1996:136). Economic practice serves a material purpose—to provide the subsistence or economic need of a group, but these actions also have meanings for those who engage in them, and others who perceive them as practitioners of a specific practice in the form of societal expectations and stereotypes, as well as political classification of groups (Vadjunec et al. 2011b). These broader conceptions are based on Acrean, regional (Amazonian), and national Brazilian history, as well as meta-narratives associated with practices that span the globe, and are grafted onto perceptions of farmers, forest-dwelling populations (extractivists), and cattle raisers. The ways that Acrean groups define themselves builds on and challenges these categories.

Despite material changes, people may still self-classify as members of a group that has been historically defined through their identification with others similar to them based on a specific practice, as social groups. A social group is not an unchanging entity, however, and a vision of it as a unit of like-minded individuals is misleading, as there are elements of disruption and change, which are expressed through changes in both practice and identity. As the rubber tappers and colonists demonstrate, the ways
that a shift in practice is perceived by a group may be easily reconciled or be a torturous process. Furthermore, a shift in practice may be perceived as incongruous with popular perceptions of social identity, leading to political consequences.

**Rubber Tappers**

**Rubber Tapper Identity**

On the most basic level, to be a *seringueiro*, or rubber tapper, is to live a life based on forest extractivism (Vadjunec *et al.* 2011b). Historically, from the mid-1800s up until the mid 20th century, this meant tapping rubber. Rubber tapper practice was highly constrained for much of this period, with *seringalistas*, or rubber barons, controlling rubber tapper labor (Weinstein 1983). With the decline of rubber, and the end of oppressive rule in the *seringal* system, many rubber tappers migrated to cities, while many of those who stayed behind began practicing agriculture, a practice previously forbidden by the *seringalista* (Bakx 1988).

Decades after the decline of rubber, state and national authorities invited large scale cattle raisers to modernize the Amazon. With the arrival of southerners and the establishment of ranches, conflict ensued. Although extractivism as a way of life and economic practice was increasingly marginal, the rubber tappers were forced to defend their land, and rubber tapper identity coalesced in a unique moment that corresponded with increased international attention to environmental concerns and an opening in the Brazilian political scene (Allegretti 2002; Keck 1995).

The main achievement of the rubber tapper movement that emerged in the 1970s was the establishment of the Extractive Reserve (RESEX), a land tenure model that sought to reconcile forest preservation and economic development based on extractivist practices (Schwartzman 1989). To be a rubber tapper thus came to mean something
beyond tapping rubber and living in the forest: it was an identity ascribed to all those living in the Chico Mendes Extractive Reserve (Vadjunec et al. 2011b).

Due to the success of the social movement, the rubber tapper serves as a symbol of international environmentalism (Keck 1995; Tsing 2005) and as the centerpiece for the Acre state government’s forest-based development (Kainer et al. 2003). Although the movement was initially focused on defending the rubber tappers’ rights to land and their way of life, they are often associated with an intrinsic conservation ethic.

The essentialization of identities may be an important tool in the struggle to gain access to land, but a change in identity or practice may undermine the legitimacy of a group’s claim to land (Clifford 1988; Hale 1997). Thus, physical spaces, which result from specific practices and are constrained in different ways as formal tenure systems, are inextricably linked with practices and identity. Once implemented, tenure system rules constrain not only practice, but also identity. This is most clearly illustrated with the rubber tappers, for whom environmental identity, the practice of forest extractivism, and residence in the RESEX tenure system have become conflated.

The rubber tapper movement argued for social equity, land tenure, and sustainable forest use as the basis for securing their livelihoods (Allegretti 2002). These goals, forged through alliances with international conservation organizations, were initially presented as an example of an economy based solely on NTFP (non-timber forest products) production (Ehringhaus 2005). Political and economic structures have continued to evolve, however, and the rubber tappers have responded with diversified livelihood systems, including cattle raising (Gomes 2009). The institutionalization of the rubber tapper “forest guardian” image and their perceived divergence from
environmentally friendly practices has led to unresolved “post-victory dilemmas” (Ehringhaus 2005).

The recent expansion of cattle in the RESEX, which prompted the threat of expulsion for some families, garnered national media attention, and was seen in the local press as a betrayal of rubber tapper identity (Lobo 2008). According to these criticisms, the rubber tappers presented themselves in opposition to cattle-driven deforestation, and their current adoption of cattle violates not only their identity of commitment to the forest, but also who they were supposed not to be: environmentally destructive cattle raisers. Maintaining a rubber tapper identity is thus necessary to mitigating outsider perceptions. Perceptions of a disconnect between practice and rubber tapper identity are viewed negatively by outsiders, and could undermine their legal rights to land.

Change in Economic Practice and the Persistence of Rubber Tapper Identity

Rubber tappers involved in the 1970s and 1980s political movement have aged and given birth to a new generation with no firsthand knowledge of political mobilization. Meanwhile, the price of rubber has continued to decline, and many original rubber tappers and their offspring no longer tap rubber.

Table 5-1 presents data from a survey in which members of each group were asked about their primary economic practices at specific points of time from 1980 until 2000. It should be noted that primary economic practice could mean many things. Among smallholders, dominant practice could mean amount of labor or land dedicated to practice, or could refer to a subsistence activity, such as agriculture or hunting. These practices are essential to social reproduction of the household, but are not captured as formal economic exchange. The majority of households surveyed were at
least partially reliant on the cash exchange economy, but not all relied on subsistence activities. Thus, in the interest of a consistent comparison between groups, primary economic practice was defined as the one that contributes the most money to the household.

Rubber tappers were reliant on extractivism, specifically rubber, prior to 1980. From 1990 to 2000, they maintained an extractivist orientation, but, due to the decline of rubber prices and the removal of the rubber subsidy, Brazil nut became the most important economic resource for tappers living in the eastern part of the state, where they are abundant, while those in western Acre increasingly relied on fishing and agriculture (Salisbury and Schmink 2007). In 2010, when this survey was administered, cattle were also becoming important in the economic lives of rubber tappers.

These results are from the community São Cristovão, which is participating in a state program that has resuscitated rubber tapping for selected families, but the program is not present in all rubber tapper communities. Although the families participating in the program reported that tapping rubber contributed to their household income, they did not find it to be one of their most important economic activities. In terms of income contribution, most rubber tappers relied primarily on Brazil nuts and cattle. Remittances from family members in the city also provided important source of household income and, for those still able to clear land, agriculture contributed to fulfill subsistence needs.

Despite changes in economic practice, rubber tappers exhibit the strongest association of all groups with their identity label, regardless of whether or not they
actually tap rubber. This applies to aged tappers, who are not economically motivated or physically able to tap rubber, as well as their offspring, who may choose not to tap rubber. Although they may not actually tap rubber, their continued participation in extractive activities, particularly harvesting Brazil nuts, enables them, they explain, to define themselves as rubber tappers. To be a rubber tapper is to lead a life that incorporates or relies on extractivism, not an exclusive dedication to rubber. The National Rubber Tapper Council (CNS) changed their label from rubber tappers to the more general “extractivists,” which encompasses other forms of forest-based resource management, such as harvesting Brazil nut (Vadjunec et al. 2011b).

Despite changes in practice and the emergence of a generation with no participation in the movement, rubber tapper heads of household confidently assert that they and their children are and will remain rubber tappers. Younger tappers explained that their identity was based on a sense of place: anyone who lives in the RESEX is a rubber tapper (Vadjunec et al. 2011b). Older tappers told me that their children will be rubber tappers if they live in the RESEX, even if they don’t tap rubber or extract forest products. For them, being a rubber tapper is a way of life that is related to a history of forest-based existence, a part of a group identity that was galvanized during intergroup conflict and institutionalized with the establishment of the RESEX. They are physically, socially, and symbolically connected through bonds among neighbors who are similarly isolated, and politically and administratively united through their habitation of the RESEX. It is also politically astute for them not to say that they are cattle raisers, even

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1 See Appendix C for a description of Pedro, a rubber tapper in the community of Sao Cristovão. The account was originally published for the “Postcards from the Amazon” series.
if they could be placed in this category, because it undermines the basis for their landholdings and invites criticism from detractors of Amazonian conservation initiatives.

**Perceptions of the Rubber Tapper**

The rubber tappers are considered heroes in Acrean society because of their role in fighting for Acrean independence from Bolivia (Alves de Souza 2008; Governo do Acre 2006). Furthermore, most Acreans in the capital city of Rio Branco trace their roots back to rubber tapper ancestors (Schmink and Cordeiro 2008). The Acrean landscape is filled with official images of the rubber tappers, giving the impression that the rubber tappers are stewards of the forest who lead a simple but dignified existence.

It would be expected that the tappers are more respected than ranchers, with whom they are often opposed. Table 5-2 provides the results of a survey asking members of each of the three groups, along with cowboys, policy makers, and people that work in socio-environmental NGOs, whether they agree with certain statements that I commonly heard about the rubber tappers.

Table 5-2 shows that rubber tappers are overwhelmingly considered to be the group that best preserves the forest. Groups also agreed that it is healthy to live in the forest. Positive valuations of the forest are related to the growing currency of environmentalism, and perceptions that forest life is healthy compared to life in the city. In casual conversations, however, it was still common to hear the forest equated not with health, but with disease and lack of wellbeing. This point is illustrated by the fact that the “healthiness” of forest life, which most groups agree on, does not translate into the “good life.” Less than 15% of members in each rural group felt that the rubber tappers had the good life, but around half or policy makers and NGO workers felt that the rubber tappers lived the good life.
Although there are exceptions, wealth tends to be associated with prestige, respect, and status. Despite the purported valorization of the rubber tappers in society, Acrean ranchers, who have a sordid history, and are often called “villains,” are widely seen as receiving more respect than the rubber tappers. Tappers are aware that positive perceptions about them exist, but they feel more the day to day negative perceptions of neighbors and others they encounter in town. Although people may appreciate the tappers’ struggles and contributions to Acrean history and society, many see them as “coitados,” poor, suffering forest dwellers.

As Table 5-3 illustrates, the practice of extractivism is strongly associated in the minds of all groups with poverty. Results for this table were obtained by asking respondents to choose the activity (e.g. cattle raising, agriculture, and extractivism) that was most strongly associated with poverty in their minds.

Findings reveal that the majority of respondents in each group associated extractivism with poverty, with more than 75% of rural groups and over half of the PP/NGO groups agreeing. The stated goal of the rubber tapper movement was to provide social welfare for forest dwellers through the managed extraction of forest products, thus contributing to preservation of the forest (Ehringhaus 2005). Many tappers feel that the promise of the extractive reserve has not directly benefited them in the ways that representation and discourse surrounding them has led observers to believe.

**Essentialism and Identity**

Part of rubber tapper identity is an expression of lived experience, past and present practice, shared history, political mobilization, residence in the RESEX, and dedication to the forest. The tappers that formed their identities around this confluence
of factors are aging, and yielding control of their household to a younger generation with little experience in these matters. These younger tappers may still tap rubber or harvest Brazil nuts, perhaps the most fundamental component of tapper identity, but few feel that they would be able to survive without cattle. Many are moving to the city, but those who stay must not only abide by the laws of the RESEX, which do not explicitly forbid cattle, but also cater to outsider perceptions, which consider cattle a violation of rubber tapper identity. When rubber tappers shifted to cattle, they were threatened with expulsion from the RESEX, although the foundational documents of the reserve say nothing of cattle limits. It was cattle, the symbol of their former enemies, which caught the attention of the press.

To an extent, then, the rubber tappers must deploy an essentialized form of their identity to maintain their lands, even if this means remaining economically and socially marginal. For other groups not limited by such tenure system rules, cattle provide a way of improving their lives and gaining prestige. If projects such as the one providing additional income to families that collect rubber are expanded, this trend might be countered. At present, however, there is a disconnect, not only between tapper practice and identity, but also between the symbolic valorization of tappers and their material and social marginality. Although outsiders may see them as deviating from their identities, rubber tappers continue to label themselves as rubber tappers, or extractivists. It is important to recognize, however, that it was practice that first gave rise to this identity, and this practice is fading in importance.
Colonists

Agriculture, Culture, and Settlement

The term *colono* (colonist) is strongly associated with the practice of small scale agriculture, but the relationship between practice and identity is not as direct with them as it is with other groups. Similar to the label “settler” in the United States, colonist evokes the same parallels of migrating to a new place and carving out a space in the wilderness. The generalized term *agricultor* (agriculturalist) is sometimes employed by colonists. Potentially, an *agricultor* could own much or little land, be rich or poor. Most ranchers from the south see agriculture, large scale mechanized production of soy and cane, as preferable to cattle raising. But, as large scale agriculture is almost non-existent in Acre, small scale slash and burn agriculture is most associated with the labels *agricultor* and *colono*.

Colonists consist of native Acreans and migrants, mostly from central-southern and southern Brazil. The Acre natives began their productive life as rubber tappers. The migrants were agriculturalists either renting from or working for large scale landowners. They came to Acre in search of their own "piece of land." Once the settlement projects were established in Acre by INCRA, they all converged upon a common practice: agriculture.

Some southerners came with a "culture" of agriculture and set about adapting their practices to the new landscape. Others knew little of this new life on the land, much less about agriculture; these included migrants from non-rural backgrounds, and the rubber tappers, whose agricultural pursuits were limited by the *seringal* system. Former
tappers were unable to continue their extractive lifestyles on the smaller lots of settlement project. ²

Agriculture is central to the identity of migrant colonos, who often say that they came from a “culture of agriculture,” and that agriculture was “in their blood.” This foundational identity of many migrants was redoubled with the developmentalist ideology of colonizing the Amazon, a process demonstrated though self reliant “colonists taming the frontier.” This mindset was further reinforced through the institutional interventions of INCRA, which rewarded those who demonstrated productivity, and threatened to punish those that left their forest intact. Both colonists and INCRA staff tell of the first president of INCRA-Acre, Moreno Maia, who supervised the settlement of the first wave of colonists to Acre. In tours of the settlements, he would threaten to take away colonists’ land if they did not prove that they were being “productive,” a concept synonymous with converting forest to economic activities—agriculture, in this case.

**Colonos and Cattle**

As seen in Table 5-1, colonists remained dedicated primarily to agriculture through 1995. Beginning in the late 1990s, however, they all went over to cattle. They cite 1998, the year that deforestation regulations were first truly enforced, as the moment that the shift occurred. Slash and burn agriculture, their primary method of producing crops, became limited.

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² See Appendix D for a description of Leopoldo, a former rubber tapper who moved to settlement project, and is now considered a colonist. Appendix E and Appendix F focus on Bahiana, a migrant from the state of Salvador, and her decision to sell her land in the settlement project and move to the city.
Today, the practice of the colonists is invariably cattle dominant. Few, if any, practice agriculture on any scale, as a result of the decline in agricultural support, and the increased enforcement of deforestation and burning regulations. Many had cattle or desired cattle prior to these developments, but these factors, which made agriculture difficult, coupled with the greater availability of cattle, have accelerated the process, and exaggerated the colonist reliance on cattle.

While cattle provide money to buy staple foods, agriculture provided greater self-sufficiency. Loss of self sufficiency has led to feelings ranging from anger and frustration to worthlessness. A story recounted multiple times in the Quixadá illustrates one of the most extreme consequences of colonist estrangement from agriculture. A man got in trouble for deforesting and burning a hectare of his land to plant his yearly roça (agricultural plot). He was fined and spent time in jail. When he returned home, he killed himself. Narrators of this story say that he did not want to go on if he couldn’t produce for himself. True or not, this common story tells of the perceived decline of the colonist resulting from an inability to fulfill subsistence needs through agriculture.

For the majority of colonists who have remained on their land, cattle provide their primary income. Those with cattle may still refer to themselves as colono, and even agricultor. Others prefer to present themselves as pecuaristas (cattle raisers) or pequenos produtores (small scale producers). They only jokingly call themselves fazendeiros (large scale ranchers), even if they have high numbers of cattle, similar to a fazendeiro. Many lots in Quixadá, where colonists formerly lived, are now owned by ranchers. These “ranchers” are sometimes other colonists who gradually bought other lots, or successful businesspeople from the nearby municipal capital of Brasiléia.
Now, following the widespread shift to cattle, colonist identity is in transition. Some are conflicted, and others find that any practice fits within the catch-all “colono” label. While still reliant on cattle, others are expanding into novel practices: fish tanks, chicken farms, agro-forestry systems, and urban and rural wage labor. Only certain practices lead to coherent social group identities and that those who are moving into novel practices do not foresee themselves adopting a chicken or fish-centered identity. Many colonists accept these changes, saying that part of being a colono is being flexible and tough. As long as they can find ways to stay on the land, they are colonos. The true end of the colono comes when they are forced to sell their land and move to the city, a common scenario.

**Cattle Culture and Colonos**

Three colonist-run rodeos have sprouted up near Quixadá in the past few years. The rodeos, held during the dry seasons, attract colonist cattle raisers and wage laborers for ranchers (cowboys); they wear shiny “Western” belt buckles, boots, and cowboy hats. Rubber tappers also attend, but their clothing is less elaborate—work boots and a contri themed hat, at most. Ranchers only attend rodeos in Rio Branco.

Cattle culture resonates strongly in the colonia. They rely on their cattle to pull ox-carts and to make milk and cheese, and on renting their pasturage. And, despite the strong connection with agriculture among many, there are many others who never wanted to know about anything but cattle. The guys that you see in Brasiléia clacking their boots on the sidewalk, with the sun glinting off their belt-buckles, are usually colonists. One colonist contrasted his confident cowboy stroll with that of the rubber tapper:
The rubber tapper walks with long strides, like he is hurrying to get the *leite* (sap of the rubber tree). You can always spot a family in town for the day. They walk single file like they are on the rubber trail.

Many colonists, regardless of their origins as migrants or former rubber tappers, have negative perceptions of modern-day rubber tappers, who have failed to leave the forest and “develop,” as former tappers in the *colonia* have done. Many of the colonists in this study area were former rubber tappers whose practices have been molded by their incorporation into the distinctive tenure unit of the settlement project. *Colonos* who have adopted a cattle-centered identity are especially likely to criticize or express pity for the tappers. They also feel that the rubber tappers receive preferential treatment from the government.

This examination of colonist practice and identity brings into relief the uniqueness of rubber tapper identity. Both groups are constrained in unique ways by the tenure area that they inhabit. The settlement project, however, does not tie the colonists to a specific practice. Although the colonists consider their situation desperate, if they react to political and economic developments and engage in a novel practice, cattle or fish farming, for example, it is not considered a betrayal of their identity by outsiders.

**Conclusion**

For the rubber tappers, who used their practices to defend their land and unite themselves with broader ideas of forest conservation, a strong link between identity and practice was formed. The rubber tapper notion of identity is based not only on practice, but also on a shared history, and residence in a specific place. Despite political economic changes which have rendered their traditional economic practice less viable than cattle raising, the shift to the practice that they once opposed has been seen as a violation of their social identity. Due to the fact that political classifications of practices
and popular notions of identity are based on previous forms of economic practice, and were institutionalized in the rubber tapper tenure system (the RESEX), the shift in practice may be perceived as incongruent or irreconcilable with established identity labels.

For colonists, being an agriculturalist is intimately linked with their acquisition of their own land, the ideology and policy of developmentalism, and notions of self-sufficiency. Unlike the rubber tappers, who used their practices to establish a basis for securing rights to their land, colonists are less constrained in responding to political economic shifts. The colonist shift in practice, while it may be an affront to their ideals of being an agriculturalist, has less severe political implications, and there is less perceived deviation from their identity.

Although many colonists feel that their inability to produce their own food has produced a sense of alienation and dissatisfaction, they do not see their shift to cattle raising as fundamentally at odds with their identity. For others colonists, raising cattle fits into their ideas of themselves as flexible rural producers; as long as they remain on the land, many feel comfortable calling themselves colonos.

The process of self definition in relation to economic practice takes place in a complex calculus, which includes the tradition and expectation of economic practice, the manner in which economic practice and perception of social groups were and are channeled into political discourse and policies, and a social group’s changing needs and desires, which are influenced both by evolving political economic constraints and socio-cultural aspirations associated with cattle culture.
Economic practice is the result of political economic constraints and the ways that groups respond to these broader structures. Political economic and social changes may render one practice more desirable than another, leading to a shift in practice. Although economic practices are motivated to respond primarily to material needs, the ways that these practices are linked with ideas about practices, and those who practice them, makes a shift in practice socially meaningful and politically consequential.

The shift to cattle has had different consequences for smallholder groups based on the distinct ways that the relationship between identity and practice is perceived by each group, how it is perceived externally. For rural groups, the relationship may be flexible, and more broadly defined in terms of social and historical considerations. External perceptions, however, may be more rigid in expectations that practices are consistent with purported identities, especially when forms of economic practice were institutionalized in land tenure systems.
Table 5-1. Dominant economic practice of social groups from 1980-2010 and predictions of future practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rubber Tappers</td>
<td>E (r)</td>
<td>E (b)</td>
<td>E (b)</td>
<td>E (b)</td>
<td>E (b) P</td>
<td>E, P</td>
<td>E, P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonist</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P, UW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rancher</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P, UP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: E = extractivism, (r)= rubber, (b)=Brazil nut
P= cattle raising, A= agriculture. UW=urban wage labor, UP=urban professional class

Table 5-2. Comparison of social group agreement with statements about rubber tappers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>rubber tappers are group that best preserves forest</th>
<th>it is healthy to live in the forest</th>
<th>rubber tappers have the good life</th>
<th>rubber tappers are more respected than ranchers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rubber Tapper</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonist</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rancher</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cowboy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy maker</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5-3. Group associations of activities with “poverty”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Group</th>
<th>Cattle Raising</th>
<th>Agriculture</th>
<th>Extractivism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rubber Tapper</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonist</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rancher</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cowboy</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy maker</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 6
RANCHER PERSPECTIVES

Nearly forty years after Nader’s call to “study up” to other strata of society (1972), there is much to learn about the Amazonian large scale rancher, an important, but often excluded actor in the Amazon region. With the exception of Rivière, who studied ranchers in a less controversial era (1972), there is a gap in the literature on ranchers since their arrival in Amazonia triggered conflicts with native populations and other smallholder groups (Hecht and Cockburn 1990; Schmink and Wood 1992).

Studying elite groups is challenging, as they are often closed societies defined by their very exclusivity, and reside outside of anthropologists’ traditional realm of study (Marcus 1993; Shore 2002). Amazonian ranchers are hesitant to speak with anthropologists and/or foreign researchers, whom they often rightfully associate with advocacy for socially and economically marginalized populations and environmental issues. Despite these obstacles, Adams’ recent work attempts to understand the perspectives of Amazonia’s large scale landowners (2010), and Nepstad and colleagues (2009) argue that the goal of “ending deforestation” in Amazonia can only be reached by working with ranchers.

This chapter is an attempt to locate the Acrean fazendeiro, or large scale rancher, ethnographically, and contribute to our anthropological understanding of this understudied group. I draw on formal interviews with 20 fazendeiros. Data obtained through semi-structured interviews and informal conversations with ranchers are also included to give flesh to the rancher life and perspective. I also attended social events, toured ranches, observed social interactions between ranchers and other groups, and, in two cases, interviews with rancher families in their homelands in south-central Brazil.
I also attempt to situate the ranchers in relation to other groups by including the perspectives of cowboys, colonists, and rubber tappers, which were also obtained through methods similar to those described for the ranchers.

I first examine rancher migration to Acre in relation to demographic and economic factors, and contextualize their actions within Brazilian history and the ideology of frontier settlement. I then analyze rancher political and economic relationships with subordinate rural groups. Perspectives of these groups (cowboys, rubber tappers, and colonists) are compared to show how the rancher embodies elite status in Acre. From the perceptions of other rural groups, which associate the rancher with positive social attributes, to the international view of them as “villains,” I delve deeper into the histories of individual ranchers. The idea of “work” is central to the ways that ranchers perceive themselves and are perceived by other groups; analyzing work, then, allows for us to better understand the ways that the ranchers position themselves in relation to other groups, Brazilian history, and local and global political debates about the environment.

**Rancher Migration to Acre**

Chico is one of Acre’s most successful and respected ranchers. Although there is no prototypical rancher, he exhibits many of the characteristics that subordinate groups and popular perceptions associate with the rancher. In this section, I use Chico’s experiences and perspective, which echo those of many other ranchers, to examine rancher migration to Acre in relation to economic, demographic, political, and ideological factors.
Chico’s ancestors came from northern Portugal and struck out for what was then the wilderness of Brazil in search of gold.¹ About 150 years ago, his great-grandfather decided to settle down in the fertile mountains of southern Minas Gerais, a land of dairy cattle and, more recently, coffee. Generations of his family prospered on this generous land.

By the time Chico and other now-Acrean ranchers came of age, they were parts of established, economically secure, and often wealthy families. Their economic standing was derived from the land, usually cattle (mostly for milk production), agriculture, as well as related commercial enterprises. With each generation, however, there was less available land due to a process that Chico calls “land reform made in the bed” -- the division of parent’s land between their children, eventually reducing large landholdings to smaller plots.

After Chico graduated from college with a degree in agronomy, he was eager to get to work building a future for himself, but he knew that he would have to seek his fortune somewhere else, as there was not enough land in his homeland to sustain him and the family he hoped to have one day. Similarly, many other Acrean ranchers felt that they would not be able to achieve an equal or better standard of living than their parents if they stayed in the center-south of Brazil.

In the 1970s ranchers began arriving in Amazonia to establish cattle ranches with the aid of generous fiscal incentives offered by the Brazilian military government (Hecht 1993). The Acrean state, headed by Governor Wanderley Dantas (1971-1975), courted

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¹ Portions of this account on Chico were originally published in the article “Pioneers came late to the Brazilian frontier,” which appeared in the San Angelo Standard-Times on April 3, 2010, as part of the series “Postcards from the Amazon.”
investors from the south, and facilitated the sale of the vast rubber estates to the ranchers (Bakx 1988). In 1980, Chico sold his *fusca* (Volkswagen Beatle) to help finance his journey, and set out for Acre with his cousin, Lui, a veterinarian. They initially planted rubber trees with the help of loans and subsidies from the government. After the rubber plantation succumbed to disease, Chico entered the cattle industry, which he had always intended to do at some point.

In addition to demographic and economic factors, rancher migration to Acre must be understood in relation to Brazilian history and the ideology of frontier settlement. Ranchers often relate their migration to Amazonia to a sense of patriotic duty to bring Amazonia under control and make it productive, a perspective reinforced politically and ideologically by the military government’s efforts to colonize Amazonia (Schmink and Wood 1992).

The decision by many ranchers to come to Amazonia was also related to their understanding of history. Many recalled the migration of their ancestors from Europe in search of a better life, which they achieved through hard work, and often great suffering.² Back in Chico’s hometown in Minas Gerais, his sister gave me a detailed history of the family genealogy, explaining how their ancestors had come to Rio de Janeiro from Portugal at the end of the seventeenth century. Chico’s migration to Amazonia was seen as the next step in taming the frontier and extending their pioneer

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² *Paulista* is the Brazilian word for a person from São Paulo state, but in Acre it is used to describe anyone from the central-south, and is often applied large scale ranchers independent of their home state. *Sulista*, or southerner is also used in a similar way to describe ranchers, but may also refer to people from southern Brazil.
heritage, as his ancestors had done before: first as bandeirantes, and then as settlers in the interior of Minas Gerais.³

Many ranchers see their actions in Amazonia as part of a broader historical narrative about bringing progress and development to the wilderness, a process that continues to be retold in romantic terms for other, previous Brazilian frontiers. Some ranchers see their migration to Amazonia in heroic terms similar to the pioneers of the North American West. As the ranchers have bitterly discovered, the colonization of the Amazon, unlike the American West, was not retold in romantic westerns with good cowboys and bad Indians, or in textbooks in which the hard-working pioneers laid the foundation for American cultural uniqueness and economic power. Instead, news images of the Amazon in the 1980s were real and raw, and showed just what went into staking one’s claim on the frontier—vast expanses of forests burning to the ground, pistoleiros gunning down those who dared defend their land, and white cattle grazing on grasses sprouting from charred earth.

Global environmentalist perspectives that would come to redefine the Amazon frontier emerged only after Chico and others came to Acre pursuing their destiny. The words “pioneer” or “trailblazer,” which might have been used for Chico in a different time and place, are not used in Acre. Instead, Amazonian ranchers are often called villains, deforesters, and enemies of nature and the poor. I will discuss these negative perceptions of the ranchers, and the ways that the ranchers understand themselves in

³ The Brazilian term bandeirante literally means “followers of the banner,” or “scout,” and is sometimes used interchangeably with “pioneer.” According to Moog, these two national icons are fundamentally different, with the bandeirantes representative of conquest, and the pioneer of colonization (Moog 1994).
relation to global environmentalism later, but first I analyze rancher relationships with other groups, and the ways that other groups perceive the ranchers.

**Rancher Economic and Political Relationships with Subordinate Groups**

The ranchers have greater economic and political power in relation to subordinate rural groups: cowboys, colonists, and rubber tappers. Class relations in Acre demonstrate a fluidity that defies dichotomous Marxist classifications between elite producers and oppressed workers because much of the rural lower class has access to land. The average rancher may have direct or indirect contact with these economically subordinate groups, often buying calves for fattening or renting pasturage. These arrangements bring greater financial benefit to the rancher than the smallholders, but the relationship between the two is not coerced or obligatory; it is but one of myriad options open to smallholders, who also obtain benefits, such as infrastructural improvements to their land, a “less stressful” form of livelihood, and a secure income. In some cases, the arrangement allows smallholders to use rancher investment in their land to make the transition to small scale, independent ranchers.

Cowboys, often former colonists and rubber tappers or their sons, form another category of rural subordinate group: proletarians selling their labor to the ranchers. Some cowboys might actually be considered rubber tappers or colonists when they return to their own or their relative’s land to work. The categorization is further complicated by the fact that many cowboys have rural origins, but were raised in the city. Their families may have moved to the city by choice, as a result of political and economic developments, or they could have been displaced, and thus alienated from the means of production, by ranchers as a result of land conflict in the 1970s and 1980s.
(Bakx 1988). In the case of the cowboys, there is a clearer relationship of domination, both historically, when they may have been forced from their lands by ranchers, and in the present, as wage laborers.

When ranchers began to arrive in Amazonia in the 1970s, they had a great deal of power—the ability to impose their will successfully on less powerful others (Schmink and Wood 1992: 13-14). The rancher’s power was greater within the socio-political context of the frontier, during which time he could pressure state entities to act on his behalf, especially against the socio-economically marginal rubber tappers (Bakx 1988; Keck 1995). The rancher was also backed at the time by the developmentalist ideology and policies of colonization, which saw the rancher’s work as the vehicle for “progress” and “development.”

The rubber tapper movement resisted rancher encroachment. Their protests culminated in the establishment of the extractive reserve in 1990, and beginning in 1999 the “forest government” made forest-based development and citizenship a keystone of its administration (Schmink 2011; Vadjunec et al. 2011a). As the ideological and policy foundations of developmentalism have been replaced by environmentalism, the ranchers complain that they have little influence in political matters, and that they are the victims of international and local campaigns to force them out of business.

The ranchers’ perception of their waning political power is not shared by other groups. The rubber tappers, as the face of environmentalism, should, in theory, have more political power during the administration of the forest government than ranchers, but this is not the reality they report. For the rubber tappers interviewed, the images and policies of the government do not translate into political empowerment. They have
not come close to achieving a socioeconomic status approximating that of the rancher, and all groups admit that it is “money that commands,” and gets political results.

According to one rubber tapper: “If I go to the mayor’s office to speak with her I could wait in line all day. If a rancher comes in, he goes straight to her office.” Subordinate groups feel that the ranchers have a great deal of power due to their ability to subvert sanctions or gain political favors through informal channels. As the rubber tapper’s quote illustrates, rancher dominance is based on perceptions that subordinate groups have of elites, but these perceptions are given specificity and cemented through daily interactions.

In social settings, ranchers exhibit cues of class distinction, and a jeito, or way of interacting with people, which combines an ease of social interaction and macho jocularity with the commanding and no-nonsense style of a person of power. When smallholders imitate ranchers, they stride purposefully with their elbows out, and bark orders. The rancher’s high social position is assumed to flow from such a “no-nonsense” approach, which, combined with their access to political favors, can be used to dominate less powerful groups.

Historically, rancher dominance was achieved through violence, coercion, or through the implicit support of the government. In areas of where there was land conflict, smallholders report that rancher power is now exercised in a more indirect manner, with the ranchers remaining at the top of the rural hierarchy as a result of their wealth, which allows them to manipulate political officials to achieve favorable outcomes.
Ranchers deny that they received preferential treatment, and go out of their way to cite instances when they were specifically targeted by governmental officials for environmental and labor violations. Despite the fact that all groups could be found guilty of such offenses, the ranchers feel that they are targeted because of their high visibility properties in the countryside, which give the impression of wealth, and are more easily monitored and accessed by government officials. Although smallholders think that wealth allows the ranchers to avoid sanctions through payoffs to governmental officials, the ranchers feel that their wealth makes them the easiest target for these officials to make a political example or to receive a payoff that is worth their time and effort, unlike with most smallholders, who may have difficulty paying fines or bribes.

Ranchers are also at a moral and ideological disadvantage because of their high social status, which pits them ideologically against “the workers,” and local and international perceptions that view them as criminals associated with deforestation. Smallholders may defend themselves against environmental violations in the name of providing food for their family, and thus be viewed somewhat sympathetically, but wealthy ranchers have no such moral high ground to stand on. Later in this chapter, I will examine how both groups use the concept of “work,” which is expressed through the conversion of forest to pastures or agriculture, to defend their unique socioeconomic positions. I first return to the task of exploring the ways that rancher dominance is expressed socially, by describing an “elite cattle auction.”

**An Elite Cattle Auction**

On Saturdays during the dry season months of May through August, ranchers put on elaborate auctions to sell off their pure-bred “elite” bulls and cows. A *leilão de gado elite* (elite cattle auction) offers a chance to observe: the way that elite status is
constructed and reinforced in social settings; the relationship between imported elite cattle and migrant elite ranchers; social relations between high and low status groups; and gradations of elite status within the rancher group.

One at a time, prodigious white bulls burst onto the stage from a little red door that leads in from the pens out back. Their entrance is trumpeted by the choruses of famous sertaneja songs, and instrumental riffs from Europe’s “The Final Countdown” and Van Halen’s “Jump.” The announcer, from his perch high above the stage and the crowd, booms on about the bull: “Reprodutor grande! Raça fina!” (Great reproducer! Fine lineage or breed!).

Often the bulls just stand there staring at the sea of people in front of them. A cowboy on a skinny ledge ten feet above the stage jabs at the bull’s hump, haunches, and face with a long pole, which gets the bull bucking, and kicking up clouds of dirt that waft over the crowd below. When properly riled up, the bulls do not look up at the cowboy, but instead charge forward, and their behemoth heads and horns sometimes get stuck in the reinforced fencing. The crowd leans back a little bit in their chairs.

The spectators and potential buyers sit around square plastic tables. The ranchers often push their tables together, making a long line on the right side of the arena. These “grandes” of Acrean ranching, the fazendeiros, sometimes pay careful attention to the bulls, or they may laugh and talk with their friends, absently holding up their empty glasses. Waiters in black vests and bowties scurry to refill their whisky, beer, and soft drinks. The ranchers take bites of steak and sausage with little toothpicks, dipping the morsels into piles of dry farinha (manioc flour).
When a new bull enters, the ranchers may study their auction booklets, scrutinizing the potential quality of the bull, from its family lineage and growth rate, to its scrotum circumference, a measure of productivity. Some of auction cattle were created using the frozen semen of long deceased, legendary bulls, whose names are printed in the family tree going back several generations. The cattle offered at the auctions are P.O., *puro origem* (pure origin) Nellore breed undiluted by inferior stock, and they may sell for up to 14,000 reais (US $8,880).

There are also weekday auctions, which the ranchers may attend if they need a “lot” of calves for quick fattening, but they will often send their *gerentes*, or foremen to buy for them. The breeding stock at the weekday auctions is not “elite;” it is comprised of mixed-race cattle, gradations of the white Nellore, and the Acrean *tucura*, a smaller, but highly resistant animal with stringier meat that was common before the arrival of the white cattle.

At the long rancher table, there are little groups related to place of origin and family connections; those from different cities in São Paulo and Minas Gerais sit together. The host rancher’s cowboys, mostly native Acreans, and their families may attend these auctions, but they generally sit apart. A group of newer ranchers, both native Acreans and migrants who have had success in business and bought ranches within the past decade, also sit apart, at the smaller tables. There are also people at the auctions who have no intention of buying cattle and own no land. These men say that they just enjoy seeing the beautiful animals, and mention that the free food and drink doesn’t hurt. These groups may mix with the traditional ranchers, but the ranchers usually come to their table, not the other way around. When a rancher arrives, the
seated individual rises quickly to shake their hand, bowing a little before extending their hand.

The ranchers are an exclusive group that fulfils the local characteristics of an elite class with their whiteness, southern origin, smooth hands, and their display of wealth and expectation of deference from socially subordinate classes. In the span of recent decades, the ranchers, along with their cattle, have been built into Acrean social hierarchy and popular perception as an elite stock imported from outside that is more “productive” than the mixed-race, highly adapted Acrean native. The waiters take their special requests while absentlv pouring for others; the new ranchers bow ever so slightly when approached by them. This sort of treatment, apparent in numerous other social interactions, shows how eliteness is both expressed and reinforced socially. We can now compare the extent to which different rural groups believe that these and other characteristics apply to the ranchers.

**Perceptions of the Rancher**

On the most basic level, to be a rancher is to own a great deal of cattle and land. Individuals owning 5000 hectares of land and 5000 head of cattle are clearly *fazendeiros*, but the threshold for *fazendeiro* classification varies, with colonists and rubber tappers placing the minimum at 2000 and 1000 head, respectively. Number of head of cattle is the key identifier, but to be a *fazendeiro* in the eyes of all, one also must fulfill a series of characteristics that indicate economic power and a historical association with the upper strata of society.

After conducting participant observation, interviews, and casual conversations from 2007-2009 with members of each group, it became apparent that the ranchers
were most commonly associated with whiteness, wealth, southern origin, and a separation from labor. In 2010, I constructed a survey to measure the extent to which different groups, with 20 respondents each group, agreed with such perceptions. Respondents were also asked about ranchers’ history of conflict, a feature that is not associated with elite status, but is commonly associated with Acrean ranchers. Results of the survey are presented in Table 6-1.

There is almost universal agreement across groups that ranchers are not dark-skinned or mixed race. This statement was reversed from the way that it was originally uttered ("ranchers are white") to avoid respondent bias. Despite this reversal of the statement, there was still over 95% agreement in each group.

It was commonly agreed across subordinate rural groups that the ability to travel outside of Acre indicates high social status. Travel was often listed as a characteristic of the rancher “good life,” which also included a new truck, a nice house in the city, a beautiful wife, and drinking whiskey. At least 90% of respondents in each group agreed that ranchers can travel outside of Acre every year.

All rubber tappers and 90% of colonists agreed that ranchers come from outside of Acre. Ranchers and their cowboys agreed less with this statement. By and large, native Acreans consider themselves more racially “mixed” or “darker” compared to the paulistas, who are associated with whiteness. Compared to the geographically isolated state of Acre, southern origin is also associated with a connection to the economic and cultural centers of Brazil. Although Acreans are very proud of their state, it is generally agreed that roots in southern Brazil are socially desirable.
Migrants are also associated with conflict with native Acreans during the 1970s and 1980s. Eighty-nine percent of rubber tappers, the group that felt the brunt of these land contests, agreed that ranchers caused conflict. Seventy-percent of colonists agreed with the conflict statement, but only 55% of ranchers and cowboys agreed.

In these migrant and conflict categories, ranchers and cowboys, who are linked to the ranchers through employment, agree less with the statements than rubber tappers and colonists. On items that are more clearly related to social status (whiteness, travel), there is high agreement across groups. Subordinate groups, with the exception of the cowboys, also link the ranchers with conflict. This is not in and of itself a reflection of status, but does attest to the broader history of the ranchers in the region, and previews one of the ways that they are viewed negatively. These indicators of status can be more fully fleshed out through a discussion of smooth hands, which provide a window into the ways that high status is constructed locally in relation to Brazilian concepts of the fazendeiro.

**Separation from Labor and Smooth Hands**

The ranchers sit at the top of the rural social hierarchy in Acre. This is mostly related to their wealth, which is produced through cattle. Rancher status is also related to subordinate groups’ perceptions that the rancher does not “work,” but commands labor in the form of wage laborers, most commonly cowboys, and is thus a part of an elite landed class.

Although the Acrean fazendeiro is exclusively a rancher, the category of fazendeiro is a national one with deep historical roots, and most generally means large scale landowner. Historically, the fazendeiro maintained a distance from the toils of labor, thus adding to his prestige and status as a sort of landed gentry (Wagley 1971).
With the transition from rubber to cattle economy, the ranchers assumed the dominant rural position of the *seringalista* (rubber baron), and many former rubber tappers became cowboys. On many occasions, I heard ranchers addressed as *patrão*, which means “boss;” the term still used by rubber tappers when talking about the old rubber barons.

The distinction between elite landowner and worker is imprinted on the hands. Calloused hands are seen as a connection to work, and a connection with the land. Maintaining “fine” hands demonstrates that one is above physical labor and makes a living by thinking, or commanding the labor of others. In greetings, these differences are apparent in the meeting of rough and smooth hands, which along with other contextual evidence, such as clothing, race, and material possessions, indicates a life of labor or the command of labor, or working with the body or the mind (see Schmink 1982: 350).

Table 6.1 shows that only 32% of rubber tappers think that a rancher has calloused hands. Only 10% of cowboys, the groups that has the most direct contact with ranchers, think that the ranchers have calloused hands. These findings indicate that in the minds of some rural groups, the ranchers are strongly associated with the command of labor. The *fazendeiros*, of whom only 25% said that a rancher has calloused hands, also subscribe to this vision of themselves.

Alternatively, a high percentage of colonists (70%) think that the rancher has calloused hands. This indicates a disagreement in what constitutes a rancher. Through the acquisition of neighboring landholdings, some colonists have amassed enough land and cattle to be considered *fazendeiros*. This same colonist—turned-
fazendeiro might not be considered a fazendeiro by the rubber tappers, who do not interact with fazendeiros as much, and thus have a more idealized representation of them as elites who command labor. For many people, being a rancher means not only commanding labor and owning land and cattle in the present, but having done so throughout one’s life as a landed elite, and “self made” ranchers are not accorded the same level of prestige as the patrão. Native Acreans often assume that ranchers with southern origins come from a legacy of rural wealth and privilege, but, as the following profiles of Acrean ranchers will show, there is a great deal of variation within the rancher category.

**Diversity of rancher origins and trajectories**

Most ranchers came to Acre in the late 1970s and early ‘80s from south-central Brazil. They were young when they came, in their 20s and 30s. In the south, many were wealthy, coming from agricultural and ranching families, or professional classes dealing with these fields. Others came with little, and made their fortune in Acre. What follows is a basic description of twenty ranchers in terms of state origin, social class, and motivation for migrating to Acre.

Of the twenty ranchers interviewed for this study, only four were the descendents of affluent ranching families in the center-south who came to Acre with the purpose of extensive cattle ranching. Cicero and Ronei are descended from a long line of ranchers in western São Paulo, and each has built up herds of over 100,000 head of cattle on their various ranches in Acre. Ronei spends half the year in São Paulo, but Cicero resides mostly in Acre. The first ranch that Ronei created was run by his sister for a number of years, until her son Oneto, who was trained in civil engineering, took it over a
few years ago. Vatapá also comes from a long line of paulista ranchers. His father established the ranches that he now runs.

Three ranchers, Zedo of São Paulo state, and cousins Chico and Lui of Minas Gerais, also came from traditional landowning families in the center-south, but their family’s lands had been subdivided to the point that their prospects were limited in their homelands. Enticed by government incentives, they came to Acre, not to raise cattle, but to plant rubber trees. After disease destroyed their plantations, they received similar government incentives to raise cattle. Chico, trained in agronomy, is credited with finding the right mix of grasses for the Acrean climate, and Lui, a veterinarian, has been instrumental in improving the breeding stock. Zedo makes most of his income from urban real estate.

Another group of ranchers were not affluent or members of traditional landowning families prior to migrating to Acre. They used capital from the sale of land, or savings acquired through business ventures or a professional career, to finance the purchase of land and cattle. David and Ronaldo were both small scale agriculturalists in their respective homelands of Bahia and Minas Gerais. They sold their properties, and with the money they were able to buy relatively cheap land in Acre, and began raising cattle. Lissero came to Acre to work in a government bank, and then invested in ranching after

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4 Ranching tends to be dominated by men, but I know of two exceptions to this rule. Oneto’s mother was the only female rancher that I ever met, and she was no longer active in the ranching business. Another female rancher, “Lydia,” was the stuff of legend in upper Acre. I never met her, but according to multiple accounts by colonists and relatives that lived near her ranch, she rode out to work with the cowboys with a gun on her hip. She was considered to be extremely violent, and it was said that she sometimes preferred to shoot cowboys instead of paying them. To this day, some cowboys and colonists said that they would not step foot on her ranch. Out of all of my research throughout upper Acre, Lydia was the only active rancher ever mentioned in association with violence. It should be mentioned that Lydia ran the ranch with her husband, who was also said to be prone to violence, but he was usually considered less of a threat than his wife.
seeing that it was profitable. Fausto came from Goiás to open the first motel in Acre. He bought a ranch recently, with money that he had saved up over the course of twenty years.

Although the *fazendeiro* category evokes parallels with landed gentry in other parts of Brazil, many ranchers came to Acre with humble beginnings. Migdario was born to a small farmer family in Pernambuco. He drove trucks for a living before settling in Acre. Tecides came as a cowboy and worked his way up the ranch hierarchy before acquiring his first piece of land with the help of his employer. Through profits accrued from the sale of smaller landholdings, he gradually acquired a large ranch. Tulire’s dad came to Acre to raise cattle and he now runs the family business. Julio’s father came from São Paulo “with nothing” and all of his sons now have large ranches. Novis lives in the *colonía*, and he has gradually pieced together enough small properties throughout the settlement project to be considered a rancher.

There are also interesting cases of native Acreans turned *fazendeiros*. Moroldo is a physician who recently bought a ranch because it was a good investment, but he hates to be associated with “crude” ranchers. Almedo owns a gas station and recently bought a ranch. Melecio’s parents are from São Paulo, but he was born in Acre. He is a lawyer who is “*apaixonado*” (in love with) cattle raising and, with the help of his father, a politician, he bought a ranch. Chagão is from the neighboring state of Amazonas, and actually tapped rubber when he was growing up. He worked in the oil industry for most of his career, opened a gas station in Rio Branco, and he then bought a ranch with his savings.
All of these ranchers now have high socioeconomic status because they own a great deal of cattle, but many of them came from humble origins, or acquired their initial wealth through means other than cattle. Although they present contradictions to the list of attributes of the idealized fazendeiro, they are all considered white; I still have not met a rancher that would be classified as moreno. Sixteen of the ranchers were born outside of Acre, and 12 out of 20 came from the center-south. None of them admitted to having any role in land conflict with other groups, emphasizing the inherent confusion of the situation in which they bought land, and then had to find ways to come to terms with the rubber tappers, who also had rights to the land. Based on shaking each of their hands, I would say that, compared to manual laborers, the majority of them have smooth hands.

Ranchers and Work

Regardless of the extent to which they engage in manual labor, the ranchers, much like smallholder groups, employ a discourse of “work” that is central to their class-based identity. For smallholders, the need to work is a basic right, one which was instilled in them through personal experience (Porro 2002). This perspective is also based on biblical understandings of the social function of land, and its fundamental importance for producing food (Schmink and Wood 1992: 181). The transformation of the land through work was also reinforced by developmentalist policies that encouraged smallholder migrants to demonstrate productivity through cultivation. Many colonists, whose agricultural pursuits have been severely curtailed or discontinued as a result of deforestation and burn bans in Acre, feel fundamentally offended that they no longer are able to “work.”
The ranchers tap into many of these discourses when defending their large landholdings. In order to understand the rancher position, it is necessary to understand their definitions of highly meaningful words: *terra* (land) and *trabalho* (work). When responding to questions about how much land they own, ranchers will usually ask if you want them to include “worthless” forests and reserves. For them, land is an area that is made to produce, either through agriculture or pasture. Only through “work,” through the conversion of forest to cultivated and productive spaces, is “land” produced.

After driving through Lissero’s property and learning how many cows a hectare of land could support, and thus the value of each unit of land per year, we drove into one of his reserves, a government mandated area of forest that must be maintained. Once in the forest, he told me to look around and asked me what I saw. After I responded, “the forest,” he asked me: “Do you know how much I make from this forest each year?” Although he had his forest reserve on a 25 year selective logging regime, the income it generated was paltry in comparison with pasture, and he lamented that he would never see this part of his land “produce.”

Lissero is the head of an organization that has been fighting for revisions to Brazil’s forest code, which currently requires that ranchers and colonists maintain 80% of their land as forest reserve. In framing an argument against the forest code, which they consider oppressive and unjust, the ranchers often use a discourse that relies heavily on social and historical notions of work.

Their use of the word work is not based on their own physical labor, but on their actions, which produce food. Oneto has a bumper sticker on his truck that says: “*Já comeu hoje? Agradeça a um fazendeiro.*” (Did you eat today? Thank a rancher). On
another occasion, Migdalio, the truck driver-turner-rancher, asked me: “What do people eat that doesn’t come from the earth? Where does Marina’s food come from?”\(^5\)  

The ranchers feel that they provide an essential service to society, and that their work is inhibited by environmental regulations.

While some continue to actively fight environmental regulations, others are confident that more “reasonable” laws will be established because their work provides a greater social benefit than forest preservation. As Chico put it:

> There are one billion people in the world now living in hunger and the world’s population continues to grow. They call the Amazon the “lungs of the world” because of the forest, but maybe we need to also think about the “stomach of the world”—all those hungry people. Here we can produce the food that the world needs.

Many ranchers consider themselves to be the true environmental conservationists in the region because, although their way of living requires them to transform forest into pastures, they are forced to maintain much of their land in forest reserves. Based on this way of viewing land and work, most ranchers do not consider the rubber tapper’s forest extractivism to be “work.” It is said that the rubber tappers are not preserving the forest because they live off of the forest. Environmental legislation that limits “work” is also considered to be highly objectionable by the ranchers, as can be seen through a discussion on the political legacy of rubber tapper leader Chico Mendes.

### Perspectives on Chico Mendes

In the months preceding his assassination, Chico Mendes increasingly felt a sense of impending doom, and was certain that he would be killed. By this point he was an international figure in the environmental movement, and the rubber tappers were

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5 He was referring to Acre native Marina Silva, a former rubber tapper leader and Brazil’s Minister of the Environment from 2003-2008.
gaining significant ground in their attempts to secure rights to their land in the form of the extractive reserve system, a novel tenure system based on their forest extractivist way of life. Mendes and the rubber tappers had recently put a stop to convicted criminal and rancher Darly Alves da Silva's attempts to appropriate traditional rubber tapper lands in the *Seringal Cachoeira* (Revkin 1990).

On December 23, 1988, Chico Mendes was murdered in his home by Alves’ son. In an interview with the national program *Fantástico* 20 years after Mendes' assassination, Darly attempted to defend and exonerate himself to Faustão, the program host, saying: “*Ninguém matou Chico Mendes. Quem se matou foi ele mesmo.*” (No one killed Chico Mendes; he killed himself).6

Undoubtedly, in the process of moving from a real man to an international icon and then a martyr, a biography is subject to change, but some of the ways that Chico Mendes is remembered by some Acreans (including non-ranchers) reveals the contentiousness of his legacy. Examining these counter-discourses is revealing, for it points to the centrality of oppositions between cattle culture and environmentalism in society, and the perception that Chico Mendes made them worse.

Ranchers are slow to bring up Mendes, but when they do, they are passionate.7 They usually say that they knew him and that “he was nothing like you in the U.S. think.”


7 No ranchers defend Darly. They say that he was a criminal before he even got to Acre, and that there are always a few bad apples. Every rancher interviewed said that they and the majority of other ranchers tried to be fair with people that lived on the land that they bought. They either let them stay or “paid them a fair price for their land.” No one has said that they forced anyone off the land. Some have offered for me to come and speak with the former tappers (many have become small-medium cattle raisers) that continue to reside on rancher-owned land.
He was a “vagabundo” (bum), a “drunk”, and a “rabble rouser,” who searched for “confusão” -- he tried to create problems. He tried to make money, not through honest work, but by manipulating the tapper movement to target the ranchers and attract international attention.

Ranchers have explained Darly’s statement to me as meaning that Mendes should have known not to interfere in the affairs of others. To them, Mendes was not a hero who acted in the name the forest or the rubber tappers who live there, but rather an aggressor who would threaten another’s ability to “provide for his family” -- the ultimate insult for a number of ranchers. One rancher said about Chico Mendes: “It is all a myth. He was a vagabundo. Anyone can start a problem, but it is hard to solve one. Interfering, keeping a man from working is bad, real bad.” Presented in this way, a conscious invocation of the working class ideal of work, Mendes did not “work,” and through his insistence on saving the forest he inhibited the ability of others to work. His actions are seen as an affront to ideological claims of progress and development, which are expressed through “work,” turning raw nature in something that produces.

**Ranchers and the End of the Frontier**

Many ranchers feel that the rubber tapper history has been turned into a fairy tale, and is used by “them” to justify the shackling of the Acrean economy for “their own personal benefit.” When pressed to explain how conservation benefits “them” and who “they” are, things get fuzzy for most interviewees. Some of the groups that are blamed for rancher difficulties are: the current state and national government; academics and environmentalists; the Catholic Church in the 1970-80s; international conservation
entities and their Brazilian puppet NGOs; North American businesses; and the liberal media based out of Rio de Janeiro.

Ranchers lament that their children will not have the opportunity to improve their lives through ranching as they have. They attribute this to the same spatial/demographic pressures ("no room to grow") that they faced, but with the additional and forcefully expressed opinion that these limitations are artificial, by which they mean political in nature (e.g. enforcement of deforestation regulations). Amazonia’s inability to “progress” is the result of self-interested politicians who promote conservation to enrich themselves, on state and national levels. The politicians are also viewed as acting against the best interests of the nation by stifling the ranchers’ ability to produce affordable food.

The ranchers contrast their frustrated ambitions in Amazonia with American westward expansion, in which there were few limitations, and the nation and people subsequently prospered. Nonetheless, they also resent the gringos, whose actions toward Amazonia are not motivated by an authentic concern with the environment, but are rather indicative of international powers that “have theirs and don’t want us to have ours.” Local and national officials are thought to be in the pockets of these international entities.

From this critical perspective, countries like the United States fear Brazil rising to its potential and joining them as world powers, decreasing American-European hegemony in the process. Members of all groups, from rubber tappers with limited contact with the outside world or formal education to intellectuals at the Federal University, express similar criticism toward developed countries, whom they perceive as
using conservation to veil their imperialist plans. By tapping into the discourse of work, and aligning themselves with a nationalistic stance in which they are doing what is best for the nation and benefitting all sectors of Brazilian society, the ranchers seek to diminish their class distinction and “villain” label, and give themselves a moral ground from which to oppose environmental legislation.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has examined rancher history and ideology, and analyzed their current perspectives as the dominant rural group, who feel unjustly constrained by environmental regulations. The designation of the ranchers at the apex of the rural social hierarchy is related to subordinate groups’ perceptions that they have both wealth and political power. The ranchers contest these designations of themselves, pointing to their disfavor in the halls of state power, and the ways that they are unjustly targeted by government officials for violations of environmental regulations.

Despite their protestations, the ranchers exhibit behaviors that are associated with high status as observed by subordinate groups in social situations. The ranchers fit into these categories by exhibiting elite cultural symbols and behaviors (e.g. new truck, nice house in city, drinking whisky). By maintaining distance from manual labor (smooth hands) and commanding the labor of others, they fulfill characteristics historically associated with the traditional landowning classes on a national (*fazendeiro*) and local (*seringalista*) level. Although all ranchers are considered to have high social status and to be above physical labor, they are a diverse group comprised of both landed elites and persons of more humble origins.
In general, rancher and subordinate group perspectives are similar in that they view work as essential. This perspective is informed by biblical and developmentalist ideas of land, work, and productivity, which may be shared across upper and lower class sectors, and especially among migrant groups. The rancher's class position, however, is defined in large part by their separation from physical labor, which puts them in opposition to the working class.

Ranchers seek to demonstrate that they do, in fact, work, by pointing to what they produce. Subordinate groups also see work in terms of production, but their focus is on physical labor that leads to production. Ranchers use the concept of work as production to oppose environmental legislation by framing beef production in terms of its positive social function. Ranchers say that by producing a large amount of food more effectively than smallholders, they increase access to affordable foods among the lower classes, and also benefit the national economy by increasing food security.

Because rubber tappers live in the forest, and do not produce clearly cultivated spaces, it is sometimes said that they do not actually work, and thus environmentalism is associated with laziness. The political legacy of the rubber tapper movement inhibits the ability of the ranchers to work, which many of them take as a very serious offense. The ranchers do not see the forest as a positive space because it holds little economic value, and they are skeptical of environmental conservation, which they often see as a façade used by politicians, from local to international levels, for their own personal gain.

The ranchers are an elite group that once exercised economic and political power with the backing of ideology and policy. They no longer enjoy these benefits, but they have remained dominant over subordinate groups, despite the ascendance of a
subordinate group in symbolic, ideological, and policy terms. This indicates that subordinate groups will likely remain subordinate on the local level if their economic standing does not improve, because all groups agree that economic power translates into political power.

The elite group fights to maintain the material basis of its wealth by emphasizing their participation in the process of working and producing, which unites them in some senses with the working class, and demonstrates the social benefit of their economic activities. They hope that the resonance of their discourse will lead to the revision of oppressive policies, which would allow them to expand their wealth and secure their elite status for generations to come, thus repeating the historical processes that first led many of them to this land, and their ancestors to previous frontiers.
Table 6-1. Comparison of percentage of social groups agreeing with characteristics of ranchers (“Most ranchers…”)  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>are moreno (dark-skinned, not white)</th>
<th>can travel outside of Acre every year</th>
<th>come from outside Acre</th>
<th>caused conflict in the past</th>
<th>have calloused hands</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rubber Tappers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonists</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranchers</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cowboys</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 7
THE RISE OF CATTLE CULTURE: DIFFUSION, APPROPRIATION, AND PARTICIPATION

Cattle began to arrive in the state of Acre, Brazil in the 1970s, triggering native rubber tappers to defend their forest and way of life in the name of environmental conservation and social justice (Keck 1995). This small state in the western Amazon captured the world’s attention, and has become an important site in the search for sustainable alternatives to environmentally destructive cattle ranching (Kainer et al. 2003; Vadjunec et al. 2011). Yet, amidst the testaments to rubber tapper cultural legacy and the signs denoting the policy initiatives of the state “forest” government, a growing number of country-themed bars and clothing stores, and rodeo arenas have emerged in the capital of Rio Branco, and throughout the upper Acre region. These expressions of “cattle culture,” based on the ranching practices and traditions, go hand in hand with the explosive growth of the Acrean cattle industry in the past decade. The focus of cattle culture, however, is not the vaqueiro or the northeast, or the gaúcho of the southern Brazil, but rather the cauboi (cowboy) and his vida contra (country lifestyle).

My aim in this paper is to draw out the origins and paths of diffusion that have given rise to Acrean cattle culture, to analyze the reasons that it has taken hold in this unlikely place, and compare the extent that different groups, from cowboys to environmentalists, participate in cattle culture. I define cattle culture as a cultural domain in which a cattle-based vision of rural life is valued above other forms of rural livelihood. Cattle culture includes both perceptions and participation, but here I focus only on participation. This paper is structured to gradually narrow the scope of analysis from a historical and continental perspective to the present-day actions of distinct Acrean social groups. In addition to drawing out linkages between scales, each level of
analysis introduces a concept that builds towards an understanding of Acrean cattle
culture: direct and indirect diffusion, appropriation, and participation.

The Diffusion of Cattle Cultures in Brazil

Iberian cattle arrived in the Americas in 1494, and were spread to present-day
Mexico in 1521, and to other parts of North and South America over the next century
(Dary 1981; Jordan 1993). The techniques and cultural features of cattle raising in the
Americas drew on common Iberian roots, but became distinguishable as cattle raisers
adapted to novel ecological, political, and economic contexts (Butzer 1988). Rich
cultures developed around the practice of raising cattle, from huasos and gauchos of
the Southern cone to charros and vaqueros of Mexico and cowboys of North America
(Slatta 1990). These American cattle cultures share broad structural similarities due to
their common dedication to cattle ranching: an ecologic-economic pattern characterized
by market-orientation, extensive scale, and use of proletarian cowboys to work cattle
(Strickon 1965).

In Brazil, there are two main regional cowboy traditions: the vaqueiros of the arid
northeast and gaúchos of the southern campanha (pampas or temperate grasslands).
Environmental differences between these regions produced not only unique forms of
dress, but also distinct characters:

The southern gaúcho, upon meeting the vaqueiro...would look him over
commiseratingly. The northern cowboy is his very antithesis. The former,
denizen of the boundless plains...finds his environment friendly and
fascinating...he is not saddened by periodic scenes of devastation and
misery. The clothes he wears are holiday garb compared to vaqueiros’
rustic garments (da Cunha 1944: 92-93).

Secondary cattle cultures developed as gaúchos and vaqueiros migrated and
adapted their practices to novel contexts. Migrants from the Northeast brought cattle
raising to the savanna region of Roraima, in northern Amazonia. In their transition from the desert to the savanna they “they discarded the traditional leather clothing which, while so essential among the thorn bushes of the *catinga*, is barely necessary on the open plains” (Rivière 1972: 35).

In other cases of migration, culturally defined modes of dress remained. For example, cattle raising in the Brazilian *pantanal* is the result of *gaúcho* migration and adaptation to the seasonal floodplains (Mazza *et al.* 1994). The *gaúcho* tradition of drinking hot *herba maté* tea (chimarrão), along with its social function and code of etiquette, were maintained by *pantaneiros*, who take their tea cold, as *tereré*, in response to the hot climate of the *pantanal*. *Vaqueiro* and *gaúcho* forms of dress emerged as adaptations to environmental constraints, and were again adapted in subsequent migrations to the *pantanal* and the savannas of Roraima.

These accounts of cultural diffusion, which focus on material culture, provide a means of contextualizing the history of Brazilian cattle cultures, showing the diversity of cattle cultures that emerge in response to environmental constraints, and establishing linkages between regions. However, these regional traditions have exerted limited influence in Acre, and adaptation has played a limited role in the formation of Acrean cattle culture. It is thus necessary to look at the specific processes that brought cattle and cattle raisers to the western Amazon in the 1970s, as well as connections beyond the borders of Brazil.

**Direct Diffusion: Paulista Migration to Acre**

Most large scale Acrean ranchers came from the center-south region of Brazil, particularly the states of São Paulo and Minas Gerais, and are referred to as *sulistas* (southerners) or *paulistas* (natives of São Paulo state). *Paulista* ranchers played a
significant role in establishing of economic and technical infrastructure necessary for the cattle ranching industry in Acre, paving the way for the subsequent spread of cattle and cattle culture throughout the region.

Cicero, one of Acre’s largest ranchers, was raised in a town in western São Paulo famous for its cattle and horse raising traditions. The King Ranch of Texas operated for many years in the area (Lea 1957), and Cicero reported that North American cattle raisers were influential in the development of the modern cattle industry. Cicero augmented his cattle raising techniques working with Americans in the 1960s, and also participated in American-style rodeo competitions. His home office is adorned with numerous trophies that his sons earned in roping competitions organized with the help of the foreigners. When Cicero migrated to Acre, he brought plans for a cattle ranch, as well as a love of rodeo, which he has passed down to his grandchildren, who spend their evenings practicing rodeo events on the outskirts of Rio Branco. Through his training of Native Acreans as cowboys to work on his ranch, he spread both technical skills and an interest in rodeo.

Native Acreans were trained to work paulista ranches in the tradition of the central-southern peão. The majority of smallholders in Acre came from the southern and northeastern Brazil, areas where cattle raising was associated with gaúchos and vaqueiros, respectively. Often landless in their homelands, these migrants were not strongly associated with their regional cattle traditions. In Acre, they exerted less influence over the development of Acrean cattle culture than did the wealthy paulista ranchers.
Indirect Diffusion and the Creation of the Cauboi

The Acrean version of the cowboy will most commonly refer to himself as a *peão* (peon), a term applied to proletarian cowboys throughout Brazil, or a *cauboi*, derived from the English word “cowboy.” Both the *peão* and the *cauboi* look like a North American cowboy, with boots, tight jeans, a cowboy hat, and a belt buckle. These identifiers provide a window into processes of cultural diffusion that result from direct contact with cattle raisers, but also point to the circulation of broader influences emanating from outside of Brazil, specifically North America.

The town of Barretos, located in northern São Paulo state, has been the focus of Brazilian beef production since the early 1900s. It was the site of a slaughterhouse and refrigeration plant, and thus, the end of the trail for cowboys driving their cattle to market. The cowboys entertained themselves by competing against each other in tests of skill, such as lassoing and horse riding, until the *Festa de Peão de Barretos*, (Barretos Cowboy Festival) based on traditional Brazilian competitions, was established in 1955 (Dent 2009: 7; Gonçalves and Iacomini 1997).

At the end of the 1980s, the growth in popularity of *sertaneja* music, which “combined the guitar of [North American] country music with the [Brazilian] *viola caipira* (“hillbilly” guitar)” inspired local businessmen to transform the *festa* into a “Texas tournament” (Gonçalves and Iacomini 1997). They hoped to attract middle class patrons who would never attend a “caipira” (hick or hillbilly) festival, but would happily come to a “country” event (*Ibid.*). The combining of Brazilian traditions with North American country and western influences created a new vision of the countryside in which consumers and country folk could celebrate rural tradition in the face of historical disdain for the backward “interior.”
A key component of cattle culture is *música sertaneja*, or Brazilian country music. According to Dent, the growth in popularity of *sertaneja* music coincided with the 1985 transition from dictatorship to a period of neoliberal economic and social reform (2009). During this time Brazilians increasingly began to use rural musical genres:

to fashion alternatives to the progress narratives that had been so essential during the dictatorship, especially those associated with urbanization, industrialization, and future-orientation (*ibid.*:8).

The longing for the rural life, although it has only recently taken center stage on a national level, is a common theme in the era of Brazilian modernization in which rural peoples have migrated to the megacities of Brazil. In southern Brazil, the *Gaúcho* Traditionalist Movement (MTG) emerged from intellectuals’ desire to reconnect with rural traditions. The MTG, “the largest popular culture movement in the world,” chose the *gaúcho* as the symbol of tradition, highlighting his rustic qualities in contrast to the social disintegration of modernization (Oliven 2000). The modernization critiqued in *sertaneja* music, the simpler past longed for by the members of the MTG, and positive representations of country life in rodeo, all resonate with Acreans for some of the same reasons, but also as a result of their unique history and the nature of their connection with the rest of Brazil. The case of Sorocaba illustrates some of these points.

**Acrean Appropriation of Cattle Culture**

There was a house in Rio Branco where *sertaneja* music often blared over the walls, penetrating the entire neighborhood. In front of this house a truck was often parked precariously on the sidewalk; multiple country-themes stickers were affixed to the back window saying things like: “Yes Cowboys” (a Brazilian country clothing store).

One day I decided to meet this person, who seemed to embody all things cattle culture. His name was Sorocaba. The first day we spoke, he was watching team-
penning competitions, a rodeo event, on his laptop, with music from his vast sertaneja collection playing in the background. Behind him, in the churrasqueira (an open-faced brick barbecue grill), a chunk of picanha (top sirloin) stuffed with sausage sizzled and dripped grease onto the charcoal below.

The love for the contri way of life, Sorocaba explained, came from a saudade (longing) for the rural life. These sentiments emerged when he first saw Pantanal, the first novela (soap opera) to explore rural themes. “It made a mark on me and an entire generation. It awoke in us an interest in the countryside,” he said.

Sorocaba drives a truck, wears boots and other contri clothing, and listens to sertaneja music. He drinks tereré every evening with his friends, often at the “Cowboys Ranch,” a country clothing store that opened up in 2010. Sorocaba and his friends have made the journey to the Barretos rodeo a few times in the past. After one of these trips, two of his friends decided that Acre needed a place to buy everything associated with the contri life. In 2010, they opened the Cowboys Ranch, and stocked it with moda contri (country fashion): cowboy boots and hats, tooled leather belts, belt buckles, and even smokeless tobacco.

In the evenings, Sorocaba and his friends head to the “Ranch” to sip tereré. Sometimes they gather on the showroom floor and lasso miniature metal bulls, talking about their work and exchanging news about the latest developments in contri music, fashion, and local events. The last time I was there (July 2010), they were busy with preparations for the annual cavalgada (cavalcade), a parade of horsemen through the streets of Rio Branco. The Cowboys Ranch sponsors a comitiva, or entourage of horsemen, that ride in the cavalcade. The cavalcade leaves from the banks of the Acre
River, in the middle of Rio Branco, and proceeds down the Via Chico Mendes to the exposition grounds. The arrival of the cavalcade at the grounds signals the beginning of Expo-Acre, the annual agricultural fair and the state’s biggest party. The fair is centered on business exhibits and cultural activities, but the biggest events are the rodeo and sertaneja concerts which take place in the evenings.

Sorocaba, his friends, and hundreds of others, including ranchers and cowboys, ride their horses in the Cowboys Ranch comitiva, but there are many other comitivas sponsored by other groups. Each is led by a truck pulling at least two trailers full of non-horse riding participants. The trailer also houses ice coolers and a grill, with horsemen trotting up alongside to grab beer and meat kabobs throughout the five hour journey. There is also a huge sound system on the trailer. The comitiva in front of Cowboys Ranch had a stage built on top of their trailer, where a man in a black cowboy hat and a black leather trench coat performed the greatest sertaneja hits. Spectators lined the streets throughout the route, singing along and clapping.

Sorocaba was born and raised in the city. Although he had recently bought a horse, which he debuted in the cavalgada, he owned no land or cattle. When I met him, he was on the verge of graduating with his degree in environmental law. This short excerpt from Sorocaba’s life serves to introduce some of the fundamental components of cattle culture. After examining some of the reasons that cattle culture has spread in Acre, I will then compare the extent to which different groups participate in cattle culture.

Most Acreans explain their love for the countryside with the expression saudade, which connotes a mixture of longing, missing, and nostalgia. These feelings formed in response to an increasingly modernizing, urban Brazil and have found expression in
idealized visions of the countryside. The arrival of modernity to Acre is commonly linked to the arrival of the road connecting the state with the rest of Brazil, bringing migrants, vast social changes and conflict (Bakx 1988). The cities are filled with people who fled their rural homes because of land conflicts, or as a result of the failed promises of the plans to “develop” the Amazon.

The majority of those who left the countryside for Rio Branco rarely return (Schmink and Cordeiro 2008). In the city, they have access to education and healthcare, services that rural people must leave their homes and communities to access. Despite these urban advantages, those who have settled in the city romanticize visions of what they left behind, often citing autonomy, tradition, and tranquility. As Sorocaba illustrated, lifetime urbanites also experience a longing for the countryside, and being unfamiliar with the hardships of rural life makes the countryside an even more appealing escape.

The appeal of cattle culture must also be contextualized in terms of the peripheral status of Acre in relation to the rest of Brazil. Most Brazilians only know of Acre as the “land of Chico Mendes.” They associate it with violence over land and generalized lawlessness—the Velho Oeste (Old West). Acre is also known as the ultimate backwater state. In São Paulo, people described Acre’s location to me in colorful terms: “onde judas perdeu as botas” (where Judas lost his boots)¹; “onde o vento faz a curva” (where the wind turns around).²

¹ The person who said this then went on to say that Acre is so insignificant that Judas did not lose his boots there, but only his sock, his toenail, and so on.

² An internet search for this term turned up a definition. On the site disciclo.com, various categories are given for a slang term. For the “onde o vento faz a curva” entry, the only “location” for the term is “between Acre and the Bermuda Triangle” http://desciclo.pedia.ws/wiki/Onde_o_vento_faz_a_curva
These expressions of geographical isolation reflect what Acreans feel about their state, which they sometimes say is “o fim do mundo” (the end of the world). At the same time, Acreans are fiercely proud of their state. Their perceived marginality in relation to the rest of Brazil leaves some searching for ways to connect with national culture.

Given Acre’s rural roots and expanding livestock industry, Acreans feel that they can embrace the increasing Brazilian valorization of the countryside coming out of São Paulo interior. Cattle culture allows them to both incorporate and critique the modernity of urban life, while celebrating the simplicity and tradition of the rural life. Cattle culture also gives people an opportunity to link to a nationally appreciated popular culture, one of the few platforms where rural folk feel appreciated. The organizers of the Barretos rodeo were right: very few Brazilians want to be associated with the backward caipira, but they may seek out cattle culture, which links them with an assertive rural folk celebrated from Acre to São Paulo, and beyond the borders of Brazil. Although cattle culture never corresponds exactly with Acreans’ experience, it provides an outlet for their saudade for the countryside, which they associate with an idealized rural past or less complicated present, and a means of reconnecting symbolically with it that is socially acceptable.

It is, of course, surprising that cattle culture would find a home in Acre, with its environmentalist image. The state’s strong symbolic and political association with the forest is, however, the final component for understanding cattle culture’s unlikely appeal in Acre. Cattle culture does not, as the name implies, value all visions of the countryside equally, but extols a specific form of human-nature interaction in which humans
demonstrate their control over nature. *Sertaneja* songs romanticize the simplicity of life on the farm, and the thrill of riding a wild bull, not the satisfaction of tapping rubber or living in the forest.

Only landscapes and practices that visibly demonstrate cultivation and the mark of hard work are valued in cattle culture. These values were further reinforced by the developmentalist ideology and policies that accompanied Amazonian colonization. The Amazon was, and remains, the ultimate expression of wilderness, and, in Acre, 88% of the land remains forested. Acre, with its emphasis on maintaining the forest, frustrates the drive to “develop” and “progress” through conversion of wild nature into cultivated spaces.

An alternative vision of the frontier emerged in Acre with the rubber tapper’s defense of the forest in the name of social and environmental justice (Keck 1995). The old ghosts of developmentalism are slow to die, however, and are in fact gaining renewed traction as many rural Acreans feel unjustly constrained by environmental laws. Cattle culture provides an oppositional voice to environmental preservation as an affront to hard work and the autonomy of rural producers. For urban populations, cattle culture allows for a link to an imagined, idealized countryside in which nature is tamed, even for those without land. This domination of nature is repeated in key rituals, most notably in rodeos (Lawrence 1990), and *churrascos* (barbecues).

**Comparison of Participation in Cattle Culture**

To what extent do different Acrean groups actually participate in cattle culture? I surveyed twenty members in each of six groups: 1) forest extractivists or rubber tappers; 2) colonists residing in rural settlement projects; 3) large scale ranchers; 4) cowboys working on ranches; 5) urban policy makers working for the state government
on issues related to rural development and environmental conservation; and 6) workers at environmental NGOs in Rio Branco. The first four groups work with cattle on a daily basis and, with the exception of the ranchers, live in the country. The policy makers and NGO workers (hereafter abbreviated PP and NGO) live in the city, do not own cattle, and are, with the exception of some policy makers, more oriented toward environmental conservation.

These interviews were carried out after a year of fieldwork, during which time I created a list of activities commonly associated with cattle culture from key informants and participant observation. The survey was administered from January-July 2010, and was comprised of a series of question from four categories designed to measure participation in cattle culture: 1) contri dress; 2) cattle-based lifestyle; 3) cattle culture on TV/radio; 4) participation in popular cultural events.

**Contri Dress**

Wearing contri style clothing, a package including belt buckle, cowboy hat, boots, tight jeans, and plaid shirt, is highly associated with cattle culture. Using these forms of dress amid other fashion alternatives represents a conscious decision to link oneself with cattle culture, unlike boots which also serve a practical purpose.³

Of all contri items, a belt buckle is the most strongly associated with dedication to cattle culture. As seen in Table 7-1, 95% of cowboys report that they use a belt buckle—sometimes when working, but mostly when they go the city or attend cultural events.

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³ Although boots are the form of clothing perhaps most associated with cattle culture, they are also the most common footwear worn by people who work in the countryside. They are less common among urban populations, such as the policy makers and NGO workers, who may nonetheless wear them when visiting rural areas. This question would have been more revealing if it had asked a general urban sample if they wear boots, because those who wear boots in the city are consciously associating themselves with cattle culture.
events, such as dances and rodeos. The three ranchers who reported wearing a belt buckle did so only for cultural events, and many rejected all forms of contri clothing due to its link with working class sectors. Environmentally-oriented PP and NGO groups clearly reject the belt buckle, which they explained as symbolic of a cattle raising lifestyle, which they generally reject on ideological grounds. Only 10% of colonists and rubber tappers reported using the belt buckle, although a larger percentage of them wear boots and cowboy hats, items which may be the only forms of such functional clothing available in their local markets, but which are nonetheless linked with cattle culture.

**Cattle-based Lifestyle**

It would appear that those most closely linked to the countryside are more likely to participate in cattle culture than urban populations. Table 7-2 shows to what extent the different groups participate in other activities related to a cattle-based lifestyle. Nearly every rubber tapper, colonist, cowboy and rancher owns cattle, has worked with cattle, and rides horses. The only deviation from this trend is among the cowboys, a mere 35% of whom own cattle. These figures contrast markedly with the lower figures of the PP/NGO groups. At least half of PP ride horses and have worked with cattle, but only 30% of NGO ride horses and even fewer (15%) have worked with cattle. Very few members of the PP/NGO group own cattle.

Given the centrality of these three activities in the lives of rural groups, similar to boots in the previous table, it is difficult to say that these practices reflect a cattle culture. This shows, however, just how widespread cattle raising is among each group, even among the rubber tappers. If these three traits were common among the NGO/PP groups, this would be significant for two reasons: they make their living not from the
land, but from their urban professions, and they express environmentalist ideology, which is opposed to cattle raising.

**Cattle Culture on TV and Radio**

Table 7-3 summarizes group participation in activities in which cattle culture is valorized in TV or radio. A high percentage of cowboys, colonists, and ranchers watch the nightly horse auctions, broadcast from São Paulo, on the *Canal Rural* (Rural Channel) in the evenings, but very rubber tappers (35%), PP (20%), and NGO workers (5%) watch the horse auctions.

With the exception of the rubber tappers, all groups watch *Acre Rural* (Rural Acre), a program focused on agriculture and cattle raising based out of Rio Branco, or *Globo Rural*, (from the Globo Network, Brazil’s largest television station), a national-level program focused on rural issues in general, including environmental issues. The grouping of these two television programs obscures the fact that most environmentalists would never watch *Acre Rural*, which focuses on agri-business and cattle raising, and would be considered more in line with cattle culture. The show often begins and ends with extended scenes of cattle grazing or horses galloping through the countryside, while *sertaneja* music is played by local or national bands. Most PP and NGO groups, along with ranchers, will watch *Globo Rural*, which keeps them up to date on contemporary rural issues and debates on a national level.

For these three items, the rubber tappers rank lower than other groups in terms of participation in cattle culture, a divergence best explained by material constraints, not ideological differences. The rubber tappers do not watch much television because they are the only group without access to electricity. If they watch television, they do so when they visit the city, or some of the wealthier rubber tappers will power a television.
with a car battery. Out of the twenty rubber tappers in my sample, only two had functioning televisions, and the only programs that they made a point of watching were *novelas* (soap operas) and soccer matches.

Battery-powered radios are much more common than televisions among the rubber tappers, ninety percent of whom report listening to *sertaneja* music. Colonists, ranchers, and cowboys all listen to *sertaneja* music, either through the radio or CDs. Each of these three groups scores high on every item in the TV/radio category. Seventy percent of PP listen to *sertaneja* music, a lower figure than the rural groups, but much higher than the NGO workers (25%).

Questions about TV/radio, particularly the *sertaneja* and horse auction programs, along with the questions about *contri* dress, are all highly associated with cattle culture. Questions about participation in these activities were often met with laughter by NGO workers. They considered these activities to be in complete opposition to their identities as environmentalists, and also as educated people. Those who chose these forms of expression were associated with a lack of taste and/ or culture. One NGO worker referred to *sertaneja* music as “*bestaneja,***” (*besta* means stupid) because listening to it “makes you *besta***.” These sorts of comments were less common among the policy makers.

In this category, we began to see divergence between the other groups and the rubber tappers because of their physical isolation, lack of electricity, and socioeconomic status, which inhibits many of them from buying a TV and car battery. It is fair to say that it is a material limitation more than ideological commitment to abstain from certain activities, as is the case with NGO workers. We have also started to see in this section
and the previous one similar patterns of participation with policy makers and rural groups, and a distancing from more environmentalist NGO workers.

**Participation in Cattle Culture**

The three items presented in Table 7-4 are clearly associated with cattle culture in the minds of all groups. Dancing to *sertaneja* music and attending rodeos, along with wearing *contri* clothing, a belt buckle, a cowboy hat, and viewing horse auctions are all conscious decisions to participate in activities that are unequivocally related, across groups, to cattle culture. Although Expo-Acre is an event that clearly celebrates cattle culture, attending it is related to factors beyond an affinity of the cattle culture.

The table reveals that around half of colonists, ranchers, and cowboys dance to *sertaneja* music. Around a third of policy makers, and only 15% of rubber tappers and 10% of NGO workers admit to dancing. Attendance of Expo-Acre shows differences again in terms of access between the rubber tappers and colonists, who live at least 150 miles from Rio Branco, where these events occur, and other groups who live closer. For the first time, colonists are not among the highest percentages. Cowboys, who may live just as far away, often travel to these events with the ranchers who employ them. Policy makers, 70% of whom report attending Expo-Acre, often do so either out of pleasure, or because they are required to as government employees. Most NGO workers dislike going to Expo-Acre, but may also be required to go for their job.

With the exception of NGO workers, at least half of each group attends rodeos. Distance is not an issue for colonists and rubber tappers because a number of rodeos have been created along the side of the highways over the past few years. These rodeos form part of a state-wide circuit, and people from local communities sometimes compete in them. Conversely, ranchers and policy makers attend national-level rodeos
in the capital of Rio Branco, and usually only do so during Expo-Acre. Overall, the results in Table 7-4 reflect the ways in which the same cattle culture activities take place in very different social contexts, and participation in them is determined by questions of access and ideology. It is also important to note that the rubber tappers, who are strongly associated with a conservation ethic, did not explain their lack of participation in cattle culture as a conscious decision or a form of protest. Rather, it was due to a lack of access and money, and a feeling that events such as rodeos were culturally foreign to them. Those who did attend such events were often members of a younger generation more familiar with other social groups.

Conclusion

Broad circuits of diffusion brought cattle from the Iberian Peninsula to the Americas, where vibrant cattle cultures developed from the Great Plains to the Argentine pampas. These cultures influenced one another through migration, and then were transmitted through popular culture events, television, and radio, such as rodeo. In the past decade or so, a dominant cattle culture has arrived in Acre.

The rubber tapper mobilization against cattle ranchers and their association of cattle with social and environmental destruction in the 1970s and 1980s, along with the state’s environmentalist image and policies, would seem to make Acre an unlikely place for such cultural constructions to take root. However, as cattle raising has grown in importance in the Acrean economy, cattle culture has become widespread.

In Acre, this can be understood as part of a national phenomenon. Cattle culture allows Acreans to connect with a rural resurgence and expression of pride and tradition. By linking Brazilian regional cultures into a dominant cattle culture that draws influences from the United States, for the first time in Brazilian history a form of connecting with the
countryside has become socially valued. The marginality of Acre in relation to cultural and economic centers of Brazil makes participation in a national cattle culture appealing, as do historical conditions unique to Acre.

The arrival of migrants and their cattle in the 1970s brought about widespread displacement of rural populations, and flight to the city continues today as a result of environmental policies which make traditional livelihoods challenging. Those who now live in the city express *saudade* (longing) for the life in the countryside. Cattle culture, although it does not correspond exactly with their memories of their rural past or their present station in life, nonetheless provides a means of re-connecting symbolically with the rural life.

Despite the growing influence of cattle culture in Acre, participation by people in distinct social groups varies. In general, those rural groups who work most closely with cattle, the cowboys, are the most in tune with cattle culture, followed by other cattle-dependent groups: colonists, ranchers, and rubber tappers. Distinctions emerge in relation to social class, as wealthy ranchers may reject certain features of cattle culture that they associate with the working class. Conversely, rubber tappers, the most impoverished rural group, do not consciously reject cattle culture, but have limited opportunities to participate in it due to their isolation and lack of disposable income. Among urban groups, particularly those working at environmental NGOs, participation is also low, but this is due to their ideological resistance to cattle culture, not questions of access. Policy makers, who represent institutions working toward both environmental preservation and economic development, may reject cattle culture on grounds similar to the NGOs, but many of them participate in cattle culture. They often explain their
participation not as explicit endorsement of the cattle industry or cattle culture, but as participation in popular culture. This indicates that not only among rural populations, but also in urban contexts, cattle culture either expresses central features of Acrean culture, or traditional features of Acrean culture have combined with or been overtaken by cattle culture.

This chapter has shown that the economic practice of cattle raising gives rise to cattle cultures, which may be spread through direct contact with cattle raisers. Cattle culture may also be diffused independently of cattle raising through popular cultural events, music, and television programming. Both types of diffusion provide a population with an opportunity to incorporate cattle culture. In order for novel cultural practices to be appropriated, however, they must resonate in some way with local histories, and cattle raising should be present in the area.

For the most part, a group’s positive or negative perceptions of cattle raising determine the extent to which they participate in cattle culture. Overall, those who raise cattle participate more in cattle culture, as an expression of their lifestyle and values. There are, however, exception to this rule: the wealthiest cattle raisers may limit their participation due to cattle culture’s association with the working class; low social class cattle raisers who are geographically isolated may participate less because they have limited access to cattle culture; and urban populations with no link to cattle raising may seek out cattle culture because of its symbolic associations with rural life and traditional social values. Other groups may reject cattle culture because they do not feel that it represents their values, or because they are ideologically opposed to cattle raising as an environmentally destructive practice.
Table 7-1. Comparison of group use of *contri* clothing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>RT</th>
<th>Colonist</th>
<th>Rancher</th>
<th>Cowboy</th>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>NGO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Do you wear boots?</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) a belt buckle?</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7-2. Comparison of indicators of a cattle-based lifestyle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>RT</th>
<th>Colonist</th>
<th>Rancher</th>
<th>Cowboy</th>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>NGO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(3) ride horses?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) worked with cattle?</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) own cattle?</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7-3. Comparison of consumption of cattle culture through television and radio

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>RT</th>
<th>Colonist</th>
<th>Rancher</th>
<th>Cowboy</th>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>NGO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(6) Watch horse auctions?</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) <em>Acre/ Globo Rural</em>?</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8) Listen to <em>sertaneja</em> music?</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7-4. Participation in activities linked with cattle culture across groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>RT</th>
<th>Colonist</th>
<th>Rancher</th>
<th>Cowboy</th>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>NGO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(9) Dance to <em>sertaneja</em> music?</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10) go to Expo-Acre?</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(11) attend rodeos?</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CATTLE CULTURE, FLORESTANIA, AND THE LANDSCAPE

There are two houses on *Epymondias* street in Rio Branco, which are separated by another house in the middle. One of these houses belongs to Sorocaba, the dedicated urban *cauboi* described in Chapter Seven. His truck is often parked on the sidewalk in front of a padlocked gate, which leads inside the walls that surround his house. The area surrounding his house, like others on the street, is covered in tile from the driveway to the courtyard, and leading up to the pool and the little shaded bar and grill in the back corner. There is no form of vegetation in his yard save a few weeds that have popped up in between tiles.

One house down, the walls are lower, and *açaí* palms and ornamental plants peek out into the street. Surrounding the house are grassy areas, a cement driveway and concrete footpaths, which also lead to pool and *churrasqueira* (barbecue grill) in the back. This house served as a meeting point for governors, heads of government institutions, and researchers, who sat and talked around a rectangular wooden table on the carport. They were trying to figure out new ways to provide for the economic needs of rural Acreans and, at the same time, decrease deforestation and promote resource preservation.

Many of these ideas culminated in the policies of the *Governo da Floresta* ("Forest Government"), which began with the 1988 election of Jorge Viana as governor of Acre. In 1989, his administration began to build on the ideals of the rubber tapper movement to promote forest-based development, and sought “to demonstrate to present and future generations that development does not depend on the destruction of the forest, but rather on its survival” (Government of Acre 1999, quoted in Kainer *et al.* 2003). The
forest government also implemented a cultural program based on the valorization of the forest and forest populations, calling it florestania, or forest citizenship (Schmink and Cordeiro 2008). Florestania attempts to “celebrate the population’s roots in the rubber tapping economy, while breaking from previous development policies to favor environmentally-friendly policies” (Vadjunec et al. 2011b: 75).

The two houses on Epymondias street were inhabited by people dedicated to the ideals of cattle culture and florestania, respectively, and, to some extent, their homes were expressions of their cultural and ideological perspectives. In this chapter, I compare the ways that the opposed worldviews cattle culture and florestania are imprinted upon landscapes, and discuss the ways that ideas surrounding the nature-culture divide continue to structure economic and cultural behaviors and perceptions.

I begin with a discussion of the frontier as a space in which ideologies related to the nature-culture divide converge and conflict. Historical ecology and cultural geography provide key perspectives for analyzing the cultural meanings of rural landscapes and urban places. I then discuss the construction of landscapes and places, from urban homes to houses in the forest and rodeo arenas, and examine the ways that different groups perceive them. An examination of beef consumption compares how landscapes and practices linked with cattle are perceived by different groups, and demonstrates that cattle culture forms a complete system of symbols, beliefs, and practices in which nature domination is valorized.

**Theoretical Framework**

**Nature-Culture and the Ideological Frontier**

In order to understand Acrean landscapes, it is essential to acknowledge the old ideological divide between nature and culture that was at the forefront of frontier
expansion and struggle, and continues to be expressed in the construction and perception of landscapes. The nature-culture divide refers to the conceptual separation between humans and the natural world that is prevalent in Western thought (Dove and Carpenter 2007; Little 1999). Many non-Western perspectives of nature, often associated with Amerindian peoples, understand society as less distinct or separate from nature (Descola 1994).

In the context of the frontier, dichotomous ways of classification may be deployed as ideological tools to characterize people and their practices, with one group (ranchers and other commercial interests) representing culture, and associating themselves with ideas of civilization, development, and progress. The other, often a native population, is defined by the agents of culture as savages, primitives, or less-developed beings (Schmink and Wood 1992). These dichotomies are also associated with distinct forms of landscape and places made by each population: those who are more civilized create pastures, agricultural fields and cities, while savages live in (do not “create”) the wilderness, forests, and hinterlands.

The dichotomies between civilized and savage go back to the first frontier encounters between Spanish conquistadores, settlers, and explorers, and indigenous populations (Raffles 2001). In Argentina, Sarmiento saw the struggle for the future of his nation as a battle between “civilization and barbarism,” a contest taking place on the hinterland of the pampas, with mixed-race gauchos representing a form of savagery (1845). In North America, Turner understood the frontier as a site of “perennial rebirth” in which unique American identity was formed; as setters “won the wilderness,” they transformed the “primitive economic and political conditions of the frontier into the
complexity of city life” (Turner 1920: 2). These influential visions of the frontier have been revisited by researchers who demonstrate the interaction between cultures along frontiers, as well as the violence associated with frontier expansion (Slatta 1997; Schmink and Wood 1992; Weber and Rausch 1994; Wolf 1982).

While scholars have focused on the material conflicts taking place in the Amazon frontier (Foweraker 1981; Schmink and Wood 1992), my concern here is with ideological underpinnings of these conflicts. Speaking decades before the military government began to colonize the Amazon, President Getulio Vargas catalyzed support for the mission by using familiar dichotomous imagery:

"Nothing will stop us in this movement which is, in the 20th century, the highest task of civilized man: to conquer and dominate the valleys of the great equatorial currents, transforming their blind force and their extraordinary fertility into disciplined energy. The Amazon, under the impact of our will and labor . . . shall become a chapter in the history of civilization (Vargas 1940, quoted in Davis 1977: 21).

The colonization of the Amazon brought cattle ranchers to Acre in the 1970s. These men were backed by developmentalist policies and ideology that framed their actions. In the words of the ranchers, they were bringing “progress,” “development,” and “productivity,” and a desire to desbravar (tame) the frontier. Rubber tappers and ranchers battled over land ownership and how the land was to be used: essentially, forest-based extraction versus the conversion of large areas of forest to pastures for cattle (Ehringhaus 2005; Hecht and Cockburn 1989).

The rubber tappers successfully countered the ranchers and the dominant frontier narrative. While their actions were important, it was the resonance of their environmental discourse that enabled them to connect with global environmentalism, and ultimately led to their success (Keck 1995). During the time of rancher frontier
expansion and rubber tapper resistance, each side was, or came to be viewed as the embodiment of developmentalism and environmentalism, respectively, which are reincarnations of the nature-culture divide.

**Gaps**

Anna Tsing-Lowenhaupt writes about the local encounters involved in globalization, and the “friction” that results, producing unlikely results (2005). In illustrating the “messy” nature of the frontier in the forests of Kalimantan (Indonesia), she hearkens back to Acre as an example of the unexpected results of global-local encounters:

> It was this space that challenged so many cherished notions of development, that allowed rubber tappers the mobility to connect their practices with a nascent global environmental movement. Gaps—conceptual spaces and real places into which powerful demarcations do not travel well . . . they call attention to the bad transportability of demarcations of human livelihood versus nature conservation, productive farms versus forest reserves, and settled culture versus the wild (Tsing 2005: 175).

By demonstrating the “gaps…where universals have not been successful in setting the terms,” Tsing shows how unlikely alliances result, and how, in the case of the Acrean rubber tappers, small actions came to produce big changes, and set the stage in which Acre is strongly associated with environmentalism (*ibid.*: 202).

Tsing’s concepts of gaps is useful for seeing the Acrean landscape as both a product of political economic and environmental structures, and recognizing the agency of diverse social actors. She also shows how the landscape is representative of different forms of economic practice, which may challenge dominant ideological structures.

I argue for attention to the new gaps that have emerged in the Acrean landscape—cattle pastures, country clothing stores, and rodeo arenas—in order to
understand the ways that cattle are assuming a greater role in Acrean society at the same time that the state is associated with environmentalism.

**Nature, Culture, and the Rubber Tappers**

The rubber tappers did not see themselves as representing one side of the nature-culture divide; they argued for a new vision in which people could live from the forest without destroying it. With the establishment of the extractive reserve, which built on the rubber tapper model of resource exploitation, it was (and continues to be) hoped that the extractive reserve can reconcile the potentially contradictory goals of environmental conservation and economic development (Gomes 2009; Kainer *et al.* 2003; Schwartzman 1989; Vadjunec *et al.* 2011a). The ideals of the rubber tapper movement have been incorporated into the political and ideological vision of the state government’s *florestania*, which emphasizes forest-based economic development and a notion of citizenship in which forest heritage is celebrated.

The rubber tappers have become inextricably linked to a form of nature-culture reconciliation known as “sustainable development.” According to Ribeiro, sustainable development can be viewed as a "metanarrative with utopian characteristics that establishes a common discursive field, creating possibilities for alliances between environmentalists and those social agents interested in economic growth" (Ribeiro 1991: 83, quoted in Little 1999: 271). Despite the progress that has taken place in Acre, the Western baggage of the nature-culture divide continues to be imposed on the rubber tappers in the expectation that they will conform to the notion of the “ecologically noble savage” (Redford 1990). On the other extreme, ranchers, and increasingly, anyone who raises cattle, are associated with environmental destruction, but also with economic development. The practices of extractivism and cattle ranching are inscribed...
as landscapes that are representative of different sides of the nature-culture divide, and are highly meaningful after the frontier has passed.

**Landscapes, Places, and Cattle Culture**

Historical ecologists contest explanations of culture as determined by the exigencies of the environment (c.f. Meggars 1981), pointing to the manner in which Amazonians have interacted and shaped their natural environment across time (Posey 1985, Balée 2006; Heckenberger *et al.* 2007). Historical ecology emphasizes the relationship between humans and nature across time, seeing the landscape as the product of this interaction, and a text that can be read as material culture (Balée 2006; Crumley 1994, quoted in Biersack 1999).

The construction of urban places involves a similar process resulting from human manipulation of the material world. Both landscapes and places are consciously produced by people (Jackson 1989: 48) and serve as symbols of culture (Olwig 2001) (quoted in Vadjunec *et al.* 2011a: 10). Cultural geography provides a lens for finding meaning by analyzing the material and cognitive “traces” that connect places to the identity of the cultural groups that make them (Anderson 2009: 5). In summary, economic practices are constrained by political, economic, and social factors, and are inscribed on the material world as landscapes and places, which can be then interpreted as cultural texts that reflect both material constraints and cultural meanings.

Before proceeding to the discussion, it is necessary to operationalize cattle culture: a cultural domain in which a cattle-based vision of rural life is valued above other forms of rural livelihood. A coherent set of preferences and perceptions based on perceived superiority of a cattle-based rural lifestyle serve as guidelines for appropriate actions and behaviors in the physical and social world. Cattle culture thus informs the
ways that people perceive nature, with a preference for spaces that demonstrate control
over the environment, such as pastures and agricultural fields, and a disdain for “wild”
nature. Those who harness nature through cultivation, and make it “productive,” are
rewarded socially, and the landscapes that they produce are judged positively.
Although often associated with the practice of cattle raising, cattle culture has been
institutionalized in popular culture. Thus, others disconnected from cattle raising or rural
life may use it as a means of expressing general ideals associated with the country,
such as tradition, autonomy, self-reliance, and simplicity, as contrasted with modern
urban life or environmentalism. Cattle culture channels these general sentiments, which
need not be associated with cattle raising, into a cattle-centered vision of rural life that is
expressed through the construction of cultural landscapes and spaces.

By analyzing the landscapes of Acre, from the forests and pastures of the
countryside to urban places (e.g. contri bars) that seek to recreate the rural, we can see
how the nature-culture conflict of the frontier is played out after the frontier has passed,
but remains in an ideological sphere. I focus on the ways that landscapes are judged
and perceived, and the ways that rural places are recreated in urban areas. It will be
demonstrated that cattle culture, which emphasizes the domination of nature, is both
related to and distinct from environmentalism in general, and the specifically Acrean
notions of florestania. The manner in which people are reconciling the nature-culture
divide shows a move more towards cattle culture, and the reassertion of the
dichotomous classifications through the domination of nature.
Comparison of Group Perceptions of the Landscape

Beauty and Nature

When speaking positively about the forest, Acreans will often cite its beauty. Twenty members in each of seven different groups were asked to identify which form of landscape they found to be the most beautiful. They chose from the three most common forms of rural landscape: forest, agricultural plot, and pasture.

As seen in Table 8-1, four groups found the forest to be the most beautiful form of landscape: environmental NGO workers (18), policy makers (16), urban residents of Rio Branco (11), and rubber tappers (10). NGO workers and policy makers (hereafter abbreviated PP) value nature and the forest as a symbol of purity, and also as integral to regional global environmental health. The eleven Rio Branco residents that chose the forest cited the importance of conserving the forest, and their perceptions of climate change. To varying extents, we can see the preference of these urban groups as related to an environmentalist ideology. In contrast, the rubber tappers’ preference comes from an appreciation of the forest built through sustained interaction.

The ranchers, cowboys, and colonists all found the landscape most associated with their economic practice, cattle raising, to be the most beautiful, suggesting a link between landscape, livelihood, and aesthetic appreciation. These groups often said that a uniform pasture gives them great satisfaction, and that it would not be appropriate to find beauty in the forest because “it is not worth anything.” Members of these three groups, who do not use forest resources to the same extent as the rubber tappers, commonly see the forest as an unexploited resource that they are forced to maintain by the government.
Interviews with urban residents reveal the connection between landscape beauty and economic value, but this connection is often overridden by an environmentalist sentiment. After much deliberation, Maria, a seamstress in Rio Branco, decided that the forest was the most beautiful, but, she added: “If I had cattle I would say pasture, but I don’t even have lice on my head.” She was aware of the link between beauty and value, but her position as an urban wage earner, disconnected from land use decisions, allowed her to choose the forest.

Although it is unclear why Maria and other urban residents chose one landscape over another, most Acreans are aware that forest is the culturally or “politically correct” response. Acreans often associate foreigners, especially pesquisadores (researchers), with efforts to “save the forest,” referring to them as ecologistas, or environmentalists. Thus, the preference for the forest may have been overstated to this researcher. Overall, these finding show that ideological and economic considerations play into evaluations of beauty, an abstract category. I now ask: How do abstract preferences relate to the ways that people actually interact with nature?

**Concrete Actions: The Home and Nature**

The aesthetic appreciation for the forest is at odds with many fundamental perceptions in Acrean society, which see the forest as a threat. Out of the survey of 120 members (20 in each of six groups), there was 99% overall agreement that “if you stop working, the forest will take over your property.” I often had to repeat the statement, which people felt to be obvious. “Lógico!” was a common response.

The belief that life in Amazonia is a battle against nature is not confined to those who live in the countryside, but is also present in the minds of urban Acreans who find
the forest beautiful, but do their best to keep nature at a distance, and take steps to reinforce this separation by eliminating traces of tropical nature from their home.

Most houses sit on a giant concrete slab that takes up the majority of the lot, with the perimeter surrounded by walls. High rise apartments are also increasingly popular. Although there are homes with native trees and other forms of vegetation, the homes of many urban Acreans are devoid of much, if any vegetation, with the possible exception of some fruit trees. The flower shops are filled with plastic flowers and roses shipped in from São Paulo. When I asked the florist why he did not have any native flowers, he said that no one wanted flowers from the “mato” (forest).

When urbanites talk of the benefits of the forest, they speak about how it is not like the city: it is cool, low stress, and not noisy. They desire to escape their concrete compounds and enjoy the tranquility of nature, but they strive for a nature that is under their control, and not without the conveniences of the city. The outskirts of Rio Branco are lined with chacarás, small pieces of land with a house among fruit trees, manicured lawns, and artificial ponds stocked with fish. The chacarás represent a compromise between country and city where people with means seek respite from the “stress, crime, and noise” of the city in a semi-rural milieu that is not without urban conveniences. In summary, the aesthetic appreciation for the forest does not express itself in the domain of urban Acrean homes, or in the semi-rural spaces that they create to escape from the city. Nature may be incorporated into the human world, but the manner in which it is controlled suggests a form of reconciliation that is tilted toward nature domination.

Urban policy makers and NGO workers, groups that are ideologically committed to forest preservation, however, downplay the importance of maintaining a distance
between home and forest for rural populations. Table 8-2 presents the results from questions asking members of six groups if it “dangerous to have forest close to the house,” and if “it is better to have pasture around the house than forest.” Only 21% of policy makers and NGO staff agreed that “it is dangerous to have the forest close to one’s house.” Alternatively, 84% of rubber tappers and 65% of colonists, the two groups that live in closest proximity to the forest, said that having forest close to the home is dangerous, citing the risk of tree falls, and the increased likelihood of predators and pests entering the home. In order to mitigate the threats of the forest, rural groups create pastures around their homes. According to 84% of rubber tappers and 60% of colonists, “it is better to have pasture around the house than forest.” Although I have emphasized the role of ideology in landscape construction, these data show that practical matters also dictate the human interactions with nature. The landscapes that people create around their homes are in many cases necessary, but they also have normative and ideological meanings.

Only 16% of policy makers and none of the NGO workers agreed that it is better to have pasture around the rural home. There are consistencies with PP/NGO groups in terms of finding the forest beautiful and stating a preference for rural homes to be in close proximity with the forest. This suggests that appreciation for Amazonian nature, at least in proximity to the home, comes after one has been removed from it. After achieving a secure standard of living, and bringing nature under control, one can contemplate the virtues, and not just the threats of nature. This double standard becomes more obvious by examining the ways that rural populations are judged by the landscapes that they produce.
Inscribing Ideology

Hard Work and Pasture

Despite the growth of pro-environment sentiment among much of the urban public, rural people who live among nature are socially rewarded for their ability to transform, not to maintain the forest. Spending time in the countryside, one hears many remarks about the character of people, based on quick evaluations of their landholding. This is most common among rural populations, but NGO workers and policy makers make similar statements. They recognize that a property with well maintained, “clean” pasture demonstrates that the owner is a hard worker. Conversely, the opposite may be said about a person who lives too close to the forest: that the person lacks the will to work (falta coragem), or is lazy. Table 8-3 shows the extent to which different groups agreed with these statements.

A high percentage of members in each group believe that “a person with a clean pasture is a hard worker.” The clean pasture-hard worker association is nearly unanimous among rural groups. Alternatively, if a house cannot be seen from the road because of forest, or if a house is surrounded too closely by the forest, it is said that the proprietor lacks the will to work. Interestingly, it was the rubber tappers, perhaps the most aware of this perception, and the cowboys, who agreed with this statement the most (~75%). More than half of colonists also agreed. However, among the NGO/PP groups, there is extremely low agreement that leaving the forest intact denotes laziness. Although the ranchers often made this sort of statement in conversation, they only

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1 Ranchers often have the most uniform pastures, but this is usually imputed to mean that they “tem cabeça,” that they are smart; they are good administrators capable of commanding the labors of others (cowboys).
agreed with it 20% of the time in the survey. As with many questions that were worded negatively, or would indicate a “politically incorrect” stance, the results do not capture the prevalence of the statement in natural speech.

**Men work, Bichos Live in the Forest**

The findings in Table 8-3 indicated that among rural populations, pasture is associated with hard work, and to a lesser extent, that the forest is associated with a lack of work. There is a distinction made in the countryside between “men” who work, and those who fail to demonstrate their work by transforming the natural environment. Those who fail to show the clear separation of human and natural spaces are considered less “men” in terms of rural gender roles, which assert that real men should perform physical labor, but also in an evolutionary sense (*i.e.* that rubber tappers are less developed form of human).

According to some ranchers and colonists, the rubber tappers’ “cultural underdevelopment” is the result of living in the forest, which has made them “more like the animals then men, but better than Indians.” This is related to a variety of theories, from a lack of sunshine, which hinders their cognitive functions, to the lack of access to education and socialization resulting from their isolation. The rubber tappers themselves often assert their humanity in relation to Indians. When describing the arrival of their ancestors to Acre, more than rubber tapper said: “there were no people here, “só bichos e índios” (only animals and Indians).

The perception of rubber tapper laziness is also a result of observation of the rubber tapper lifestyle and work habits. The rubber tappers are accustomed to rising early to tap the rubber trees. They then spend part of their day resting as the rubber seeps from the trees into collection cups, returning later to collect the rubber. Thus,
one may arrive at a rubber tapper home in the middle of the day and find the rubber tapper resting between trips to the forest, or already done with the day work. This leads some outsiders to believe that the rubber tapper spends the day in the hammock, or in the shade of the forest, not out in working in the *sol quente*, (hot sun), where “men” perform “hard work.”

The value judgments surrounding landscapes and landscape transformation must also be understood in relation to a broader narrative of nature domination that was implanted in the region through the migration of people who sought to “tame the frontier.” This ideal was further reinforced through policies that gave legal rights to those who showed “improvements” to their land.

Although domination of nature, if labeled “deforestation,” is distasteful to most Acreans, it is widely acknowledged that creating an orderly home or cultivated landholding, and thus demonstrating “work,” brings a person positive social values. This is most clearly expressed in the minds of many rural and urban populations by removing wild components of their forests from the vicinity of their house and expanding this sphere of influence. For rural populations, this is done by creating pasture, which is practical, socially approved, and, for those with cattle, profitable and aesthetically pleasing.

This section has demonstrated that an abstract appreciation for the forest is growing, at least among urban populations, but that groups who maintain a strict separation of their home from nature are judged positively. There is evidence of a contradiction between the stated values of environmentalism, with an emphasis on forest preservation, and a real world preference for anthropogenic landscapes, which
suggests that the nature-culture divide continues to structure human perceptions and actions with regard to the natural world.

**Cattle Culture and the Creation of Urban Rural Places**

Rural landscapes, such as pastures, agricultural fields, and forests, are the products of economic practices, which are constrained by political economic structures and practical concerns, as well as cultural preferences and ideological discourses across scales. However, how can we understand urban cultural places, such as the *contri* bars and rodeo arena? Real people constructed the rodeo arena and the *contri* bar. They were banking on the fact that these spaces mean something, and will attract people who subscribe to these meanings, and will choose to support them amid other cultural alternatives. (Environmentalists do not go to the *contri* bar, and *caubois* do not search out *bossa nova* concerts). As such, these places must be understood as ideological expressions, in addition to expressions of class and urban and rural identity. How can we understand symbolic components of the landscape--places which are recreations of a specific form of human-nature interaction?

Urban Acreans are reconnecting with nature by constructing spaces that express their ideals of nature and the countryside. These places do not seek authentic insertion in the actual countryside, but rather reflect a preference for urban or semi-urban places that approximate a culturally appropriate vision of rural life. Unlike *florestania*, which suggests a compromise between humans and nature, these spaces seem to be more informed by cattle culture, with a vision of human dominated nature.

In Chapter Seven, I described Sorocaba, and the ways that he connects with a rural life that is profoundly *contri*—centered on horse riding, drinking *tereré*, and wearing boots. Even though Sorocaba is studying environmental law, and will one day, it is
assumed, in some way work to defend the “environment,” he will never engage with the forest as an acceptable social space. Like many Acreans dissatisfied with life in the city, and longing for something more authentic, the reconciliation of city and country comes through the creation of “rural” places oriented to cattle culture.

*Ranchos* are small landholdings similar to *chacarás*, but with land for cattle or with facilities for rodeo competitions. At the *Rancho Sinuelo*, on the periphery of Rio Branco, young urban professionals meet up after work to practice roping and other rodeo-related activities. They sip *tereré* with lemon, passing the bull horn to each other. Some of the men “dip” smokeless tobacco. They take turns attempting to rope a calf, sprinting out on horseback after the beast is released from the pen. Everyone else sits on the rails of the corral, watching, passing around the *tereré*.

The *rancho* provides a valuable rural space for these exclusively urban men. It allows them to participate in a cultural movement in which they can connect with the perceived tradition and tranquility of rural life. They can escape the annoyances of modern life in the city, but they do not have give up its conveniences, or deal with the difficulties of a rural life on the land. In this “rural” space, which is neither wholly rural nor urban, these men are participating in the construction of socially appropriate rural places.

Rural places need not even be in the country, as the “Cowboys Ranch,” located in the heart of the city, shows. These places need not have cattle or a corral fence to lean on; they can be created wherever some friends sit down and display some of the symbols of cattle culture. In the evenings, you see groups of people on the edge of the *Parque da Maternidade* (Maternity Park, which runs through Rio Branco), or on the
sidewalk in front of their houses, drinking *tereré*, and usually listening to *sertaneja* music.

*Contrai* (country) or *sertaneja*-themed bars, which draw heavily on Barretos rodeo and American “Western” themes, are increasingly common. The most recent *contri* bar is “Bahamas,” where patrons drink icy beer from little steel buckets and watch a big-screen TV playing rodeo clips and bullfighting bloopers. The volume is turned off so that they can hear a man clad in *contri* attire singing *sertaneja* covers. He passes the microphone to patrons during the refrains of the most popular tunes. The walls of Bahamas are painted with various scenes that seem to hearken back to American West more than Brazil, with American style cowboys roaming desert landscapes punctuated by table-top mesas. The male and female bathrooms are indicated by two cowboy-hatted silhouettes leaning against a wall: one slim and muscular; the other, buxom.

Visiting Bahamas is not like going to the countryside roamed by the fearsome people and things that city residents sometimes associate with the “interior:” backward forest dwellers, machete-toting colonists, violent ranchers, fierce jaguars, and disease-carrying insects. At Bahamas, people sing about the beautiful smell of earth, and the joy of milking the cows. Cowboys sit atop a bull and show how nature can be dominated. In these urban “rural” places, a compromise of sorts has been reached between wild and civilized—a socially “appropriate” rural way of life and cultural landscape.

These places provide urbanites with the conveniences of the city and a link to the country that is clean and not socially disdained. These are spaces that seek to connect
with a mythologized rural past and to disassociate Acreans from rural life as it actually exists in Acre, especially forest life.

As Table-8-4 show, the aspirations of urbanites do not end with the consumption of symbolic representations of the countryside. Most Acreans interviewed would one day like to actually have a place, a “piece of land” in the country. The way that most Acreans would engage with this land, as the table illustrates, would be through cattle, not the forest.

A focus on beef provides the final component for this analysis by showing how rural landscapes are connected with urban ideals and behaviors. Perhaps the best way to see to the pervasiveness of a cattle-centered cultural construction is to go to a barbecue.

**Beef and Society**

“Beef a special treat in the forest”

It was midmorning on a Saturday in June, and the mist had long since burned off the forest, the chickens had become sluggish, and the million little sounds of the rain forest morning had died down. Jatobá, Luanna, their son Espimar and I closed up the house and headed out for the *churrasco*, or barbecue.²

We left the clearing that surrounded Jatobá and Luanna’s house on a little path into the forest. It felt like it was suddenly evening, as the heat and light of the blazing sun were muted by the canopy overhead. Fifteen-foot-wide trees with buttresses went straight up hundreds of feet without a single limb before extending their branches into

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² From the series “Postcards from the Amazon,” published on August 14, 2010 in the San-Angelo Standard Times.
the canopy. We passed vines a foot thick that climbed all the way to the top and meandered from tree to tree.

We followed the rubber trails, little paths that connect around 50 to 100 rubber trees, or about as much as a tapper can tap and later harvest in one day. We crossed creeks and muddy rivers that will rage when the rains come, balancing on felled trees that served as bridges.

As we walked, we came into clearings in the forest where other families lived, and they would offer us sweet coffee from a thermos. Some joined our caravan to the churrasco. After a three-hour walk, we arrived at the house of one of Jatobá’s “closest” neighbors, Carlos, who was hosting the barbecue.

Carlos slaughtered one of his cows for the party. It was to be a celebration and a chance to see friends, but Carlos also needed help. The promise of beef lured friends from miles around to help him clear some land for planting. The guys were happy to work all morning knowing they would feast in the afternoon.

For the rubber tappers, who live deep in the forest, eating beef is a rare treat. When they eat meat, it is usually hunted. The local favorite is a small deer, which weighs around 40 pounds.

They also eat armadillo. Every time I mention that people eat armadillo in Acre, [Americans] worry about leprosy, but I haven’t ever heard of that being a problem in Acre. When I asked if eating armadillo causes any health problems, Leni, who had just fried some up for dinner, told me dryly: “Eating tatu (armadillo) can cause backache.”

I added this one to my list of folk beliefs and food taboos, along with others that I had learned, such as peanuts and celery are sexual stimulants, but passion fruit
somehow makes you sleepy. Later, when I was in the city, I told a friend about my anthropological discoveries and found out that Leni was pulling my leg. He explained the old joke to me: “Eating armadillo makes your back hurt because it is so little and you have to bend over to catch it.”

In addition to armadillos, they eat turtles, wild pigs, pacas and a lot of animals and birds that we don’t have [in the U.S.]. Although many of them now raise cattle, their cows are too valuable to eat. They use them to carry goods, such as rubber, and the milk provides a steady source of protein. Some kids even ride their steers to school. When they do sell their cattle, it is usually in times of emergency, when they need immediate cash. Eating beef, then, is a luxury for most rubber tappers.

By the time we got to Carlos’ house, the women were in the kitchen and scattered throughout the house, talking, cutting the meat into smaller pieces and peeling manioc root. The men had finished clearing the field and were relaxing in the shade of a tree, trying to be patient with the first pieces of meat on the grill. They were crouching near the barbecue pit, which was literally a pit — a hole five feet deep and big enough for a coffin. Coals smoldered on the bottom, grilling the thin cutlets of meat laid across a barbed-wire grill at foot level.

As night settled in, Carlos’ tiny house on stilts provided the only light except for the stars above, thousands of little pinpricks in a black sheet that covered us all. In the corner of the house, next to a kerosene lamp, a battery-powered radio played an old forro cassette. The shining house swayed and seized with the rhythm of their dance steps — a slide and step that sounded like a huge broom sweeping and then a collective stomp as they planted their feet again.
Old Pedro Perto, who limped the entire hike over, was floating around light as air with his wife, Zefa. Teenagers danced awkwardly with the few other potential girlfriends and boyfriends that lived within a day’s walk, their happiness overcoming any initial hint of embarrassment. When we left just before dawn, the stars were slowly beginning to disappear, but the house was still swaying and there was meat on the grill.

Where’s the Beef?

This excerpt demonstrates the social importance of the ritual consumption of beef, even in the most isolated of Acrean corners. When Bahiana left her colonia, she had a big barbecue to say goodbye. On any given weekend or holiday, the air of Rio Branco is thick with the smell of roasting meat, and I have been to barbecues with Marxist economists, journalists, environmentalists, and politicians. From these upper sectors of Acrean society, I learned that a love of beef permeates all sectors of society, as do double entendres of beef and male sexual organs, and a gendered division of barbecue labor. After he was finished riding bulls at the Raio de Lua (Moonbeam) rodeo, Branco sat on a small plank with other cowboys and devoured big chunks of roasted beef. From the hole-in-the-ground churrascos in the seringal to the poolside stainless steel churrasqueira of a rancher, the ritual consumption of beef is a central component of Acrean social life that is full of meaning and contradictions. The centrality of beef in Acrean culture and society is expressed in beliefs, practices, and symbols.

The place of beef is particularly interesting in terms of participation, with Acreans consuming beef at high rates, either during meals or at churrascos (barbecues), a common social event across groups. Table 8.5 shows that, on average, beef is eaten 3.8 to 6.6 days per week by members of each group. Although there are differences in rates of beef consumption, it is noteworthy that the environmentalist NGO groups eat
meat almost four days a week. With the exception of the cowboys, who slaughter a cow every week to provide food for the ranch, and can eat beef every day free of charge, all groups buy their meat. The rubber tappers differ greatly from the other groups, eating beef only around one day every month, which can again be understood in terms of lack of access, but also as reflection of their cultural preference for game meat.

Cowboys, colonists, and ranchers prefer beef to other foods, whereas around half of policy makers and NGO workers prefer beef, and only 15% of rubber tappers prefer beef, most often choosing hunted meat instead. Overall, this table shows that there is a high level of participation in this aspect of cattle culture across groups, with the exception of rubber tappers.

There is a continuum of preference, which corresponds to perceptions of taste and amount of energy or strength that different foods give a person. Beef is at the top, followed by the weaker pork and chicken. Hunted meat is considered a delicacy by some and a health risk to others. A simple meal of rice, beans, and farinha (manioc flour), a common meal for the rubber tappers, is considered to be fundamentally lacking by all other groups.

The Hamburger Connection

The “hamburger connection,” a phrase coined by Norman Myers in 1981, chronicled the exportation of cheap beef from deforested lands in Central America to the United States (Myers 1981). Myers was not alone in calling attention to the complicity of American fast food chains in forest destruction, as other scholars sought to call attention to the problem in studies such as “The Cattle are Eating the Forest” (Nations and Komer 1983) and **Hoofprints on the Forest** (Shane 1986).
During the 1970s and 1980s, demand for beef in Latin American countries was less of a concern, as middle class buying power was limited by economic crisis (Jarvis 1986, quoted in Hecht 1993: 688). While the role of international markets was important in understanding this growth, it may have been overstated, as Latin American beef exports accounted for less than 5% of US beef imports (ibid.: 687). At the time, the international hamburger connection did not apply to Brazil, whose beef exports were limited, and most of the beef produced in the Amazon was consumed within the region (Kaimowitz et al. 2004).

Once fueled primarily by subsidies and incentives (Hecht 1993), much of the growth in the Amazonian cattle industry in the 1990s was fueled by demand in the burgeoning cities of the region (Faminow 1998:115). The growth in the cattle industry in Acre has produced a steady supply of cheap, high quality beef for consumers. Almost 40% of the beef raised in Acre is consumed in Acre, and consume beef they do: in 2006, Acreans were the highest per capita consumers of beef in Brazil, eating on average 45 kilograms (99 pounds) of beef per year, much higher than national average (37 kg) (IBGE 2010; Valentim, n.d.). As Table 8-5 showed, all groups eat beef, even NGO workers, who are aware of the fact that their consumption of beef directly supports the cattle industry that many of them oppose on ideological and political grounds. It will be shown, however, that the NGO workers have less positive perceptions of beef in comparison with other groups.

**Beef and Social Class**

The now widespread availability of beef is considered a sign of just how far the state has come, and how much the standard of living has improved. The administration of Brazil’s president “Lula,” (Luiz Inácio da Silva, 2003-2011) was a time of
socioeconomic advancement in Brazil. One man described this period as a time of transition from the “ovo” to “bife” (from egg to beef) in the *marmita* (lunch pail) of Brazilian workers. The egg in the *marmita* is also known as the “*bife de olhão,*” the envious person’s steak, a reference to jealousy over not having beef.

In group settings, it is important to have a piece of meat, preferably beef, on one’s plate, which signifies social status, and recognition of a common understanding of the symbolic and material benefits of beef. During lunchtime, urban workers and cowboys will make fun of others who do not have meat, disdaining their inability to buy it, and questioning their ability to work throughout the afternoon. For members of lower social classes, both urban and rural, eating beef is considered a marker of social status, and these groups generally have positive perceptions of beef in relation to other foods.

Acreans can now be picky and selective about their cuts of meat, unlike in the past. They talk about what for them was a significant historical event: waiting in line to buy beef before the influx of cattle. They would stand in line before daybreak, and were unable to choose any specific cuts. This point of reference is repeated by people who lived through it.

There is a hierarchy associated with different cuts of beef, with *picanha* and *filé* at the top, and organs and hooves at the bottom. In Table 8-6, I summarize the beef preferences of social groups. Each group was asked their favorite cut of meat, which I then classified into four categories of quality of prestige through consultation with butchers and other experts. Values were assigned between one and four, with a score of one assigned the choicest cuts (*e.g.* *picanha* (top sirloin), and organs and bones
classified as a four. Thus, the lower the average, the higher the quality of beef preferred.\textsuperscript{3}

As can be seen in the table, higher class groups (ranchers, policy makers, and NGO workers) living in the city prefer higher quality cuts of beef. Cowboys, who have access to beef beyond their social class because they work on ranches, also prefer high quality meats, but less than the higher class groups. Rubber tappers and colonists are well out of the highest quality meat range

\textbf{Beef and Perceptions}

It is often said that beef consumption gives a person immediate energy to be burned through the process of working. A steady diet of beef makes a person, particularly men, \textit{“forte,”} which means both strong and stout, or \textit{gordo} (fat), which is not an insult, but an indicator of status and health. Table 8-7 shows the extent to which people agree that beef gives more strength to work than other foods, and other perceptions.

Despite the fact that NGO workers eat meat an average of four days a week, they do not believe in many of the social perceptions about the benefits of beef. Other groups, when asked about the possibility of a lunch without meat, did not simply respond “yes” or “no,” but with a crinkled face, and drawn out moans of displeasure. It is not acceptable to not have meat for lunch, and, as one colonist put it: meatless meals are eaten “with our eyes closed.” Over half of members of all groups, with the exception

\textsuperscript{3} Clarification of meat rankings:
1: Highest quality: \textit{picanha} (top sirloin), \textit{filé} (posterior carnes = “rear meats”)
3: medium quality: \textit{cupim}, \textit{peito}, \textit{costela}, \textit{agulha}, \textit{musculo} (e.g. legs, hump, breast)
4: low quality: \textit{mocotó}, \textit{caração}, \textit{braço} (organs and parts)
of NGO workers, claim that a meal without meat of any kind is not a true meal. Most rural groups, with the exception of the rubber tappers, feel weak if they do not eat meat for lunch. Around 75% of all rural groups agreed that a meatless lunch leaves a person weak, but there was less agreement on the more strongly worded “not eating beef leaves a person without the will to work.”

One hundred percent of cowboys, who eat beef nearly every day, thought that beef gives you more strength to work. Among the rural groups, the rubber tappers, who eat beef on average less than one day a month, agreed the least with this statement (42%). Conversely, only 32% of PP and 21% of NGO groups agreed that beef gives you more strength. Thus, the PP/NGO group does not share positive perceptions of beef, but they still eat it an average of four days a week. Furthermore, only 14% of NGO workers agreed that “a lunch with no meat is not a lunch,” whereas 57% of PP and rubber tappers, and between 70%-75% of colonists, ranchers, and cowboys agreed. Question 16, “a lunch with no meat leaves a person weak,” had between 65%-75% agreement among rural groups, but only 7% of NGO workers and 37% of policy makers agreed. These results indicate distinct patterns of agreement: rural groups believe more in the positive social perceptions of beef than do urban PP/NGO groups. Among the PP/NGO groups, the PP members agree more than the NGO workers with positive social perceptions of beef.

In the realm of beef perceptions, not only are different patterns of agreement revealed between the rural and NGO/PP groups, but when comparing these cultural data with personal attributes, we see further differences. All of these groups eat beef, but the rubber tappers eat beef on average only 0.35 days/week. In contrast, cowboys
eat beef 6.6 days a week and colonists and ranchers eat beef at least 5.5 days a week. We would expect the PP/NGO groups to eat less meat because of: 1) their low level of agreement with positive perceptions of beef; 2) our knowledge that the PP/NGO groups are the least pro-cattle culture of all groups, and 3) their ideological opposition to cattle raising as a destructive practice. Despite these cultural perceptions, their practices do not match their ideology: policy makers and NGO workers eat beef an average of 3.9 and 3.8 days a week. This number is lower than all groups, with the exception of the rubber tappers (who do not eat meat because they don’t have access to it), but it is still high: people with an ideological opposition to cattle raising consume the products of cattle raising four days of every week.

This finding is difficult to reconcile with perceptions of environmentalists, but eating beef forms a part of the social fabric of Acrean, and Brazilian society at large. Many environmentalists saw the contradiction in their perceptions and practices, but as one otherwise reserved government official exclaimed: “I can’t help it, I am a carnivore!” The high beef consumption attests to the pervasiveness of cattle culture in the realm of participation, but the different perceptions of beef reflect an ideological difference among the more environmentalist groups. For the rural groups, many positive perceptions of beef are considered cultural facts, independent of their ideology.

**Beef and Metaphor**

The social idiom of eating extends beyond material sustenance into the realm of status, as demonstrated by the comparison of the egg and the *bife*. In terms of status, you are what you eat, but also who you eat. “*Comer,*” to eat, also means to consume sexually. It usually refers to the male, or the penetrator in sexual relations, who is said to have “eaten” the penetrated. To eat someone is to show dominance, and to extend
the idiom of nourishment and prestige surrounding beef, it implies the ability to derive or appropriate some sense of power over the subject.

Sexuality also has other references in cattle culture. Infidelity is commonly referred to as "pular a cerca," (jumping the fence), a reference to cattle leaving their defined place in order to mate (where the grass may be greener). Although strong or valiant men throughout the world are often compared to bulls, this is rare in Brazil. If one’s spouse has “jumped the fence,” the cuckolded partner is said to acquire horns. Being called a “chifrudo” or “corno” (horned one) is considered, either a devastating insult, or a term of chiding endearment among male friends. Brazilians generally avoid relating themselves to cattle, and although t-shirts that depict a cowboy riding a bull are acceptable, wearing clothing with the image of cattle, especially those with horns is avoided. 4

Masculine word play is especially evident at churrascos (Limón 1989). This is related to the universal designation of men as grillers and servers of meat, and the fact that men generally congregate around the grill, making it a very masculine space. Given the double meanings of various meat cuts and “eating”, accepting and eating meat from a male server, especially sausage shaped items, leaves one open to insults. Portuguese terms and expressions thus contribute additional metaphorical and symbolic dimensions of masculinity and sexuality to the culture surrounding cattle.

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4 My first year in Acre, I wore by Texas Longhorn hat around town and in the field. The hat was especially funny to Acreans because of the extended size of the horns. One day I left my hat in the hotel, and when I returned it was gone. The maids had thrown it away, "as a favor to me," so that I might avoid future humiliation.
Beef and the Center of Cattle Culture

The paramount importance of beef in the material and symbolic existence of Acreans, and the associated high levels of prestige and other positive attributes accorded to cattle raising and cattle raisers, demonstrate how separate components of the same domain come together in cattle culture. Beef gives people the energy they need to be productive, which is associated with landscape transformation and control of nature, activities which are most demonstrably illustrated through the creation of pastures for cattle raising.

According to this perspective, eating other foods give less strength and thus a person is less ready to work, to transform their environment to observably dominated and cultivated spaces. The rubber tappers’ lack of productivity is often ascribed to undesirable traits said to stem from physical weakness (*fraqueza*), and mental or cultural predispositions, or a *falta de coragem* (lack of will to work). These same attributes are often identified as symptoms of a meatless diet. Beef, or meat more generally, is seen as essential to the beginning of work on a daily and long term basis. Without it, economic productivity, the ideal of practice in cattle culture, is undermined. Cattle, as the culmination of hard work and the symbol of productivity, provide beef, thus fueling material transformation through physical labor, and simultaneously signifying “progress,” “development,” socioeconomic achievement, and wealth. The consumption of beef and production of cattle thus form part of a complete system of positive signs and symbols that valorize a cattle-based lifestyle.

Conclusion

Much can be learned from looking at the material world as a form of material culture that is both the product of and reflective of material constraints and drivers, and
ideological meanings operating across scales. This analysis of landscapes suggests that the nature-culture divide continues to structure the ways that people view certain landscapes, and informs the ways that dwellings and cultural places are constructed.

On an abstract level, the forest is considered beautiful by urban residents, who do not depend on it economically, as well as those with a history of interaction with the forest. The abstract appreciation for the forest, however, does not mean that urban or rural populations wish to live in proximity to it. Both groups take steps to separate themselves from nature, and are judged positively for demonstrating the clear separation of human and natural realms in their landholdings. Groups that live in the closest proximity to the forest agree the most that this boundary should be maintained due to practical reasons, while some urban population may downplay the need to distinguish the home from the forest for rural populations, a position associated with their ideological and political positions.

Human domination of nature is most clearly expressed in rural landscapes through cattle raising and the establishment of pastures. Human interconnectedness with nature, a rejection of the nature-culture divide, is expressed through forest extractivism, a practice which is less clearly inscribed on the landscape. Both of these landscapes and practices are seen as representative of local opposed ideological positions: either cattle culture or environmentalism. These different forms of rural life are recreated symbolically in the city, and are patronized by groups who feel that they represent their ideological and/or political values.

By analyzing the landscapes of Acre, from the forests and pastures of the countryside to urban places that seek to recreate the rural, we can see how the nature-
culture conflict of the frontier is played out after the frontier has passed, but remains in an ideological sphere. This was demonstrated by the manner in which landscapes are judged and perceived, and the ways rural places are recreated in urban areas. The prevalence of cattle culture in the material landscape, and the relative absence of any perceptible celebration of *florestania*, except in official projects, indicates that cattle culture is growing in Acre. The meanings of these landscapes and places reflect a desire to cross the divide that separates humans from nature, but in such a way that the reconciliation is based more on a cattle-centered countryside and domination of nature.
Table 8.1. Comparison of social group associations of beauty with landscapes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Pasture</th>
<th>Agriculture field</th>
<th>Forest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rubber Tapper</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonist</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rancher</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cowboy</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rio Branco Urban</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: There were 20 respondents for each of the 7 groups, with a total of 140 respondents, but 16 respondents are not included in the results because they chose more than one landscape.

Table 8.2. Comparison of social group agreement with statements about house and forest proximity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>It is dangerous to have forest close to the house</th>
<th>It is better to have pasture around house than forest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rubber Tapper</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonist</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rancher</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cowboy</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.3. Comparison of social group agreement with statements that the landscape reflects character of landowner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>a person with a clean pasture is a hard worker</th>
<th>a person who lives in the forest lacks the will to work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rubber Tapper</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonist</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rancher</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cowboy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8-4. Comparison of social group agreement with statements about social aspirations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>It is the dream of most Acreans to own cattle</th>
<th>It is dream of most Acreans to be a rubber tapper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rubber Tappers</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonists</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranchers</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cowboys</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8-5. Beef consumption

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>RT</th>
<th>Colonist</th>
<th>Rancher</th>
<th>Cowboy</th>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>NGO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How many days/week do you eat beef?</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>5.55</td>
<td>5.85</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you prefer beef over other foods?</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...had a churrasco at your house?</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8-6. Average beef prestige rankings by social group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beef prestige</th>
<th>RT</th>
<th>Colonist</th>
<th>Rancher</th>
<th>Cowboy</th>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>NGO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8-7. Social group perceptions of beef

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>RT</th>
<th>Colonist</th>
<th>Rancher</th>
<th>Cowboy</th>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>NGO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) beef gives more strength to work than other food</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) people that don't eat beef lack will to work</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) a lunch with no meat leaves a person weak</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) a lunch with no meat is not a lunch</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cattle culture is comprises beliefs, preferences, practices and perceptions that attribute economic, symbolic, and social superiority to people, practices, spaces, and cultural constructions oriented to cattle. In this chapter, I employ cultural consensus modeling (CCM) to analyze the extent to which social groups in Acre, Brazil agree and disagree with propositions associated with cattle culture.

Cultural consensus modeling is a powerful tool because it allows us to revise and question our generalizations about groups constructed through qualitative research. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches have their strengths and weaknesses, however, and I use cultural consensus analysis here to complement rather than replace the qualitative research that has preceded this chapter.

Six groups are included in this analysis: rubber tappers, colonists, ranchers, cowboys, policy makers, and environmental NGO workers. With CCM, we can address four fundamental objectives set forth for this research.

1) The questions used in the survey were drawn from statements and opinions about cattle raising and social groups that were collected through interviews and observation. By asking these questions to members of each group, and analyzing the level of agreement for each group, we can test the extent to which perceptions of cattle culture are shared across groups, and, based on the most common responses, identify the “culturally correct” answers to the questions.

2) CCM facilitates analysis of inter and intra-cultural variation, allowing me to investigate the cohesiveness of social groups and the shifting boundaries of social groups historically defined by their economic practices. Historically, the identity and
values of rubber tappers, agricultural colonists, and large scale ranchers in the Amazon were, as expected, tied to each group’s economic practices. To varying degrees, each group now depends on cattle raising, but change in identity lags behind these behavioral and material changes. We can better understand the changes taking place among Acrean social groups as they adopt the practice of cattle raising by comparing the responses of rubber tappers, ranchers, and colonists to see to what extent each has appropriated perceptions that are indicative of cattle culture. Systematically comparing group agreement with cattle culture can give us an idea of the social and cultural changes occurring among groups that have yet to or may never emerge in their expressions of identity.

3) Throughout this dissertation, it has been shown that there is ideological tension between environmentalism and cattle culture. Certain groups are thought to embody these oppositions in Acrean society. For example, rubber tappers and ranchers are often opposed to one another for historical reasons, such as land conflict. The material base of these oppositions, distinct forms of practice, has come to represent different sides of an ideological debate focused on the environment. By comparing the responses of cattle raising groups with NGO workers and policy makers, who are more oriented to environmentalism, we can probe the supposed opposition of each group to one another.

4) The main conceptual goal of this dissertation has been to investigate the interplay of material and cultural factors in the spread of cattle raising and in the formation of cattle culture. By comparing data on perceptions used in CCM with a survey on group practices, we will see the extent to which agreement with cattle culture
translates into participation in the practice of cattle raising and cultural activities associated with cattle culture.

**Cultural Consensus Modeling**

Cultural Consensus Theory (CCT) is a collection of analytical techniques and models that can be used to measure cultural beliefs and the degree to which individuals know or report those beliefs. Agreement between the responses of individuals and the aggregate responses of the group can be used to estimate how well each individual corresponds to the group (Weller 2007: 339).

There are three assumptions to CCT: 1) each informant answers questions independently of other informants; 2) questions should all be on the same topic and have the same level of difficulty; and 3) it is only applicable if there is a single set of culturally defined answers to the questions (there must be a high level of agreement in responses) (ibid.:340; Romney *et al.* 1986).

The application of CCT is known as Cultural Consensus Modeling (CCM) (Romney *et al.* 1986). Examples of research employing CCM illustrate how the method functions and how resulting data are interpreted. In a study by Chavez and colleagues, the researchers asked respondents to rank the importance of risk factors for cervical and breast cancer. Using CCM, the researchers were able to “determine the extent to which a group of people shared cultural knowledge within a specific domain of culture” (Chavez *et al.* 1995). The results demonstrated that different groups (*e.g.* Chicana and Caucasian women) achieved specific levels of agreement on the elements of a cultural domain, or agreed on a cultural model. It was also found that different groups shared similar features of other groups’ cultural models (ibid.). In a study of racial classification systems in Puerto Rico, Gravlee was able to “verify the existence and location of
cultural boundaries and to justify the assumption of shared culture” (2005: 962). These studies have empirically demonstrated the power of CCM to advance our knowledge of inter- and intra-cultural differences, and to complement traditional ethnographic approaches.

Application of CCM to the Study of Cattle Culture

Construction of the Cultural Domain

In order to construct a model for CCM, it is first necessary to find the features of a cultural domain through open ended interviews or free lists (e.g. Chavez et al. 1995; Dressler et al. 1996). From 2007-2009, over the course of three separate field seasons, I collected data on the cultural domain of cattle culture through participant observation in cattle-related events and practices, key informant interviews, semi-structured interviews, and pile sorts with informants in each social group.

Creation of the survey

I searched these data for key themes related to or indicative of the cultural domain of cattle culture, which I then divided into five categories: 1) “perceptions of land use:” the belief that raising cattle is the best way to use one’s land, socially and economically (compared to other forms of land use); 2) “perceptions of social groups:” the ascription of positive cultural attributes to people or groups who raise cattle, especially compared to those that practice agriculture or extractivism; 3) “cattle culture participation:” valorization of a cattle-based lifestyle through participation in popular culture and the expression of cultural values through dress and activities related to cattle; 4) “beef consumption and perceptions:” frequent consumption of and belief in the positive social and symbolic meanings of beef; and 5) “human-nature interaction:” perceptions that raising cattle is superior to other forms of human-environment relations. Intrigued by a
possible association between cattle culture and authoritarianism, I later added two questions to measure authoritarian tendencies. The resultant questionnaire consisted of 71 questions, with at least nine questions for each of the five categories (see Appendix A).

It should be noted that “cattle culture” is not a unified concept. To date, this is the first time that it has been conceptualized and measured. Thus, it was essential to ensure that my conceptualization of cattle culture had construct validity (Handwerker 2002). There should be a match between observations of what I consider to be cattle culture and the theoretical construct of cattle culture. Additionally, the questionnaire that I created should measure cattle culture and not something else. I thus consulted with key informants in Acre, Amazonian specialists, and CCM experts to ensure that the questionnaire had construct validity.

Sample

One of the benefits of CCM is that confidence can be established with a small number of respondents. The number of informants per group needed to establish consensus depends on the strength of the cultural domain (Weller 2007). For example, very few informants are required to learn the consensus about the names of the months of the year. More informants are needed to learn the names of ethnic and racial groups. In an exploratory study, the strength of the domain is not known until the data have been analyzed, but 20 CCT respondents in each hypothesized group or subgroup should be sufficient, according to consensus theory, to detect the presence of a single culture, if it exists (Weller 2007).

My sample in this chapter consists of 20 respondents for each of 6 groups: (1) rubber tappers, (2) colonists, (3) large scale ranchers, (4) cowboys, (5) policy makers...
(abbreviated PP), and (6) decision makers and extension agents at socio-environmental NGOs (abbreviated NGO). I chose respondents using purposive sampling (Bernard: 2000: 176) (see Appendix B for details on sampling method).

It is likely that higher levels of consensus would have been achieved by including only rural groups in this sample, but my objective was not to confirm the presence of cattle culture only among those that raise cattle. I am seeking to demonstrate both that cattle culture is widespread across different groups, but also that cattle culture is contested and appropriated in different ways among different groups. For this reason, policy makers and NGO workers, groups ostensibly opposed to cattle culture, are included in the sample.

**Analysis**

For the formal model of CCM, which was used for this consensus analysis, it is necessary to include only responses that measure agreement with the cultural domain (as opposed to personal attributes), and that responses be coded as dichotomous variables (Weller 2007). For example, the question “Does cattle raising give a person status?” measures agreement with a cultural domain, whereas “Do you wear boots?” measures a personal attribute. As a result of these limitations, only a portion of the overall cattle culture survey is entered into the consensus analysis. Category three (personal participation in cowboy culture) and parts of category four (concerned with consumption of beef), were not included because these categories measure personal attributes, rather than knowledge of a cultural domain. Additionally, the section on word associations, which does measure cultural attributes, but does not follow the yes/no pattern, does not enter into the consensus analysis. These data on personal attributes
and associations were analyzed using STATA, with results presented in the attributes section.

The cultural consensus analysis thus includes 39 questions that measured agreement with the cultural domain of cattle culture in which respondents answered either “yes” or “no.” Responses for these 39 items were entered into UCINET to determine overall and group-level consensus scores and second factor loadings, a measure of agreement with cattle culture.

**Explanation**

I offer an illustration to aid in the interpretation of the results and clarify key concepts. In Table 9-1, I have included three statements with distinct levels of agreement among members of each group and, in the far right column, the overall agreement across all respondents on the statement. Ideally, there should be 20 members in each group responding to each statement for a total sample of 120 respondents, but data are missing for some statements.

For question one (Table 9-1), we see extremely high agreement across groups, with only one NGO member not agreeing that “if you stop working, the forest takes over your land.” This was the most agreed upon question in the entire survey. There is almost 100% agreement with this statement in every group, indicating high in-group agreement. Summing the responses of each group results in 99% overall agreement, or high overall agreement.

In terms of cultural consensus analysis, the competence scores of those who agreed with this statement will be boosted, and the score of the one individual who disagreed with the majority will be lowered. Because competence scores will only be presented on a group level, the disagreement of the individual will lower the
competence score of his/her group, NGO members. It is important to remember that CCA measures agreement with the overall sample. Statements with high levels of agreement are considered to be culturally true.

Question two was the least agreed with item in the survey. Only 2% of the overall sampled agreed that “agriculturalists are rich around here.” For this question, I took a statement that was commonly uttered and reversed it (“agriculturalists are poor”), in order to have a mix of positively and negatively worded questions to avoid respondent bias. The results indicate that despite reversing the meaning of the statement, there was still high agreement.

The problem with this methodological step is that there is no proof that the opposite statement is believed to be true (“agriculturalists are poor”), only that there is agreement that the false statement is, in fact, false. Despite this limitation, it is safe to assume that 98% of respondents agree that agriculturalists are not rich. For items for which there is high disagreement, or for which there is high agreement on negatively worded questions, I will reverse these figures and refer to them in terms of agreement in order to facilitate comparison. Thus, for question two, there is 98% agreement.

Question three, “pasture around the house is better than forest” provides two lessons. First of all, there is no clear consensus on this question, with 51% agreeing and 49% disagreeing. Looking beyond overall agreement, this item provides a chance to see how groups differ in their responses. Rural groups (rubber tappers, colonists, ranchers, and cowboys) all agree with this statement at least 60% of the time. Conversely, no NGO members and only 16% of policy makers agreed with the
statement. There are two patterns of agreement here: rural groups agree that pasture is better, whereas urban, environmentalist groups do not agree.

**Results**

**Cultural Consensus across Groups**

Prior to conducting this analysis, I expected high cultural competence scores for the domain of cattle culture from (in order of score): cowboys, ranchers, and colonists. I expected rubber tappers to be lower, but to nonetheless demonstrate adherence to cattle culture. I thought that the policy group, which reflects a group of diverse individuals, would be split, and that the NGO group would not exhibit competence in the cultural domain of cattle culture. In this section, I do not refer to the term agreement, but rather competence, meaning the correspondence between a group’s responses and the responses of the entire sample. A group with a high competence score agrees more with rest of the sample; a group with a low competence scores agrees less with the entire sample.

The ratio of the first eigenvalue to the second eigenvalue is used to determine if there is one set of answers present in the data, *i.e.* if there is cultural consensus. A rule of thumb is that a ratio of greater than 3 to 1 indicates consensus (Weller 2007: 346). Analysis of competence scores in UCINET indicated a ratio of greater than 3:1 for each group and for the entire sample. Thus, there is cultural consensus in the domain of cattle culture.

In Table 9-2, the mean competence scores are presented by group. The competence scores reflect the extent to which respondents agree with the overall group on the domain of cattle culture. In order of highest to lowest competence scores, the
groups are ordered: 1) cowboys, 2) policy makers, 3) colonists, 4) rubber tapper, 5) NGO, 6) ranchers.

The differences between groups were minimal, constituting a difference of 0.11 between the cowboys, who had the highest score (0.653), and ranchers, who had the lowest score (0.552). Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of group mean competence scores confirms that there is no statistical difference between groups. Taken together, the high competence mean of each group means that there is consensus within each group, and the ANOVA, which showed no statistical difference between groups, demonstrates that there is consensus across groups in the cultural domain of cattle culture. The findings show that there is consensus across groups in the cultural domain of cattle culture.

**Comparison of Distribution of Group Competence Scores**

In this section, differences in patterns of agreement between groups are discussed and illustrated. Distribution of mean competence scores is analyzed within and across groups. This will show which groups are the most coherent in their responses. Figure 9-1 reveals the range of variation within group competence scores.

The average competence score of each group is indicated by the dark line in the box, illustrating that cowboys have the highest competence scores, followed by policy makers. Ranchers have the lowest competence scores. The shaded boxes represent the range of competence scores for 50% of respondents in each group. Thus, the smaller the box, the more the members of a group agree with each other. We see that ranchers, cowboys, and colonists demonstrate a higher degree of coherence in their responses. Rubber tappers demonstrate the greatest variation among rural groups, and even more than NGO workers. The greatest overall variation is among policy makers,
who show a range almost twice as large as all other groups, indicating that they are less cohesive in their perceptions.

The whiskers (bracketed lines) denote 1.5 standard deviations from the mean group competence score, thus providing another measure of group variation. Once again, we see less variation among cowboys and the greatest among policy makers, who have twice the range of cowboys.

The whiskers also reveal that all respondents in the rubber tapper, public policy, and NGO groups fit within 1.5 standard deviations of their group mean, indicating that no members of these groups substantially disagree with their fellow group members. On the other hand, one colonist scores well above 1.5 standard deviations and one cowboy and two ranchers score below 1.5 standard deviations. All policy-makers score within 1.5 standard deviations of their group mean, but the length of the whisker, which extends the entire vertical axis of the graph, would include the range of responses for all other groups, once again demonstrating the high variation among the policy makers in comparison with other groups.

Figure 9-2 illustrates the competence scores for individuals at distinct levels (e.g. 0.55, 0.60, and 0.65) within each group, and illustrates the relative distribution of competence scores within groups. This illustration allows us to compare differences in the distribution of competence scores between groups. The colonists demonstrate the greatest uniformity of competence scores, with 15 out of 20 colonists scoring between .55 and .65. The competence scores of the cowboys, with the exception of one respondent, are bunched up between .55 and .80, illustrating why they have the highest overall competence scores, and are among the most coherent groups.
Ranchers and rubber tappers, two of the most ideologically distinct groups, have similar distributions of scores. Six rubber tappers had scores of 0.55 or below and five ranchers had scores of 0.50 or below, showing that around a quarter of the members in each group agree with the overall sample around half of the time. Both groups then peak, with six rubber tappers scoring 0.60 and six ranchers scoring 0.55. To the right of each peak, competence scores increase; in this range there are eight rubber tappers and nine ranchers, close to half of each group. The NGO group also has a similar distribution of competence scores.

Comparing these graphs helps to understand the distribution of scores among the three groups with the lowest competences score. Roughly 75% of members in each group agree with the most common overall responses more than 60% of the time. The overall group competence mean, however, is brought down by the other 25% of each group, who agree less than 50% of the time. The wide variety of responses in the public policy group is particularly evident again, reemphasizing the fact that they are not as coherent in their perceptions as other groups. Their high competence score, however, is due to the fact that 13 out of 20 policy makers had competence scores between 0.65 and 0.80.

Figures 9-1 and 9-2 help us to understand similarities and differences between groups by comparing and illustrating the distribution of group competence scores. Overall, we see that cowboys and colonists, groups with among the highest competence scores, are also the most united in terms of their responses. Conversely, policy makers, who have the second highest competence scores, are the least united of all groups, with respondents exhibiting a wide range of competence scores. Ranchers,
NGO workers, and rubber tappers, the groups with the lowest competence scores, have a similar distribution of scores. Their scores are brought down by roughly a quarter of the members in each group, who agreed with overall sample only 50% or less.

The findings reveal that colonists, ranchers, and cowboys, the three groups most dedicated to cattle raising practice, are the most coherent in their perceptions. Cowboys and colonists also have relatively high competence scores, but the ranchers have the lowest competence scores. Figure 9-1 explains the surprisingly low score of the ranchers: it is likely that the two ranchers who scored 1.5 standard deviations below the rest of the group pulled the group competence score down. Despite these two outliers, the ranchers are still one of the most coherent in their perceptions, and it is likely that if the two outliers were removed their competence scores would be higher.

These findings thus support expectations that groups most associated with cattle raising practice are also the most coherent in their perceptions. If we exclude the ranchers, who have the lowest competence score, and the policy makers, who have the 2nd highest scores, the groups most dedicated to cattle raising (colonists and cowboys) also have the highest consensus scores

**Agreement and Cattle Culture**

Up to this point, the discussion has focused on comparing consensus scores, or level of agreement with the overall sample. It has been demonstrated that there is overall consensus within the cultural domain. This means that there is agreement across groups, but it does not necessarily mean that we are measuring agreement with cattle culture. We can see the difference by analyzing the second factor loadings, which represent the greatest remaining differences among respondents, or a component of cattle culture not captured by consensus scores. Consensus analysis
shows agreement with other groups, or the culturally correct answers. The second factor loadings show that there is something beyond consensus driving similar responses.

In their study of environmental values, Kempton and colleagues compared their findings between groups perceived to be environmentalists (e.g. members of Earth First! and the Sierra Club) and groups thought to be less inclined to agree with the values of environmentalism (e.g. sawmill workers) (1995). After plotting the second factor loadings with agreement, the researchers noticed that environmentalist groups were clustered toward the top of the graph and non-environmentalist groups were clustered toward the bottom. Based on their knowledge of their sample, and the distinctive clustering of environmentalist and non-environmentalist groups, they interpreted the second factor loadings to represent an environmentalist perspective (Ibid. 1995: 191-199).

After I plotted the second factor loadings with agreement, the cowboys, who are more aligned with cattle culture, were clustered in the upper portion of the graph. NGO workers, who are more opposed to cattle culture, were clustered in the lower extremes of the graph. Given that those with high second factor loading are more in favor of cattle culture and more involved in cattle raising than groups with low second factor loadings, I interpreted the second factors to be representative of pro-cattle culture beliefs.

In Figure 9-3, the x-axis represents competence scores, and is labeled as “agreement.” Individuals who agreed the most with other respondents are further to the
right (increasing competence score). The y-axis represents the second factor loadings, or pro-cattle culture perspectives.

The graph (Figure 9-3) helps us to visualize four key aspects: 1) points further to the right represent higher competence scores, or increasing levels of agreement with the overall sample; 2) the higher an individual is on the y-axis, the more pro-cattle culture they are; 3) points closer together demonstrate greater in-group homogeneity. We can see differences in cattle culture orientation by comparing cowboys (Figure 9-3) with NGO workers (Figure 9-4).

Cowboys are in the upper right portion of the graph (Figure 9-3), which means that they have a more pro-cattle culture perspective than NGO workers (Figure 9-4). We also see that the cowboys more tightly clustered than NGO workers, demonstrating that they are more coherent in their perceptions. None of the NGO workers are in the upper portion of the graph. This demonstrates something that we were expecting: NGO workers are less in favor of cattle culture than other groups.

Figures 9-5 through 9-8 show the results of the second factor loadings for policy makers, rubber tappers, colonists, and ranchers, each with a unique distribution on the graph. The graphs for policy makers (Figure 9-5) and rubber tappers (Figure 9-6) show similar distributions of competence scores, but marked differences in pro-cattle culture perceptions. The policy makers had the 2nd highest competence scores, but the graph shows that they are not as pro-cattle culture as the rubber tappers and cowboys. Figures 9-7 and 9-8 show that colonists and ranchers are both pro-cattle culture. There are five colonists around or above the 0.5 mark on the vertical axis, indicating that some
colonists are extremely pro-cattle culture. There is only one other group with an individual above the 0.5 mark, an NGO worker.

Figure 9-9, an agreement chart that includes members of all groups, allows us to see how the groups overlap, with some members of each group having perspectives similar to those in other groups. Table 9-3 compares group competence ranks with expected and actual pro-cattle culture perspectives. As illustrated in the graphs, the groups rank, in order of high to low pro-cattle culture perspective: cowboys, colonists, rubber tappers, ranchers, policy makers and NGO workers. This was close to the expected order of the groups, with only rubber tappers and ranchers switched. The comparisons offered up to this point have hinted at differences between groups.

**Patterns Agreement and Disagreement on Individual Items across Groups**

Now that we have a good idea of the distribution of competence scores and pro-cattle perspectives for each group, it is informative to compare group-level responses to individual questions. This will provide us with a better understanding of the similarities and differences between groups. The findings presented in this section examine the following distinct patterns: 1) strong agreement (more than 75% agreement) in each social group; 2) moderate agreement (more than 75% agreement for most groups, but less than 75% agreement for at least one group); and 3) lack of agreement, indicated when at least one group falls below the 50% agreement threshold.
High Levels of Within Group Agreement

Table 9-4 shows that at least 75% of members in every group agreed on Questions 1-4, or that there was high agreement across groups for these items. Questions 5-9 had less than 25% agreement in all groups. From this point forward, I will refer to all of these nine items, for which at least 75% of each group answered the same way, as “high agreement,” to avoid confusion. For example, instead of saying that 2% agreed that agriculturalists are rich, I will say that there was 98% agreement that agriculturalists are not rich. The reasons and the drawbacks of this approach were discussed previously, but presenting the data in this way makes the comparisons easier to follow.

The far right column is the sum of total responses to each question (Table 9-4). For each of these questions, there was at least 88% overall agreement. The table thus illustrates items for which there was high overall and high within-group agreement.

Out of the nine statements with high agreement, six are from the social group perceptions category (questions 2-6, 9), two questions come from the land use perceptions category (q 7, 8), and one question comes from the human-nature interaction category (q 1).

Most of these questions give the impression that cattle raising and raisers are viewed positively in comparison with other groups and practices. Overall, all groups agree that raising cattle gives a person status (91%) and the “good life” (92%), and that it is the dream of most Acreans to own cattle (92%). These positive social values are ascribed to ranchers, who possess the ability to travel outside the state (96%), a marker of high social class. This is reinforced by the fact that over 90% of all groups disagreed with the statement that “ranchers are mixed race/ black,” with many stating that they are
white, another category associated with high social class. It is clear that cattle raising and cattle raisers are associated with positive social values.

Conversely, there was 98% agreement that agriculturalists are not rich. Colonists and ranchers often say that “rubber tappers lack the will to work,” but only 12% of the overall survey agreed with this statement (with the highest agreement in the colonist and rancher categories). This statement was quite common in casual conversation among the ranchers and colonists, but was negated in the survey.

These respondents either said things that they did not mean in normal conversation to make a point, or they were uncomfortable having such a politically incorrect or controversial viewpoint recorded formally in the survey. Different methods of data collection elicit different data, as I learned early on when I asked people if I could record our conversations. In recorded interviews, responses were terse and guarded, and they would search for responses that they thought would be most acceptable or “correct” to me, an outsider and perceived environmentalist. This example shows how the culturally correct answers are defined by context and method of data collection.

Cultural consensus analysis, which relies on a formal survey, will capture the majority of agreement among respondents, and give a researcher a general feel for the cultural domain. Controversial questions, however, may not elicit “culturally correct” responses, but rather yield “politically correct” responses. This is further support that formal methods (surveys) and quantitative data analysis (CCM) should be combined with traditional ethnographic methods to get a balanced understanding of cultural phenomenon.
There was 99% overall agreement with Question 9, “if you stop working, the forest takes over your property.” As discussed in Chapter Eight, this statement question was considered a fact among almost everyone. Most respondents think that it is the dream of most Acreans to own land (95%) and to own cattle (92%). The high level of agreement on these statements, when coupled with those that show high status associated with cattle raising, demonstrate aspirations for, or at the very least, a vision of the rural life that is cattle dominant. For questions dealing with cattle raising or cattle raisers, there is at least 80% agreement within all groups, including policy makers and NGO workers.

Collectively, these items with very high agreement across groups provide support that cattle culture shapes perceptions. As shown in previous chapters, cattle raising is expanding, participation in cattle culture is increasing, and social groups are renegotiating their identities. In addition to these components of Acrean society, the findings presented in Table 9-4 demonstrate that some components of cattle culture are expressed in the perceptions of all social groups.

**Moderate within Group Agreement and High Overall Agreement**

Table 9-5 shows the statements for which there was moderate agreement, or for which at least one group was below 75% agreement with the other groups, who were above 75% agreement. There are 14 questions presented in the moderate agreement section; responses that are below 75% are underlined. In eight of the 14 questions, only one group disagrees with the other groups. Some of the overall levels of agreement within the moderate category are actually higher than those in the high
agreement category, but the point here is to capture items for which at least one group differed from the majority in order to identify differences between groups.¹

With the exception of the rubber tappers, it was nearly unanimous among all groups that “government should never limit the voice of the people” (q1). This question was an attempt to see if cattle culture was associated with an authoritarian viewpoint. Ideally, this question would have revealed a connection between the domination of nature through cattle raising, and a tolerance for the domination of people. It did not reveal this relationship, but it does suggest that rubber tappers are somewhat more tolerant than other groups of non-democratic rule. This could be attributed to their lack of awareness that authoritarian rule is generally considered negatively because they are more physically and socially isolated in comparison with other groups. It is also possible that older rubber tappers, who once lived under the coercive rule of the rubber barons, have a greater tolerance for non-democratic political systems.

Ranchers disagreed with other groups that “the rubber tappers are the group that best preserves the forest” (q2). They often explained this by saying that rubber tappers live completely from the forest, and thus they do not have to decide to preserve the forest or not. Others said that rubber tappers did not preserve the forest at all, pointing out that all rubber tappers that they know had deforested their lands and shifted to cattle raising. Another segment of ranchers felt that the ranchers were the group that best preserved the forest. Their logic was based on the fact that rancher landholdings are usually around 5000 hectares and the law requires that they preserve 80% as forest.

¹ All of the moderate agreement items had overall agreement greater than 70%. When summed with the 9 questions in the high agreement category, there are 23 out of 39 total questions for which there was greater than 70% overall agreement.
Thus, they reasoned, they preserve more forest than a rubber tapper with 300 hectares within their 10% deforestation limits.

The statement “agriculture has more tradition in Acre than cattle raising” was another question that was reversed to prevent respondent bias. Most people actually say that either cattle raising or extractivism has more tradição, or tradition. It became apparent that tradição can mean history/tradition, as I intended, but that it also means to be strong or well established in the present. Regardless of the meaning, it is a positive descriptor, and was not associated with agriculture by 90% of respondents. The question is only included in the moderate agreement category because 74% of rubber tappers disagreed with it, and it thus barely missed the 75% cutoff established for high agreement.

**Preference for anthropogenic landscapes**

At least 87% of all groups agreed that “it is healthy to live in the forest” (q4). In contrast, only 55% of ranchers agreed with this statement, further reflecting their disdain for the forest, which they see as unproductive and wasteful, and which serves as a focus of their resentment for the government. Less than 35% of all groups agreed that “converting forest to pasture shows that you can control nature” (q5). This question, perhaps a little too obviously, attempted to determine if cattle raisers were more inclined to see themselves as dominating nature. Thirty-five percent of ranchers and 25% of cowboys, who spend most of their time caring for pasture, agreed with this statement. Differences in perception between ideologically opposed groups begin to emerge with this question, with only 7% of NGO workers and no policy makers agreeing.

Only 22% said that it is the dream of most Acreans to be a rubber tapper; only one or two respondents in each group agreed with this statement, excluding the rubber
tappers. Perceptions of the forest, where the rubber tappers live, reveal ambivalence across groups. Most agree that is healthy to live in the forest (87%), but only 27% agree that extractivism is the way to a better life for those that live in the forest, and 87% say that a person with a clean pasture is a hard worker.

Collectively, these figures indicate that many agree on the abstract value of life in the forest, but when it comes to human habitation and exploitation of those spaces, those that have pastures for cattle are believed to be more “hard-working,” considered among the highest virtues among rural populations. Perceptions of the rubber tappers’ hard work is generally undermined by their lack of observable transformation of their environment through the conversion of forest to pasture or, to a lesser extent, agricultural plots. These statements demonstrate a clear preference for clearly anthropogenic landscapes and those who create them, a central tenet of cattle culture. The belief that rubber tappers lack the will (*falta coragem*) to work, a sentiment commonly expressed in casual conversations, was not captured by the survey.

**The rancher: still the villain?**

The results thus far have demonstrated a preference for cattle raising, and positive social attributes associated with cattle raisers. In Chapter Six, we saw that ranchers feel that native Acreans resent them for their role in conflict, and that the ranchers are marked both positively and negatively by their non-native, outsider status. It is worth examining these two negative perceptions of ranchers now because, as results have indicated, these are two of the only aspects of rancher social group and practice that are not associated with positive social perceptions.

Question Ten shows that “most ranchers come from outside Acre.” There is high agreement on this statement among rubber tappers (100%), colonists (90%), and NGO
workers (77%). Ranchers, cowboys, and policy makers agree less, but still agree over 60% of the time. Overall, 77% agree that ranchers come from outside of Acre.

Interestingly, the ranchers, the group that reported being discriminated against for their status as non-native Acreans in the past, overwhelmingly indicated that “prejudice against non-Acreans has decreased” (95%). Resentment against migrants is less prevalent than I had expected, with 82% overall in agreement on this statement (q7). Only the rubber tappers (74%), for whom the arrival of migrants resulted in conflict, did not cross the 75% mark on this question. This is an important development because outsider status was one of the only attributes that negatively marked the ranchers, but it now appears to be less important to most Acreans.

Perceived violence against other groups is another common negative perception about the ranchers, and probably the most important source of disdain for the ranchers in Acrean society. Over 77% of the overall sample agreed that “ranchers caused conflict in the past” (q11). All NGO workers and at least 89% of rubber tappers and policy makers agreed that ranchers had caused conflict. Only 70% of colonists, and 55% of both ranchers and their workers, the cowboys, agreed with this perception. The 55% of ranchers in agreement with this statement, who all denied having any role in conflict, placed the blame on a “few ‘bad apples’ who gave the entire group a dirty name.” The 45% of ranchers who disagreed pointed to the fact that the issue of land ownership was inherently problematic when they arrived, and that, in some cases, conflict resulted, but that ranchers did not cause or buscar (look for) conflict.

Regardless of group specific interpretations, the results indicate that the ranchers are
still associated with conflict, and are thus not considered positively on all counts in Acrean society.

The label of villain is applied to the rancher because of their perceived role in conflict and environmental destruction. It is less associated with migrant status, which also applies to some members of other groups. The results confirm that the rancher is strongly associated with conflict, but what about environmental destruction? Although it would have been useful to ask a question about deforestation, I intentionally avoided this topic because it raised suspicion among respondents. Research shows, however, that the majority of recent deforestation is not taking place among the large scale landowners, but among the smallholders (Toni et al. 2007).

Despite this trend, conversations with members of all groups and observation of public meetings about environmental issues revealed that the ranchers are strongly associated with environmental destruction. This negative image is propagated internationally, most recently in the Greenpeace publication O Farra do Boi na Amazonia (The Festival of the Oxen in Amazonia), which featured a blood-spattered map of Amazonia on the cover, and drew attention to the link between cattle and deforestation, slave labor on ranches, and illegal slaughterhouses (Greenpeace 2009).

Despite the lessening of prejudice against non-native Acreans, the association of the rancher with social conflict and environmental destruction remains strong, locally and internationally, thus the villain label is likely to persist. This is a formidable negative perception that will not be lived down in the near future. It is important, however, to point out that the link with past conflict was the only negative perception associated with cattle raising or cattle raisers revealed in the survey.
Lack of Agreement across Groups

Table 9-6 illustrates items for which at least one group fell on the other side of the 50% threshold, thus signifying that at least one group disagreed markedly with other groups. When a group disagrees, or is on the other side of 50% agreement from the other groups and the overall agreement percentage, the figure is underlined in the table. In total, there are 16 questions (out of 39) in the lack of agreement category. The purpose of this table is to illustrate where there are substantial differences between groups, as well as items for which there are similarities in disagreement between groups. Additionally, by looking at the items for which there was around 50% agreement, we can see that a lack of overall agreement does not necessarily mean a lack of agreement within groups, only that other groups disagreed markedly with the majority. The lowest overall agreement on this table is 51%, representing the least agreed upon question in the entire survey. Unlike in the previous tables, the results are not in order of agreement.

Disagreement between rural social groups, urban policy makers, and NGO workers

Table 9-6 reveals a disconnect between two larger groups: rural social groups (rubber tappers, colonists, ranchers, and cowboys) and urban policy makers and NGO workers. At least 84% of the members in the rural social groups agreed that cattle raising is the most profitable way to use the land (q1), but only around half of PP/NGO groups agreed. What is emerging here is a difference between the material lived experience of rural groups, which tells them that, as opportunities and constraints are currently structured, cattle raising is the most profitable way to use the land. Conversely, the PP/NGO groups were always reluctant to agree with such black and
white statements, and almost universally began their responses with “It depends…” When forced to make a yes or no answer, there was a 50/50 split in their responses to this question.

The reluctance to agree that cattle raising is the most profitable way to use the land among the PP/NGO groups is the result of three factors: a refusal to see “profitability” independent of environmental health; access to knowledge; and environmental ideology. First, many PP/NGO respondents calculated “profitability,” not in terms of immediate economic returns, but in a more complex matrix that included economic and environmental sustainability. Cattle raising may be profitable now, they said, but the pastures will become degraded eventually, and profits will diminish. To them, agroforestry and forest management scenarios would be more “profitable” in the long run.

PP/NGO responses also show the importance of access to knowledge and ideological leanings. The PP/NGO groups are better informed on alternatives to cattle raising that may be more profitable, but these alternatives remain largely outside the knowledge or experience of rural social groups. Thirdly, it was painful for some policy makers in the “forest government” and all of the NGOs workers, who are dedicated to environmental conservation, to agree with positive statements about cattle raising. Many of them are ideologically opposed to cattle ranching. Many policy makers were chosen for their current posts, in which they deal with rural issues, because of their academic research, or experience working in social movements or NGOs. These policy makers share an ideological commitment to environmental preservation.
NGO workers are even more dedicated to environmental issues. Many of them could, if they chose to, join the government or private sector and enjoy greater financial compensation. The fact that they remain at the NGOs despite these drawbacks, and in light of the fact that many of their colleagues have joined the government, illustrates their strong ideological commitment to environmental issues. These patterns bring up an interesting question that is a fundamental concern for this research: the relationship between the material world, composed of economic practice and lived experience, and cultural perceptions, beliefs, and preferences. This topic will be examined at the end of this chapter.

As seen in Table 9-6, the majority of the rural groups, with the exception of the ranchers, thought that cowboys were more courageous than other rural workers (q8). Conversely, no NGO and only 26% of PP agreed with this statement. Three questions in the human/nature interaction category reveal further differences: a person that lives in the forest lacks the will to work (q6); it is dangerous to have forest close to house (q10); and it is better to have pasture around the house than forest (q11). The NGO/PP only agreed with these three statement between 0 to 21% of the time, whereas the rural groups agreed between 60%-84% (excluding the ranchers on question 6, who agreed only 20%).

**Similarity of environmental perspectives**

In Table 9-7, I have included two items from previous tables to illustrate interesting patterns of agreement between groups. Throughout the questionnaire, I placed questions that had similar content, but were differently worded. For example, Questions One and Two ask a similar question. Question One asks if a “rubber tapper lacks the will to work (falta coragem de trabalhar).” Question Two replaces the specific group
label with a generalized “person.” The NGO, PP, and rancher groups responded the same way to both questions. All social groups had similarly low levels of agreement when the question was worded with the rubber tapper. However, when the general “person” was inserted into the same question, the agreement jumps to between 60-75% among cowboys, rubber tappers, and colonists.

These findings suggest that NGO/PP groups truly believe in the underlying concept of this question (that forest-dwellers are not lazy), but that ranchers were able to discern the culturally correct response despite changing labels. Conversely, for rubber tappers, colonists and cowboys, it was less acceptable to say that rubber tappers were lazy, but they were comfortable agreeing that a faceless forest-dweller was lazy. This suggests that such a harsh statement about the rubber tapper is seen to be culturally unacceptable or politically incorrect (although the ranchers caught the similarity of the questions). In the abstract, however, most rural groups agree that forest-dwellers are lazy, an observation reinforced through ethnographic methods.

There is another possible explanation: groups’ perceptions of the forest, the forest dweller, and the rubber tapper differ. Most people know that the rubber tapper lives in the “forest” as a large geographical territory or space, but that they do not actually live in the forest, i.e. beneath the canopy. They know that the rubber tapper is surrounded by the forest, but that he carves out an anthropogenic space within the forest. Conversely, the “person that lives in the forest” has no social history or point of reference in the respondents’ minds. They may imagine a hermit of sorts, who, if they did not demonstrate observable separation between their home and the forest, would be considered lazy.
Table 9-8 shows two more items on the subject of the forest, for which there were interesting in- and between-group patterns. These statements had the lowest overall levels of agreement in the entire survey, but reveal interesting differences between the NGO/PP groups and the rubber tappers and colonists. Question One asks if it “is dangerous to have forest close to the house,” and question 2 asks if “it is better to have pasture around the house than forest.” Both of these questions are inquiring about the same concept of nature-home separation, but were worded differently.

Once again we see a high degree of coherence in the responses of the PP/NGO groups for both questions measuring the same concept. We also see a high level of agreement with the rubber tappers and colonists, but in the opposite direction. These two rural groups think that it is better to have pasture, not forest around the house, while the PP/NGO, who live in the city, think that it is preferable to have forest around the house. I think that this reflects an ideological position that views the forest positively and pasture negatively, with both serving as opposed symbols in environmental debates.

The fact that the two groups who live in the closest proximity with the forest (rubber tappers and colonists) recognize some of the negative aspects of forest life suggests that this statement is “true” in a material sense. This discussion has shown that the PP/NGO are the most coherent in their perceptions of questions related to the environment, but that their perceptions do not match with the perceptions of groups residing in those environments. That their responses contradict those of rural groups, whose responses are based on the material realities of those environments, suggests that the PP/NGO groups are at times guided by an ideology that is disconnected from material reality of rural groups. This corresponds with findings presented previously,
which show a more pro-cattle perspective among rural groups. The discussion of beef showed that these two groups are further opposed in their perceptions of beef, but that they exhibit similar levels of high beef consumption. Thus, it is now appropriate to ask: to what extent are perceptions related to practice?

**Personal Attributes and Consensus Scores**

Cultural consensus analysis is useful for analyzing perceptions of a cultural domain, but is not equipped to analyze personal attributes. Given my interest in connecting material practice and cultural constructions, I included questions about personal attributes in my survey. The list of personal attributes came from observation of cattle culture events, and represents the activities that are most linked to cattle culture. The personal attribute category consists of five sub-categories: 1) beef consumption; 2) dress: wearing clothing associated with cattle culture; 3) cattle practice: experience working with cattle or horses; 4) TV/ radio: watching programs or listening to music in which a cattle-centered vision of rural life is expressed; 5) participation in cultural events associated with cattle culture.²

The comparison of consensus scores, which measure cultural data, with personal attribute data opens up new lines of inquiry. In this section, I will concentrate on three: 1) how do groups differ in their active participation in cattle culture, measured through personal attributes? 2) How does a group’s degree of participation relate to their consensus scores, which reflect their level of agreement with the cultural domain of cattle culture? 3) How are specific personal attributes (e.g. wearing a belt buckle,

² For a comparison of group participation in these activities, see Chapter Seven
listening to country music, not raising cattle) related to individual competence scores and responses to specific questions?

In Table 9-9, I present the results of the survey on 19 personal attributes from the “participation” category of cattle culture. The figures presented in the columns represent the percentage of members (out of 20) in each group that answered “yes” to having each personal attribute.

Most interesting for the purposes of analyzing the relationship between practice and perception is the case of the cowboys. For 18 out of 19 personal attributes, the cowboys had among the highest levels of participation. They eat more beef and express themselves through their clothing. They also watch cattle on TV, listen to country music, and participate in household and societal-level rituals associated with cattle culture (Expo-Acre, rodeos, churrascos). In terms of their economic practice, they have all worked with cattle (an attribute required for their membership in this group). But it is important to remember that cowboys, unlike the other rural groups, are not making their own decisions about how to use their own land. They are wage laborers who perform tasks indicated by the rancher. In fact, only 35% of those interviewed even own cattle. This is the lone category in which the cowboys are not at or near the top.

If all the attributes are summed by group for each of the 19 items, we have a measure of overall degree of participation in cattle culture (Table 9-10). Cowboys exhibit 87% participation in cattle culture, whereas NGO members are at 23% participation. Cowboys, ranchers, and colonists participate in more than half of the activities, and rubber tappers, policy makers, and NGO score less than half. It is revealing that the cowboys have the highest degree of participation in cattle culture
because they also have the highest competence scores and are the most pro-cattle culture. We can compare how the groups rank on these three categories, and with expected pro-cattle culture rankings in Table 9-11.

These results reveal a relationship between material practice and cultural perceptions. Cowboys are the top ranked group in every category, meaning that they agree the most with the other groups (competence); that they participate the most in cattle culture practices; and that they are the most pro-cattle culture, as expected. There is also great consistency across categories for the colonists, who either rank 2nd or 3rd in each category, and the rubber tappers, who ranked fourth across the board, although I had predicted that they would rank third. NGO workers, as expected were ranked the lowest across the board, although their competence scores were higher than ranchers. These results show that there is a consistency across categories for four groups, three of whom are more in favor cattle culture, and one that is against it. These results correspond with expectations based on ethnographic research, and suggest consistency between material and cultural realms with these groups.

There are deviations from expectations, however, among the ranchers and policy makers. The ranchers had the lowest competence scores, or agreed the least with other groups on the cattle culture survey. In terms of personal attributes, however, they rank second, and are the third most pro-cattle culture group. Policy makers exhibit similar inconsistencies. They had the second highest competence scores, but ranked fifth in every other category. These two groups, however, rank consistently in terms of personal attributes and pro-cattle perspective, with the ranchers scoring high in these categories and policy makers scoring low. This emphasizes the importance of
analyzing different sorts of data in different ways. If we had stopped with the consensus analysis, we would have had the impression that the ranchers, by virtue of their low agreement, were less aware of the perceptions of cattle culture, and that the policy makers were the second most aware of cattle culture.

In Table 9-12, I have included three categories, which show not only cattle culture, but cattle practice. “Cattle ownership” is the percentage of respondents in each group that owned cattle (as seen in Table 9-9). The two new categories are: “reliance on cattle,” the extent to which raising cattle contributes to the household economic in relation to other activities; and “work with cattle,” the extent to which each group physically works with cattle.

The three columns under the “cattle practice” category capture the diverse nature of cattle raising practice among different groups. Compared to other groups, the cowboys spend the most time working with cattle, but rarely own cattle, and are only indirectly, through wage labor, reliant on cattle. Conversely, ranchers spend very little time working with cattle, but are economically dependent on the sale of cattle raised by cowboys.

The table reveals that the appropriation of cattle culture is related not to ownership of cattle, but rather to working with and relying on cattle. The two groups that rely on, and work the most with cattle--cowboys and colonists-- are also the two groups that have most appropriated cattle culture in the realms of perception and participation. The ranchers, who own more cattle than any other group, but do not work with cattle, have lower levels of cattle culture appropriation. Environmentalist groups rank low across the board, indicating a consistency between their lack of appropriation of both cattle
practice and cattle culture. Overall, these finding indicate a correspondence between what groups do and what they think.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has shown how quantitative methods and data analysis can be used to complement traditional ethnographic methods. Using cultural consensus analysis with other methods has enables us to see to what extent different groups agree with one another, and thus understand to what extent cultural constructions surrounding cattle are shared across groups. In a context where the shift to cattle raising has not been fully reflected in group social identities, comparing group perceptions can help us to analyze the supposed boundaries between groups, and understand in what ways groups different.

It was established that there is overall consensus on the cultural domain of cattle culture, and that there were no statistically significant differences between groups in terms of their competence scores. CCA is useful for establishing that there is consensus, but other forms of analysis help us to learn more about the similarities and difference between groups with regard to cattle culture.

Analysis of the distribution of competence scores showed that high agreement is not necessarily related to internal group coherence, and that the high or low scores by a few respondents may affect the overall average. We saw this trend with the policy makers, who had the second highest competence scores, but had a much wider range of individual scores than any other group. Other groups were more similar in their responses, and those that had the highest and lowest competence scores, the cowboys and NGO workers, respectively, were also the most coherent, or tightly grouped in their responses.
It was revealing to analyze group responses on specific statements in order to see what sorts of statements elicit high levels of agreement (greater than 75%) across groups. Nine out of 39 statements fell into this category. Due to the high levels of agreement on these statements, and the diversity of the sample, we can consider these statements to be widely accepted within Acrean society. Comparing groups on questions with moderate and low levels of agreement showed us the ways in which groups differ in their perceptions. Rural groups, who prefer cattle for economic reasons, often disagree with NGO/PP groups, who are guided more by an ideology of environmentalism than economic practice. The consistently low levels of pro-cattle behavior were expected among NGO members, but the lack of unity in the policy group was surprising. The policy makers agree a great deal with all of the other groups, but their responses are the most spread out of all groups. This inconsistency could be interpreted as evidence for the fact that cattle culture is a much more unified cultural domain than environmentalism as expressed through florestania.

The inclusion of personal attributes with measures of perception represents another potentially important step in attempting to capture the nature of cattle culture and the ways that different groups appropriate it. The results of the comparison between participation and agreement indicated a consistency between practice and perception. Those groups that participate the most in cattle raising demonstrate greater agreement with cattle culture in the realm of both participation and perceptions. It was also shown that cattle ownership is less related to the appropriation of cattle culture than reliance on cattle and work with cattle.
Table 9-1. Levels of agreement across groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>RT</th>
<th>Colonist</th>
<th>Rancher</th>
<th>Cowboy</th>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>NGO</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) if stop working, forest takes over land</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) agriculturalists are rich around here</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) pasture around house better than forest</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9-2. Summary of mean competence scores by social group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Group</th>
<th>Summary of Competence Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rancher</td>
<td>0.552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>0.588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubber Tapper</td>
<td>0.593</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonist</td>
<td>0.595</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Policy</td>
<td>0.608</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cowboy</td>
<td>0.653</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: ANOVA reveals that there is no statistically significant difference between groups ($F = 1.63$).
Figure 9-1. Range of competence scores by social group
Figure 9-2. Bar chart: summary of mean competence by social group
Figure 9-3. Cowboy agreement graph

Figure 9-4. NGO agreement graph
Figure 9-5. Policymaker agreement graph

Figure 9-6. Rubber tapper agreement graph
Figure 9-7. Colonist agreement graph

Figure 9-8. Rancher agreement graph
Figure 9-9. Agreement graph for all groups

Table 9-3. Comparison of rankings of competence scores and pro-cattle culture perspectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Group</th>
<th>Competence Rank</th>
<th>Pro-cattle culture (expected)</th>
<th>Pro-cattle culture (actual)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cowboy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Policy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonist</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubber Tapper</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rancher</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9-4. Strong agreement (>75% or <25%) on questions across all social groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>RT</th>
<th>Colonist</th>
<th>Rancher</th>
<th>Cowboy</th>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>NGO</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) if stop working, forest takes over land</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) agriculturalists are rich around here</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) ranchers can travel out of Acre</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) most ranchers are black</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) is not dream of most Acreans to own land</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) is dream of most Acreans to own cattle</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) raising cattle gives a person the good life</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8) raising cattle gives person social status</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9) rubber tappers lack courage to work</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: RT=rubber tappers; NGO = socio-environmental NGO workers; Policy=policy makers. There are five questions categories. Questions in this section come from the following categories: land use perceptions (questions 7 and 8); perceptions of social groups (3-8); human/nature interaction (1).
Table 9-5. Moderate agreement (>50%) or disagreement (<50%) on question across all Social groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>RT</th>
<th>Colonist</th>
<th>Rancher</th>
<th>Cowboy</th>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>NGO</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) govt. should never limit the voice of the people</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) r.appers are group that best preserves forest</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) agriculture has more tradition than cattle</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) it is healthy to live in the forest</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) a person with a clean pasture is a hard worker</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) convert forest to pasture shows nature control</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) prejudice against non-Acreans has decreased</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8) rubber tappers have the good life</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9) it is dream of most Acreans to be a rubber tapper</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10) ranchers come from outside Acre</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(11) ranchers caused conflict in the past</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(12) extractivism is way to better life for forest dwellers</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(13) a vegetarian can have good health</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(14) agriculturalists are miserable (coitados)</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: question categories = authoritarianism (1); land use perceptions (3, 12); perceptions of social groups (2,7-11); human/nature interaction (4-6); beef perceptions (13)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>RT</th>
<th>Colonist</th>
<th>Rancher</th>
<th>Cowboy</th>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>NGO</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) cattle raising is most profitable way to use land</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) rubber tappers are more respected than ranchers</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) ranchers have calloused hands</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) people that don’t eat beef lack will to work</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) rural people would rather live city</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) a person that lives in the forest lacks will to work</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) forest gives tappers everything they need</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8) cowboys more courageous than other rural workers</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9) govt. makes difficult for rural folk to make living</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10) it is dangerous to have forest close to the house</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(11) pasture around house better than forest</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(12) women should not contradict man in public</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(13) tappers don’t have culture of cattle raising</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(14) beef gives more strength to work than other food</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(15) a lunch with no meat is not a lunch</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(16) a lunch with no meat leaves a person weak</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question Categories: Land use (1); Social Groups (2,3,5,7,8,9,13); beef perceptions (4,14,15,16); human/nature interaction (6,10,11); authoritarianism (12).
**Table 9-7. Ideological coherence and disconnects among group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>RT</th>
<th>Colonist</th>
<th>Rancher</th>
<th>Cowboy</th>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>NGO</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) rubber tappers lack courage to work</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td><strong>0.20</strong></td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td><strong>0.05</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) a person that lives in the forest lacks courage to work</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td><strong>0.20</strong></td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td><strong>0.05</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 9-8. Ideological coherence and disconnects among group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>RT</th>
<th>Colonist</th>
<th>Rancher</th>
<th>Cowboy</th>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>NGO</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) it is dangerous to have forest close to the house</td>
<td><strong>0.84</strong></td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td><strong>0.21</strong></td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) pasture around house better than forest</td>
<td><strong>0.84</strong></td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td><strong>0.16</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9-9. Summary of personal attributes by social group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>RT</th>
<th>Colonist</th>
<th>Rancher</th>
<th>Cowboy</th>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>NGO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Do you prefer beef over other foods?</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) had a <em>churrasco</em> at your house?</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Do you wear boots?</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) ...contri style clothing?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) ...a belt buckle?</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) ...a cowboy hat?</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) Do you ride horses?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8) worked with cattle?</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9) own cattle?</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10) Do you watch <em>novelas</em> about cowboys?</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(11) horse auctions?</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(12) <em>Acre</em>/<em>Globo Rural</em>?</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(13) Listen to sertaneja music?</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(14) Dance to sert. music?</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(15) go to ExpoAcre?</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(16) rodeos?</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(17) cattle auctions?</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(18) drink <em>tereré</em>?</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(19) have cattle decorations on your wall?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The lines separating rows divide the questions into 5 categories: beef consumption (1-2); cattle culture dress (3-6), cattle practice (7-9), cattle culture on TV? radio (10-13); and participation in cattle culture (14-19).

Table 9-10. Personal Attribute Totals and Rankings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Group</th>
<th>Personal Attribute Total</th>
<th>Personal Attribute Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cowboy</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rancher</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonist</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RT</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9-11. Comparison of rankings of competence scores and pro-cattle culture perspectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Group</th>
<th>Competence rank</th>
<th>Personal attribute rank</th>
<th>Pro-cattle culture (expected)</th>
<th>Pro-cattle culture (actual)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cowboy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonist</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubber Tapper</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rancher</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9-12. Social group rankings on cattle culture and practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Group</th>
<th>Pro-cattle culture (expected)</th>
<th>Pro-cattle culture (actual)</th>
<th>Personal attribute rank</th>
<th>Cattle ownership (% group)</th>
<th>Reliance on cattle</th>
<th>Work with cattle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cowboy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4 (0.35)</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5 (0.10)</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonist</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1 (1.00)</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R. Tapper</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3 (0.70)</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6 (0.05)</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rancher</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 (1.00)</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 10
CONCLUSION

The Rise of Ranching In Acre, Brazil

In Acre and throughout Amazonia, cattle are concurrently disdained for their role in social conflict and environmental destruction and desired for their singular ability to provide economic security. Understanding the rise of ranching requires attention to the complexity of economic practice, or the way that groups use their land to provide for their economic needs. Economic practice can be located at the intersection of political economic constraints and group level understanding of practice, traditional notions of group identity based on previous forms of practice, and circulating cultural values, which spread both directly and indirectly between groups.

The period from 1970-1990 was a formative time in Acre characterized by intergroup conflict and the establishment of separate and distinct tenure systems within a political, economic and cultural context that encouraged group-specific economic practices. The foundation laid in this period paved the way, both intentionally and inadvertently, for the explosion of cattle after 1990. Beginning around 1990, the retraction of government support for agricultural and extractivist livelihoods made cattle an appealing economic practice for colonists and rubber tappers. This trend was further reinforced at the end of the 1990s by the enforcement of deforestation regulations, which pushed colonists in particular toward an almost singular reliance on cattle.

During this period, ranchers began amassing their wealth through the growth of their herds. An industry developed to support them, and young rubber tappers and colonists sought employment on ranches. Cattle became more available, and
knowledge of how to raise cattle began to circulate. The rancher also became a model of success in rural Acre, while agriculture and extractivism went into decline.

In the past decade, popular cultural constructions based on a cattle-centered vision of the rural livelihood spread throughout Acre. Groups now indicate positive perceptions of cattle and cattle raisers. Changes in cultural perceptions, intergroup relations, and political economic structures all contributed to creating a context that now favors cattle raising over other forms of economic practice.

Political economic analyses dominate the study of cattle in the Amazon, often with a concern with slowing cattle-driven deforestation. Research on the cultural meanings of cattle can be used to formulate a multi-part conceptual framework that takes into account group perceptions of cattle and political economic determinants to provide a more complete understanding of the expansion of cattle in the Amazon.

### From Cattle Raising to Cattle Culture

As cattle raising has grown in importance in the Acrean economy, cattle culture has become widespread. The roots of Acrean cattle culture stem from local groups’ dedication to cattle raising, but can be more fully understood by analyzing broader paths of circulation of both cattle and culture, and drawing out the direct and indirect links between Acre and these sources.

The practice of cattle raising produces myriad cattle cultures, as was demonstrated through a comparison of cattle cultures in East Africa and the Americas. Among different social groups in Acre, the diversity of uses of cattle have given rise to cultural constructions related to both African pastoral and American ranching modes of production. We can initially understand differences in cattle culture in relation to the subsistence or market-based economic orientations of groups. Among smallholder
groups in Acre, the daily routine of caring for cattle that provide subsistence through milk or transportation inevitably produced a close human-animal relationship, in some cases producing a symbolic connection demonstrated through naming and a resistance to sale.

In the ranching mode of production, wage laborers work with large herds of cattle and convert their flesh to rancher profits. From the saddle, a relationship of separation and domination is reinforced between human and animal. Smallholder cattle owners oriented toward beef production also demonstrate this sort of relationship with beef cattle, which are not generally named, but they may also form symbolic attachments with subsistence cattle.

Non-ranching modes of production exist within a predominantly ranching mode of production oriented toward market exchange, but features of subsistence cattle cultures will be secondary to dominant cultural forms stemming from ranching. Although symbolic connections and cattle-based rituals exist in Acre, they are largely unrelated. Symbolic attachment was seen among those who used cattle for basic subsistence, but popular rituals emanate from the dominant ranching mode of production.

The everyday practices of the cowboys form the basis of dominant cattle culture in terms of material culture (principally cowboy clothing, tools, and a focus on the horse) and popular cultural forms, such as music, television, and celebrations focused on a ranching-centered rural life. Cattle culture explicitly and implicitly promotes a vision of human domination of nature, a relationship that is recreated in popular cultural events and practices, and is most clearly demonstrated in rodeo.
Acrean cattle culture is related to some extent to the cultural constructions stemming from cattle ranching as practiced in Acre, but the foundations of both cattle raising practices and cattle culture were developed in other contexts. Broad circuits of diffusion first brought cattle from the Iberian Peninsula to the Americas, where Iberian practices and techniques were adapted to provide the foundations for American cattle cultures. These cultures influenced one another through migration and contact between distinct cattle raising traditions, and then were transmitted through television, radio, and popular cultural events.

The Acrean version of the cowboy will most commonly refer to himself as a peão (peon), a term applied to proletarian cowboys throughout Brazil, or a cauboi, derived from the English word “cowboy.” Both the Acrean peão and the cauboi look like a North American cowboy, with boots, tight jeans, a cowboy hat, and a belt buckle. These identifiers point to the circulation of broader influences from North America, which were first appropriated and transformed in the center-south region of Brazil in the 1980s. Some of these features of cattle culture were spread to Acre with the migration of paulista ranchers, who established the cattle industry and spread their regional traditions. The same processes of modernization that brought the ranchers to Acre also opened up the region to messages and practices of cattle culture spread through music, television, and the rodeo circuit.

Cattle culture took root by building on the growing economic base of the cattle industry, but its appropriation by sectors of Acrean society was related to local and national factors. Cattle culture allows Acreans to connect with expressions of rural pride and tradition taking place throughout Brazil. By linking Brazilian regional cultures into a
dominant cattle culture that draws influences from the United States, a widespread form of connecting with the countryside has become socially valued. The marginality of Acre in relation to cultural and economic centers of Brazil makes participation in a national cattle culture appealing.

Cattle culture, although it does not correspond exactly with peoples’ memories of their rural past or their present station in life, provides a socially valued and acceptable means of re-connecting symbolically with the rural life. Cattle culture finds a receptive audience among urban populations with rural roots, many of who were forced to leave the countryside, and thus long for a connection with rural life. On the group level, however, cattle culture is not appropriated uncritically, and groups differ in the extent to which they participate in and agree with cattle culture.

**Cattle and Identity**

The process of self definition takes place in a complex calculus, which includes the tradition and expectation of economic practice, and the manner in which economic practice and social identity were and are channeled into political discourse and policies. A social group’s changing needs and desires are influenced both by evolving political economic constraints and socio-cultural aspirations associated with cattle culture.

The social identities of rubber tappers and colonists as extractivists and agriculturalists, respectively, were formed through their dedication to specific economic practices over time. Political economic changes have rendered one practice more desirable than another, leading to a shift in practice. Their shift to cattle has produced changes in the ways that the groups perceive themselves, and are perceived by others. The ways that practices are linked with identities makes a shift in practice socially meaningful and politically consequential.
For the rubber tappers, who used their practice-based identity to defend their land and unite themselves with broader ideas of forest conservation, a strong link between identity and practice was formed. The rubber tapper notion of identity is based not only on practice, but also on a shared history, and residence in a specific place.

Despite the flexible ways in which the rubber tappers understand their identity and the political economic changes which have rendered their traditional economic practice less viable than cattle raising, the shift to the practice that they once opposed is viewed negatively by outsiders. Popular (external) notions of rubber tapper identity have been cemented to previous forms of economic practice based on forest extractivism. The rubber tapper shift in practice is thus perceived as incongruent or irreconcilable with established identity labels, and threatens to undermine the perceived legitimacy of their land claims.

For the colonists, who have shifted from agriculture to cattle raising, the disconnect between agriculturalist identity and cattle practice is less controversial, but it has produced a sense of alienation and dissatisfaction among many. Being a colonist is associated with being an agriculturalist, and is intimately linked with the acquisition of one’s own land, the ideology and policy of developmentalism, and the valorization of self sufficiency through the production of one’s own food through agriculture. Cattle raising, although it provides an attractive cash return, is perceived negatively by some colonists because it exaggerates their reliance on buying the foods that they previously produced.

For some colonists, the shift to cattle has had little impact on how they describe themselves, and fits into their ideals of themselves as flexible rural producers. As long
as they maintain a connection with the land, they feel comfortable calling themselves *colonos*, and even agriculturalists. The colonist transition to cattle has had less severe political implications because the colonists did not use their practices and associated identity to establish a basis for securing rights to their land.

There are members of both groups who consider themselves cattle raisers. This is not a dramatic departure for the migrant colonists, and even rubber tappers may not see it as a problematic. Examining group boundaries using cultural consensus analysis showed that there are minimal overall differences between groups in terms of agreement with cattle culture. In many respects, however, the rubber tappers remain a distinct group with respect to their participation and agreement with cattle culture perceptions. Evidence showed that the more a group relies on cattle raising, the more likely they are to share positive perceptions of cattle culture. Considering that cattle raising is a relatively recent addition to rubber tapper livelihoods, there could be a delay before rubber tappers begin to exhibit features associated with cattle culture.

**Expressions of Cattle Culture**

Much can be learned from looking at the physical world as a form of material culture that is reflective of material constraints and ideological meanings operating across scales. By analyzing the landscapes of Acre, from the forests and pastures of the countryside to urban places that seek to recreate the rural, we can see how the nature-culture divide continues to be expressed in Acrean society.

Human domination of nature is most clearly expressed in rural landscapes through cattle raising and the establishment of pastures. Human interconnectedness with nature, a rejection of the nature-culture divide, or view of the relationship as more of a continuum, is expressed through forest extractivism, a practice which is less clearly
inscribed on the landscape. Both of these landscapes and practices are representative of the locally opposed ideological positions of cattle culture and *florestania*, or, in more general terms, environmentalism.

The forest is considered beautiful by urban residents, who do not depend on it economically, as well as rubber tappers with a history of interaction with the forest. The abstract appreciation for the forest, however, does not mean that urban or rural populations wish to live in proximity to it. Groups that live in the closest proximity to the forest agree the most that this boundary should be maintained due to practical reasons, while some urban population may downplay the need distinguish the home from the forest for rural populations, a position associated with their ideological and political positions. All groups are judged positively for demonstrating the clear separation of human and natural realms in their landholdings. The manner in which people construct and perceive landscapes demonstrates that the nature-culture divide continues to structure the thoughts of much of the population, despite an abstract appreciation for the forest and the spread of environmentalist values.

From the cement-covered yards of the homes of urbanites to their *chacarás*, (semi-rural plots of land that serve as weekend getaways), a preference for controlled nature is expressed by urban populations. Although not explicitly tied to cattle culture, these urban and semi-rural spaces show that groups perceive and construct an appropriate vision of nature in which humans demonstrate a clear separation from the forest.

Country bars and rodeo arenas are symbolic recreations of a vision of rural life in which cattle are central. These cattle culture places are created and patronized by
groups who feel that they represent their ideological and/or political values. The prevalence of cattle culture in the material landscape, and the relative absence of any perceptible celebration of *florestania*, except in official projects, indicates that cattle culture is growing in Acre in urban areas, and represents a form of socially appropriate human-nature interaction.

The pastures of the countryside are connected with the butcher shops and *churrascarias* of Rio Branco by the high levels of beef consumption across all social groups. The paramount importance of beef in the material and cultural life of Acreans, and the positive attributes accorded to cattle raising and cattle raisers, demonstrate how cattle culture forms a coherent system of perceiving landscapes, groups, and ideas.

Beef is seen as essential to the beginning of work on a daily and long term basis. Without it, economic productivity, the ideal of practice in cattle culture, is undermined. Cattle, as the culmination of hard work and the symbol of productivity, provide beef, thus fueling material transformation through physical labor, and simultaneously signifying “progress,” “development,” socioeconomic achievement, and wealth. The consumption of beef and production of cattle thus form part of a complete system of positive signs and symbols that valorize a cattle-based lifestyle, based on the domination of nature by humans.

**Cattle Culture Perceptions and Practices**

Cattle culture comprises beliefs, preferences, practices and perceptions that attribute economic, symbolic, and social superiority to people, practices, spaces, and cultural constructions oriented to cattle. Using cultural consensus analysis (CCA) enabled us to see to what extent cultural constructions surrounding cattle are shared across groups, and thus, based on the most common responses, identify the “culturally
correct” responses. In general, these measures of perceptions, along with analyses of behaviors and participation, corresponded with expectations based on ethnographic methods. Collectively, each method provided a vital piece for moving toward a more complete understanding of cattle culture.

CCA showed that there was overall consensus on the cultural domain of cattle culture across six groups: rubber tappers, colonists, ranchers, cowboys, policy makers, and environmental NGO workers. Analysis of the distribution of competence scores showed that high agreement with cattle culture is not necessarily related to internal group coherence. We saw this trend with the policy makers, who had the second highest competence scores, but had a much wider range of individual scores than any other group.

It was revealing to analyze group responses on specific statements in order to see what sorts of statements elicit high levels of agreement (greater than 75%) across groups. Nine out of 39 statements fell into this category. Comparing groups on questions with moderate and low levels of agreement showed us the ways in which groups differ in their perceptions. Rural groups, who preferred cattle for economic reasons, often disagreed with NGO and public policy groups, who were guided more by an ideology of environmentalism.

Participation in activities related to cattle culture varied across groups. In general, those rural groups who work most closely with cattle, the cowboys, were the most in tune with cattle culture, followed by other cattle-dependent groups: colonists, ranchers, and rubber tappers. Overall, those who raise cattle participated more in cattle culture, as an expression of their lifestyle and values. There are, however, exceptions to this
rule: the wealthiest cattle raisers may limit their participation due to cattle culture’s association with the working class; lower-class cattle raisers who are geographically isolated may participate less because they have limited access to cattle culture; and urban populations with no link to cattle raising may seek out cattle culture because of its symbolic associations with rural life and traditional social values. Other groups may reject cattle culture because they do not feel that it represents their values, or because they are ideologically opposed to cattle raising as an environmentally destructive practice.

Comparing personal attributes with measures of perception was useful in attempting to capture the multifaceted nature of cattle culture and the unique ways that it is appropriated by different groups. Overall, the results indicated consistency between group measurements of practice and perception, with groups that raise cattle demonstrating higher levels of agreement with cattle culture perceptions and participation in cattle culture events and activities. Among those that raise cattle, it was demonstrated that cattle ownership is less related to the appropriation of cattle culture than economic reliance on cattle and work with cattle.

There were cases where a person was ideologically opposed to cattle raising, but nonetheless scored high on measures of agreement and participation. These individual would sometimes explain their perspective by saying that they were not endorsing the cattle industry or cattle culture, but were, rather, taking part in popular culture. This is an indication that culture either expresses central features of Acrean culture, or traditional features of Acrean culture have combined with or been overtaken by cattle culture.
## A. Perceptions of Land Use

### Part I. agree/disagree w/ statements ("Today in Acre...")

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Raising cattle is the most profitable way to use the land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>There is more cultural tradition in agriculture than raising cattle or tapping rubber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Raising cattle gives a landholder more social status / prestige than other ways of using the land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>One can achieve the &quot;good life&quot; by raising cattle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Extractivism is the best way for poor rural populations to improve their lives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Part II. land use and concept associations*

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>is related most strongly to which land use in your mind?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Choose one from the following illustrated cards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>wealth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>sickness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>backwardness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>social status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>productivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>environmental conservation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## B. Perceptions of Social groups

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Rubber tappers live the &quot;good life&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Most ranchers in the Amazon are <em>sulistas</em> or <em>paulistas</em> (southerners, migrants from São Paulo)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>People who practice agriculture are rich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ranchers caused conflict with other rural groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Rubber tappers are the group that best conserves the forest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>There is less discrimination than there used to be between Acreans and migrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>A rancher has calloused hands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Rubber tappers have a &quot;falta de coragem&quot; (lack the will to work; are lazy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Most ranchers are black</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

1 Sections with a star (*) are not included in the consensus analysis because they are not dichotomous variables (section A, part II) or because they measure personal attributes instead of cultural knowledge (section C; section D, Part I; section E question 9)
Ranchers can travel outside of the state every year

Agriculturalists are "coitado" (miserable, suffering)

Rubber tappers do not have a "culture" of raising cattle

Rubber tappers are more respected in Acre than are ranchers

It is not the dream of most Acreans to own a piece of land

Most people that live in the city would like it better in the country

It is the dream of most Acreans to own cattle

It is the dreams of most Acreans to be a rubber tapper

Guys that work with cattle are more macho than agriculturalists and rubber tappers

The forest gives the rubber tappers everything that they need to live well

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C. Expression/ Participation in Cattle Culture*</th>
<th>y/n</th>
<th>comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clothing</strong> Do you wear…?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Boots</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Cowboy-style clothing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Belt buckle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Cowboy hat</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experience</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Ride horses?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Worked with cattle?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Own cattle?</td>
<td></td>
<td>How many?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Popular Culture</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TV</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Like soap operas about rural life and cowboys?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Like to watch horse auctions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Like to watch Acre Rural</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Events/ Activities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Listen to sertaneja or country music</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Do you dance to sertaneja or country music</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Attend Expo-Acre</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Attend Rodeos</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Attend cattle auctions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Drink tererê with your friends</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Have any decorations in your house or on your walls related to cattle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### D. Beef Consumption and Meaning

**Part I. Beef Consumption and Preferences**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Had a churrasco at your house?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>How many times a week do you eat beef?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>What cut of meat do you eat most often?*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>What is your favorite cut of beef?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Part II. Beef Perceptions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Beef gives a person more strength than other foods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>People that don’t eat beef lack “coragem”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>A lunch without meat leaves a person weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Vegetarians can have good health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>A lunch without beef is still a lunch for me</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### E. Human/Nature Interaction

** Dwelling**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>It is not safe to have trees around one’s house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Living in the forest is good for one’s health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Living in the middle of a pasture is better for one’s health than living in the forest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Perceptions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A person with a nice, clean pasture is a hard worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>A person that lives in the forest is lazy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>If people do not constantly work, the forest will take over their property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The government makes it hard for people to make a living from the land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8*</td>
<td>A woman should never contradict a man in public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9*</td>
<td>Which is more beautiful? (pasture, forest, agricultural field)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10*</td>
<td>1) The president can limit the voice of opposition parties in times of crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Even in times of crisis, the president must guarantee the voice of opposition parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Converting forest to pasture shows that a person is dominating nature</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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## APPENDIX B
SAMPLE REQUIREMENTS AND COMPOSITION OF SAMPLE

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Requirements for taking survey</th>
<th>Sample</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Rubber Tapper</td>
<td>Head of household; 2) past or present participation in extractive activities in support of household; 3) residence within extractive reserve; 4) self-identification as rubber tapper</td>
<td>20 Households in the former rubber estate of São Cristovão and Pindamondongaba, presently located within the CMER.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Colonist</td>
<td>Head of household; 2) past or present participation in extractive, agricultural, or cattle raising activities in support of household; 3) residence within settlement project; 4) self-identification as colonist or agriculturalist</td>
<td>20 households in Quixadá Settlement project. (located in the upper Acre region, between Brasiléia and Assis Brasil, bordering the CMER)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Rancher</td>
<td>Owner of a ranch with minimum of 1000 hectares and 1000 cattle 2) past or present administration of the ranch 3) self identification as rancher or cattle raiser</td>
<td>20 ranchers based out of Rio Branco with a ranch located within the upper and lower Acre region and within 200 miles of Rio Branco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Cowboy</td>
<td>Presently employed full-time at a ranch 2) daily work with cattle (excludes cooks, fence builders, and pasture cleaners)</td>
<td>20 cowboys working drawn from 5 ranches located in upper and lower Acre</td>
</tr>
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<td>Group</td>
<td>Requirements for taking survey</td>
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<td>5. Policy-Maker</td>
<td>Individuals currently serving in a governmental agency concerned with an economic development and/or environmental conservation with rural populations 2) must be in decision-making position within agency. The majority of respondents were primary or departmental heads of the agency</td>
<td>20 Respondents chosen from a range of state and federal government agencies based out Rio Branco.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Environmental NGO</td>
<td>Individuals currently employed by an NGO working with policies related to environmental conservation and/or sustainable livelihoods with rural populations 2) respondents must be in a decision-making position within the NGO</td>
<td>20 Respondents chosen from NGOs located in Rio Branco</td>
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The last time I saw Pedro Perto, he was tapping rubber in the forest.¹

It was July of last year (2009), and I was walking with Espimar, my guide in the rubber tapper community of São Cristovão. As he walked, he played his new guitar and sang the few country songs that he had heard on the radio and somehow learned.

It was surreal, walking through the forest as he sang, with little patches of light reaching through the canopy, our feet crunching on the leaves that had grown brittle in the dryness of the Amazon summer. When the rains stop, rubber season begins.

As we came to the crest of a small hill, we spotted old Pedro Perto. He was smiling, as he always was, a smile that went to his eyes, which twinkled as he squinted. His brown skin was tight on his bones, his white hair as full as that of his sons, grandsons and great-grandsons.

In his hand he held a faca, a knife for cutting rubber. He held the little handle in one hand and guided the blade with the other, working it diagonally across the tree bark. He left a line sure and straight, and the leite, or milk, begin to bubble through.

Gradually, a line of white liquid filled in the groove and began to run down a central vertical cut that channeled it to a cup.

He wore a long-sleeved plaid shirt against the early morning cold of the forest. As was his custom, a hand-rolled cigarette was stuck to his bottom lip, unlit. It moved with his lip when he talked. He had tied his shirt around his waist and pulled up the sleeves as the morning heated up, and the way it bloused out made him seem like a giant with skinny little legs.

He lit the cigarette and walked on to tap some more trees, which were scattered randomly throughout the forest, all connected by trails he had made. He spent less than a minute at each tree and was off again, walking at a jogging pace. There were about 100 trees on each trail, and he had three trails. He would work each trail twice a week, resting on Sunday.

He used to have to work even more. In addition to tapping and then harvesting the rubber each day, he would then have to go home and pour the rubber slowly over a stick that he rotated in the fire to make it coagulate into a ball. He did this until the ball reached a weight of about 100 pounds and then he would give it to the rubber barons, the owners of these lands.

Pedro’s ancestors came to Acre in the 1800s from the drought-stricken

¹ “Rubber Tappers Toil in the Forest” appeared on June 28, 2010 in the San Angelo Standard-Times as part of the series “Postcards from the Amazon.” The original text has been maintained as it was originally published with minor changes, such as the use of pseudonyms. I include this article in the appendix to illustrate the complexity of social group life and history, and to contrast the ways that my research was presented to academic and popular audiences. For a full description of the “Postcards,” see Chapter 2, pages 54-55.
northeast of Brazil, lured by the promise of a better life. They were disappointed when they found out that the land and their labor was controlled by rubber barons, but they were trapped thousands of miles from home in the middle of the Amazon basin and had no way to get back.

In exchange for the rubber balls, the baron would give Pedro supplies, food and medicine. He wasn’t allowed to sell the rubber himself — that could get a rubber tapper killed.

“There were good barons and there were bad ones,” he said. “The one that used to own the land here was really bad.”

The price of natural rubber declined throughout the 20th century because rubber seeds were stolen from the Amazon and used to create plantations in Southeast Asia. During World War II, when the Southeast Asian supplies were cut off, Amazonian rubber became important again and a new wave of migrants called “rubber soldiers” came to Acre to tap rubber for the allied war effort.

The price of rubber gradually declined to the point that many rubber barons abandoned their lands, leaving the rubber tappers free. But when the government opened up the Amazon to settlement in the 1970s, the absentee barons sold their lands to ranchers, who came to claim their lands, cut down the forest, plant pasture and raise cattle.

Violence erupted as the ranchers tried to kick the rubber tappers off the land that they had lived on for up to a century.

“When things got bad in one place, I moved to another. I even worked for a rancher for a while,” Pedro said.

He moved seven times in all. Finally, when things calmed down, he came to settle in the reserve that the government set aside for the rubber tappers.

“It is good here now. We are free,” he said. “We can sell to whoever we want and buy whatever we need.” Earlier this year, I ran into Pedro Perto’s son, Chico Velho (Old Chico), in the city and asked about his dad. He told me that Pedro Perto had died.

“One day he came home from the forest and wasn’t feeling good” Chico said. “He got worse in a hurry, and by the time we were taking him to city it was too late.”

Pedro lived the history of the rubber trade in Acre from a time of debt servitude to the present, a time of freedom, but with new hardships.

Many rubber tappers would now prefer to raise cattle, which gives them more money with less work. In the São Joao, however, there is a renewed interest in tapping rubber because the community has teamed up with a local factory that makes natural condoms.

Pedro’s grandson now walks those same trails twice a day during the dry season, tapping rubber like his grandfather did.
Early in the morning, Leopoldo lights the little earthen stove just outside the back door of his house. He is making mucuzá, a corn gruel with Brazil nut milk.\footnote{This article originally appeared in the San Angelo Standard-Times on May 1, 2010 as part of the series “Postcards from the Amazon.”}

The sun has yet to make it over the distant wall of forest that surrounds his property, insulating a sea of pasture with his little house in the middle.

Out in the pasture, cows rub themselves clockwise around a towering castanheira (Brazil nut tree), straight and limbless a hundred feet up, and then exploding into a bushy crown. Calves run stiff-legged in the grass, heavy with moisture even though it hasn’t rained here in a couple weeks.

When I arrived at Leopoldo’s house, it was all closed up, but his bedroom window was open with a towel hanging out to dry. After having stayed with him last year, I knew this meant he wasn’t far off.

If he was in town for the day, he would have closed all the openings to the house, securing them with a knot around a nail or a loosely nailed piece of wood turned like a valve against the window. Everything here is simple and efficient; sticks that are barely long enough sit in between fence openings and gates are secured with pieces of rope that are so short that only he can re-tie them.

After a few beeps of the motorcycle horn, he came weaving through the occasional Brazil nut tree or termite mound on the little dirt paths that traverse the pasture. He had been in his agricultural plot, where he spends most mornings and afternoons, cutting away weeds from the corn plants and pruning the banana trees.

At first, I wondered if it was him because he was all alone and his trusty dog — gangly and white with a black patch over one eye — was not following behind. Turns out someone stole him. His two little kittens had also died since I had last seen him.

The dog and kittens used to snuggle up together on the highest step just outside the back door, waiting for him to wake up.

Leopoldo lives in a one-room house in a settlement project. Beginning in the early 1980s, areas of the Amazon were opened up for families that wanted their own land. The people that settled here are known as colonos, or colonists.

Each family got about 100 acres of forested land where they gradually built homes. All of Leopoldo’s neighbors rely mostly on cattle and, if they produce agriculture (corn, beans, rice, cassava), it is usually for their own consumption. Fish farms are increasingly popular and profitable among them.

Colonos are a mixture of native Acreans, usually former rubber tappers, and migrants from states to the south.
Many migrants were landless in their home states, which had temperate climates. Adapting to the Amazon rain forest without much support or knowledge of the local ecology was an incredible challenge.

Leopoldo, like many native Acreans in the settlement projects, has a good knowledge of the forest and uses and sells many forest products. He prefers the milk of the Brazil nut for mucuzá, while migrants from outside generally choose cow milk and call it canjica.

This illustrates the different traditions of native Acreans, who are more forest-oriented, and migrants, who brought agriculture and ranching with them. Despite these cultural differences, Leopoldo’s land is very similar to that of his neighbors — about half pasture and half forest.

To make mucuzá, Leopoldo first grinds up a few handfuls of Brazil nuts. He then puts them into a strainer, squeezing as he runs water over them to create the Brazil nut “milk.” Finally, he pours the milk into the pot of corn that he boiled last night, along with a spoonful of salt and heaps of sugar.

He harvested the nuts a few months ago, waiting until all the softball-sized pods, which weigh about 2 pounds, had fallen from the tree. Like little cannonballs, they can easily crack your skull, so everyone steers clear of the trees in the months when they are dropping. He gathered them from the forest floor around the perimeter of the trees, chucking them into old rice sacks. Next, he made a big pile of the pods, sat down, spread his legs into a “V,” and struck each pod around the crown with his machete. After hacking through the half-inch thick woody covering of the pod, he took out about 15 nuts, nestled together like sections of an orange.

Back at home he sat down again and, with his machete, scraped the woody skins off the individual nuts.

Fresh Brazil nuts have the taste and texture of coconut meat.

Leopoldo has a gas stove, but he prefers to make mucuzá on his little earth oven right outside his door. After the corn is swollen with Brazil nut milk, he takes it off and lets it cool for a time. He spoons some into a bowl for me and tops his with cinnamon.

In his little wooden house, Leopoldo sips his mucuzá. He then heads off on a little dirt trail through the pasture to his banana field, where he will thin out dead stalks and trim away weeds. Thus begins a day in the life of one colonist.

On this dirt road alone, six other families are beginning their days in entirely different ways.
If you wandered around Acre near the Bolivian border, you would probably come to know Maria Bahiana (Maria from Bahia).\(^1\) You could just say “Bahiana” and everyone for miles around would know that you were talking about the tough, talkative lady who lived down a dirt road at the bottom of a hill with her sons.

Bahiana grew up in the arid northeast state of Bahia and, along with her husband, followed the frontier through the Amazon before settling in Acre in 1982.

Life wasn’t easy for Bahiana, especially after her husband died in an oxcart accident 25 years ago.

“There was no man here to help me. Ask anyone. I provided for these kids on my own. I raised them alone.

“Look at my hands — they are calloused from working the land, from sweating in the roça (farm) to provide the kids with food.”

Her hands show the struggles of a woman who has lived for over 60 years in the country. They are large and rough and seem out of place compared to her slight frame and her black hair, which is always pulled back tight in a bun.

A year ago, I arrived at Bahiana’s house to learn about the life of the colonists, families who settled in the Amazon over the past 30 years on 100 plots of land. I stayed a month in her house with her two youngest sons and her grandson. Some things stick out in my mind from that time.

Two enormous white bulls with rings in their noses stood outside her door and always came when she called them. She washed clothes in the little creek behind the house, the slapping of clothes echoing for miles around. Everyone stopped at her house to hear the latest, tell of their troubles, or get some free advice, even if they didn’t want it. She would tell you all about it in her distinctive way of talking, with singsong phrases that go up and down in pitch, often followed by long sighs.

But, there was more going on than I realized. On that first day that I arrived, a man was sitting with her at the kitchen table. I later learned that they were negotiating the sale of her land. My month with them would be their last month in the countryside. It wouldn’t be a typical month for a colonist family, but I would learn that there really isn’t anything typical about a colonist’s life, and things change every day.

Throughout Acre, many people who live in rural areas are moving to the cities. They do this for a number of reasons, most often citing the availability of health care, education, and job opportunities in the city. All of these are limited or nonexistent in the many rural communities of the Amazon.

\(^1\) This article originally appeared in the San Angelo Standard-Times on May 15, 2010 as part of the series “Postcards from the Amazon.” (This is Part I of the article, Part II is located in Appendix E)
In Bahiana’s case, she had painful kidney stones and needed surgery. She was nervous about being so far way and worried often about not being able to get to the hospital in time.

She also didn’t want to deal with the fights surrounding her inheritance. She wanted to sell the land now and divide the money while she was still around and see her children enjoy it.

In general, she was tired of life in the country.

“This is no place for an old person. It is tiring to fight with the mud and rain, and to always have to take care of the animals.”

At this point in her life, the benefits of the city outweigh the tranquility of life in the country.

A week before she moved to town, her family had a big barbecue. We dug a big rectangular hole in the ground six feet long and four feet deep.

One of her sons offered a calf for the event. We strung it up on a tree branch and dressed it with a machete. The meat was rubbed with salt and laid across a grid of barbed wire that covered the hole, and was then left to roast. When it was ready, we ate the salty hunks of meat and squeezed lemon juice on top.

Relatives and friends from the city came with immaculately white shoes. They had taken their shoes off when they left the highway and carried them down the dirt road until they got near the house, where they washed their muddy feet.

They arrived at the house looking good, their clothes and shoes spotless.

Most of them had only been living in the city for a little while, and they longed to get back, away from the “noise, dust, and crime of the city.”

The truth is, once most people move to the city, they don’t go back. They all want a place in the country — a place to relax on holidays and weekends, but not a place to work and live.

Bahiana has been in the city for almost a year now and the house where she raised the boys is now boarded shut. The man who bought her land is not interested in the house, which hasn’t been used since they left. He bought it only for the pasture where his cows now graze.

Bahiana’s surgery went well and she is in good health again. Next time I will tell you about her life in the city.
A year ago, Bahiana, who had lived in the country all her life, packed up and moved to the city.¹

The images we have of the Amazon region undoubtedly are associated with the forest, but the majority of people who live here are in cities, which are swelling with migrants from the countryside.

Most of them despise the idea of leaving a life on the land, but the city offers people things that they cannot get in their isolated rural properties, such as education, health care and wage labor.

Bahiana’s new house in the city is painted light green and orange. It sits on a dirt road a few blocks off the main highway.

The first time I arrived here, I was saddened to see the way that her life in the country, which I found to be difficult but noble, had translated in the city.

The dogs that once had run free in the forest were chained and moved only to follow the little slivers of shade that tracked across the hard-packed yard. Instead of bathing in the clear little stream behind the house, they now clean up in dark bathroom, with only a little window covered in screen chiseled into the concrete wall.

My tour of her house on this first day was narrated by the Backstreet Boys, whose greatest hits blasted from the house behind her. They played the CD straight through seven times. Life in the city didn’t seem so great to me.

I have gotten used to it here, but it isn’t really fair to say that her life was better in the country. If I have a hard time understanding her decision to come to the city, they think I am completely crazy for choosing to leave the comfortable American life they see every day on TV to come here.

My preference for a tranquil, “pure” life in the forest is based on daydreams made possible by good health, education and financial security. It is a romanticism disconnected from the everyday trials of living in the Amazon, or anywhere in the countryside, for that matter.

Initially, at least, Bahiana hated life in the city. “I cried every day for the first few months,” she said.

Gradually, as she healed from her surgery, she began to like it.

“I rested my body and my head. I didn’t even know my head was tired, but now I do. It was stressful out there for me. I always worried about taking care of the animals and when the boys were not around, I worried about criminals.”

Although she doesn’t miss the life in the colonia anymore, her sons do. One has found a job in the city. He works 10 hours a day six days a week delivering drinking water on a motorcycle. He

¹ This article originally appeared in the San Angelo Standard-Times on June 5, 2010 as part of the series “Postcards from the Amazon.” This article is a continuation of the previous article (Appendix D).
makes about $250 a month. He would prefer to go back in the colonia where he could make that much selling one calf a month with a lot less work. On his day off, he heads straight for his relatives’ house in the country.

It was kind of lonely for Bahiana in the country. She loves to talk to people and she gets to do that more now in the city. Here is just a small sample of her conversations:

Last week, a tiny woman whom Bahiana knew from the colonia came to the city to process some documents. She ate lunch with us, gripping her spoon with her whole hand. I don’t think she ever talked, but she laughed her head off at Bahiana’s claims that I was her long lost white son from southern Brazil.

Bahiana doesn’t always need to have a person to talk to. I could hear her in one of her son’s bedrooms last week. She was folding a pile of clothes that he had left on the floor.

“I don’t know when these boys are going to learn. I am not always going to be around to fold their clothes and clean up after them. Oh, but don’t worry about it, really. I will take care of it. Lazy bums. (sigh).”

She gets all the work done early so that she can watch the novellas (soap operas) around lunchtime and then again in the evening. These are wildly popular in Brazil and the streets are mostly empty when they begin around 7 p.m. I have arrived at people’s houses during novella time, sometimes the first American they have known, and they are very interested to know me, but only during commercial breaks.

Not surprisingly, then, Bahiana also talks to the novellas. She judges the morality of people’s actions, evaluates their looks and laughs when a wrongdoer gets what he deserves. She interprets the not-so-subtle cues that someone is falling in love or is being deceived, telling them the secrets that they should know: “She doesn’t love you — she just wants your money!”

On a Sunday (the only day without novellas), I sat with Bahiana, her sons and her grandson watching bloopers and practical jokes. We howled together at the men getting racked by soccer balls and errant swings at the piñata and a levitating corpse prank.

Later, when the TV was finally turned off, I saw Bahiana running her finger over a photo of her late husband.

“If he was still around we’d be two happy old-timers, I tell you.”

Bahiana admits that it hasn’t been easy for her, but she is proud that she took what was dealt and made it work.

Through her words, and her laughter and tears, Bahiana has shown me that people are not so different from place to place, even in the Amazon. She also illustrated to me that people generally will choose to better their life if they can. For Bahiana, and many others in this region, this means moving to the city.

Moving has made her life better in a number of practical ways, but it is not always about where you are as much as who is with you, or in Bahiana’s case, who has already moved on.
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Jeffrey Hoelle was born in Odessa, Texas in 1976. His family moved to San Angelo, Texas, where he graduated from Central High School in 1995. He obtained his B.A. in Psychology and Spanish from Southwestern University in 1999. From 2000-2002, he served as a Peace Corps volunteer in a Ngabe community in western Panama, where he worked on agricultural projects. In 2003, he entered the graduate program in Latin American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, obtaining his M.A. in 2005. Hoelle arrived at the University of Florida in 2006 and graduated with his Ph.D. in Anthropology in 2011. At UF, he also participated in the Tropical Conservation and Development Program and the Center for Latin American Studies.