

The City of Knowledge:
Knowledge as the Currency of Modernity in Panama

Introduction

When the first uniformed police officer sat down at a table a few rows away from me, I was admittedly surprised by his presence. It was the first day of a free and public class offered through the non-profit City of Knowledge Foundation which manages a business park called the City of Knowledge (*La Ciudad del Saber*) that sits on the shore of the Panama Canal a short distance from downtown Panama City, the nation's capital (Image 1). The City of Knowledge is host to myriad kinds of organizations: academic institutions, bioscience and information technology corporations, several United Nations offices, and international and national non-governmental organizations (NGOs), to name a few. I had been conducting ethnographic research on the social work of the concept of knowledge for three weeks and I would continue to carry out interviews, attend events, and do archival research for another 5 weeks. The City of Knowledge, previously a strategic U.S. military base operational from the early 20th century to 1999 called Fort Clayton, promises to strive for “human and sustainable development based on knowledge” (“Panama - Ciudad Del Saber” n.d.). The Foundation generates revenue by renting its vast office space, while receiving tax breaks from the Panamanian government because of its status as a non-profit. Occupying nearly 300 acres, the fort mattered historically to countless U.S. military missions across Latin America. During this period, the U.S. attempted to legitimize control of the canal and canal zone with reference to the unique skill, that is, the knowledge, required for operating the canal competently. The history of this choreographed neighborhood continues to influence how invocations of ‘knowledge’ in present-day Panama are contoured. Although I will not elaborate on the history of the city, it's important to note that the space and boundaries of Fort Clayton and the Canal Zone area have historically served as sites of imperialist violence for much of the 20th century.

During the 20th century, U.S. claims to the canal began to emerge less through the object of the canal than through the space of what would become by 1999 the City of Knowledge as military power was consolidated around the Fort Clayton military base. American representatives propagated discourse of national security and securitization of favorable conditions for American capital. In 1977, after more than a decade of treaty negotiations during which the U.S. argued that its personnel alone possessed the knowledge necessary to operate the canal, Panama finally won a guarantee of control over the canal. Full transfer of canal zone infrastructure, however, would take 22 years to complete; a process that U.S. officials attempted to justify with claims to superior competency. As I argue below, the ways in which technocratic knowledge is forged and appropriated in the City of Knowledge represents a form of talking back to U.S. colonialist regimes and neo-colonial structures of financial dominance imposed by transnational institutions.

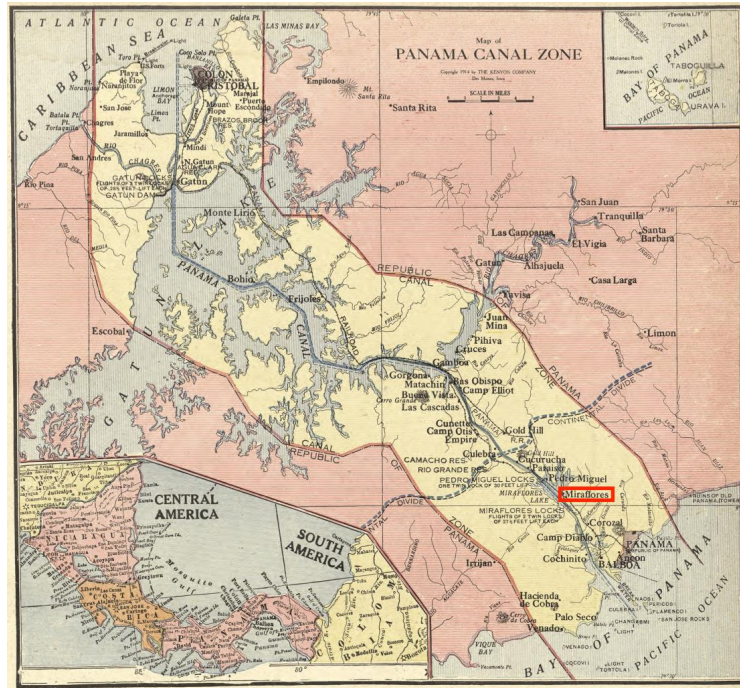


Image 1. Map of the Canal Zone and the City of Knowledge

This map shows the Panama Canal and demarcates the artificial boundaries of the canal zone in 1914. Fort Clayton is located directly adjacent to Miraflores, highlighted in the above image (“Map of Panama Canal Zone” 1914).

My nervousness about meeting others in the class was assuaged by a looped track of acoustic guitar melodies laid over a background of ocean waves. Within minutes of the entrance of the first police officer, three more officers entered the room and sat apart from each other. Yet I couldn’t make sense of their presence. Why was there a small cadre of police officers at an academic course about environmental management in Panama? At the start of the course, there were 48 attendees, including a total of eleven police officers, whom I would later learn were the police captains for each of the main police districts in nation’s capital city. The week-long course, titled “Strategic Environmental Foresight,” was introduced by the building’s administrator, who was also an employee of the City of Knowledge Foundation and the event’s facilitator. I presented myself as a student researching the socio-political work of ‘knowledge,’ here rendered mutable and contingent as a symbolic form, in the City of Knowledge.

The soothing music now off, the administrator explained that the environment, in the Foundation’s view, is fundamental for the international competitiveness of Panama. He quickly introduced the teacher of the course, a man from Colombia who had previously been an economist but now worked as a consultant for the international management consulting company, Proseres. The instructor outlined the agenda of the week ahead and finished his statement by explaining that the course was important because “the future is born in the individual’s mind.” He added, “if you want to organize [*ordenar*] territory, first you must organize your thoughts.” The instructor’s opening words, more than benign generalization, were potently symbolic of the many deeply-rooted notions of singular sources of agency and naturalized expertise, for example, that

were made prevalent, reinforced, and contested during the rest of the week and during my encounters with Foundation representatives in Panama. For one, his and others' comments within the class and within the Foundation's managerial staff, all originally in Spanish, posited the existence of an always self-aware and rational citizen—with us, the audience, as his prime example. Anthropologists have complicated this picture with ethnographic research that suggests models like the instructor's—that simplify and sanitize notions of the citizen and the state—are in fact seeped in the politics of contested meaning making (Das and Poole 2004). It's precisely these politics—the unequal and dynamic practices of invoking voices to make claim to knowledge and modernity—that I will explore in this essay.

In what follows, I couple analysis of the environmental course police presence with comments from a City of Knowledge administrator to argue that City of Knowledge participants speak back to colonial legacies by setting their own terms regarding access to knowledge and critique of its application. The novelty of this essay rests, in part, in the ethnographic specificity I bring to discussions of the place of symbolic knowledge within a linguistic anthropology of globalization in Panama. More specifically, I argue below that City of Knowledge participants attempt to signify the modernity of the Panamanian nation by making exclusive claim to location- and history-specific 'knowledge,' wherein knowledge is refigured as a type of currency of legitimacy. Drawing from ethnographic research, I suggest that knowledge, within manifestations of the so-called project of knowledge management, is re-made as a new indicator with which to gauge Panama's modernization.

In the first part of this essay, I argue that the police officers' reported engagement with rural populations embodies the actualization of the very market intervention that the Foundation's advocacy of neoliberal approaches to free market ideology would otherwise deny. Whereas the City of Knowledge imagines itself as the neutral facilitator of knowledge, this image the Foundation has of itself is contested in practice and, to a degree, by its own management, as I show in the last section of the chapter. In part two, I bring anthropological approaches to nature to bear in an analysis of what a high-ranking interviewee, whom I will pseudonymize as Rulfo, calls the "cultural problem" Panama faces with regards to environmental management. I critically engage Rulfo's comments on the role of the Foundation in the management of the nation's watersheds and other more-than-human natural assemblages. In this section, I consider the stakes involved in invocations of the nature/culture dichotomy for defining the role of knowledge in the context of City of Knowledge.

Finally, in the last section of this essay, I demonstrate how Rulfo deals in the politics of specialized knowledge and situates himself as an expert by distancing himself critically from approaches like the Foundation's. The analytic approach I take to thinking through the process by which Rulfo establishes his expertise involves closely considering Rulfo's words and body language. An analysis of the construction of expertise, I propose, is especially crucial for an anthropology of knowledge within the City of Knowledge. The present essay, also situated within an anthropology of modernity, is a study of claims made about the value of knowledge and of claims that attempt to symbolize and facilitate political subjectivity through the non-neutral concept of knowledge.

One: The Double Truth of Neoliberalism(s)

The political status of the City of Knowledge and the Foundation that manages it is ambiguous. By the end of 1999, the land and facilities were property of the Panamanian government and were valued at over US\$100 million (Enscore et al. 2000, 8–2). In the country’s 1996 general plan, the government outlined plans to commission the City of Knowledge Foundation to manage the space as a nonprofit entity, although not as a government institution. Key to understanding the ambiguous status of the Foundation is the fact that, like other nonprofits, the Foundation has no “owners” in the traditional sense that for-profit businesses do, even if it does have a board of directors. In contrast, government institutions are imagined in mainstream discourse to be “owned” by the liberal state’s citizenry. The Foundation rents office space to national and international universities, for-profit corporations, NGOs, and myriad other agencies. Moreover, as previously noted, the Foundation facilitates for-profit ventures and regularly hosts events and conferences for the “incubation” of local start-up companies. The Foundation’s website promises to promote an “entrepreneurial culture” within the Foundation’s Panama Business Accelerator, with language steeped in biological development metaphors (“Startups” n.d.). The contours of the Foundation’s on-the-ground practices raise questions central to the work of many scholars writing about changing modalities of government and corporate ownership, personhood, and temporalities. These scholars ask what it would mean to historicize the rise of and dynamic nature of corporate personhood transnationally and within contexts with high stakes for diverse stakeholders (Bashkow 2014; Ho 2005). In the face of celebratory discourses of the circulation of capital, humans, and ideas, scholars like Anna Tsing also ask about how such circulations cut metaphorical channels and how circulations are themselves changed by the imagined channels through which they move (2000a, 2000b).

One critical science studies scholar, Philip Mirowski, who holds a Ph.D. in economics, argues that it is prudent to trace contemporary forms of neoliberal thought and governance to the so-called Mont Pèlerin Society’s “thought collective” (Mirowski and Plehwe 2015). The private group was started in the late 1940s and consisted of a set of hand-picked members—from academics to businessmen—who took inspiration in developing theory from the work of economist Friedrich Hayek. Mirowski traces neoliberal logics to the Mont Pèlerin Society. It’s hard to identify a core set of principles that were advocated by the group, Mirowski argues, which was part of the strategy of the group. However, the doctrine of “neoliberalism” can be understood as a “pluralist organism striving to distinguish itself from its three primary foes: laissez-faire classical liberalism, social welfare liberalism, and socialism” (431). The political project of the society’s advocates, who would go on to establish a widely-impactful set of charitable foundations and educational organizations, was the re-education of “*all parties* to alter the tenor and meaning of political life” (431). An underlying theme of this political project is the “double truth” of neoliberal doctrine, especially where the project intersected with discourse that emphasized the importance of freedom and agency of individuals. Neoliberals, Mirowski argues, attempt to hold together principles of anti-state interventionism within markets yet heavily rely on a strong state to “define and institute the types of markets that they (and not the citizenry) were convinced were the

most advanced” (444). In practice, the need for and historical specificity of the interventionist state is deliberately hidden within the neoliberal double truth.

Mirowski’s notion of double truth is useful in understanding what is going on in the case of the City of Knowledge Foundation’s role in facilitating flow and processes of subject-making. Returning to the fully-uniformed police captains in the academic course, I argue that the police presence in the course exemplified the particular shape of the neoliberal double truth as advocated by City of Knowledge participants. Within the same breath as mentions to the free market as the best facilitator for alleviating the chronic poverty of much of the nation’s inhabitants, city officials and educational consultants claimed that agents of Panama’s political economy, such as the police, were absolutely necessary for eco-oriented so-called ‘market integration’ of rural communities. This is perhaps best exemplified by the process of the Foundation linking entrepreneurs with rural communities while requiring the implementation of specific environmentally-friendly practices in those communities. The move is characteristic of neoliberalism’s double truth, following Mirowski’s conceptualization.

The specificity of neoliberalism’s double truth came to a head when the officers conducted a panel presentation. Incredibly (or not), one officer standing at the front of the room explained that, as routine practice, the national police travel to rural provinces, such as Gamboa, to teach indigenous peoples about taking care of local fauna. The flow of knowledge displayed here is unidirectional and, as described, carries with it the assumption that the crux of the problem of “degraded” land is knowledge or the lack thereof, as if the problem of deforestation within the region rests on peoples whose ancestors have lived throughout the region for millennia. The region’s indigenous populations referred to by the officers, such as the Embera Indians, are also those whom (mostly white) international tourists can visit in an adventure “back in time” to witness “mystical rituals” and “dances and music that have hardly changed since Christopher Columbus arrived,” as one tourist company’s website explains (“Embera Indigenous Village - Gamboa Tours” n.d.).

Passive integration into regional capitalist markets is not sufficient within the City of Knowledge Foundation’s neoliberal approach. Indeed, the country’s “hidden competitive advantages” such as biodiversity and tourism, as Rulfo put it, require market intervention on the part of the state. In the case of the project of restoring ecosystem health in Gamboa, such intervention takes the form of (re)education of local peoples by police officers. Knowledge, here, is cast as disembodied and the market is imagined as the best information processor and yet, in practice, the Foundation relies on the state for the deployment of such knowledge. Important to point out here is that the term double truth does not encapsulate a contradiction. I argue that the term double truth represents a contradiction only if we assume a seamless coherency between liberal democracy and late capitalism. If we do not make this assumption, then, in fact, we are left with two separate ‘truths’--in this case, anti-state-interventionist ideology and reliance on the actualization of markets by state forces--which the City of Knowledge Foundation attempts to hold together simultaneously as if inherently linked. As an extension of this logic, we are meant to understand the police officer’s project as successful if the promise of capitalist growth in the region remains viable. Or, in the case of ecosystem health, the project could be said to be successful if the health of local ecosystems is conceptualized

to be improving towards an imagined natural and terminal equilibrium of the ecosystem, for example.

Having posed a question about the police presence in the classroom, one officer explained that the police stand with the City of Knowledge in an effort to make good decisions about environmental challenges that pose a threat to national security. The comment was at first puzzling, especially without any historical context or ethnographic description with which to situate contemporary relations between the police and indigenous and campesino (non-indigenous, rural) populations. However, understood as a response to the question *how does the state police rural populations?* the use of the health of ecosystems as a reason for legitimizing police presence in the regions starts to make more sense. My goal here is not to reify violent power relations but to get at the particularity of how certain neoliberal agents imagine themselves to hold and exercise power within specific relationships.

The police officer's comments on the exceptional nature of environmental emergency and its link to national security echo a history of U.S. military discourse in the region. Throughout the 20th century in Panama U.S. agents pointed to the exceptionality of national strikes and uprisings to justify extreme and politically expedient repression within moments of military emergency. Returning to Mirowski's double truth, the police officer's remarks evidence the reliance, in this case, of a strong state in the form of a robust police force to help actualize the types of markets for which agents within neoliberal paradigms advocate. I have used the phrase double truth to help elucidate how the City of Knowledge advocates environmental management via the market yet also relies on the state to enforce particular approaches to such environmental management in interior provinces.

As the officers walked back towards their seats, having finished the panel presentation, the City of Knowledge employee facilitating the course requested of the quiet room, "an applause, please."

Two: Planning Natures and Cultures

Following up on a contact given to me by a friend made during the academic course, I sent an email with a request for a meeting to a City of Knowledge administrator, who replied quickly. *Rulfo*¹, who is white and whose official title is "executive advisor," refers to himself as an environmental historian and is widely published and cited in the field, especially as it pertains to Central American environmental history (G.C.H. 2007, 2017b; Carse et al. 2016). Pen and paper in hand, *Rulfo* explained to me that the Panamanian territory is naturally organized by its watersheds. Rivers flow south to north or north to south, starting in the two mountain ranges which run down the middle of the isthmus as a geographical spine. However, *Rulfo* noted, "the general organization of the economy, of the interior economy, is from east to west" (2017a; Image 3). *Rulfo*'s sketches of the country now included lines that perpendicularly intersect each other. He continued:

"There's a contradiction, a conflict, between the natural organization of the territory and the territorial organization of the economy. And

¹ "Rulfo" is a pseudonym.

this contradiction is an increasingly great threat for the only part of the economy that is organized north to south; that is, the canal.”

Here, Rulfo posits a problem between the flow of traffic through the canal and the flow of trade through the rest of the country. The problem is also a problem of unequal distribution of resources within the economy since, he explained, the canal zone area and canal have been privileged above all else during the last hundred years. Rulfo marks the Torrijos-Carter treaty of 1977 as the moment when Panama took control of the canal’s watershed; the first, he claims, the state had ever actively managed.

Yet, Rulfo explained to me, by the time Panama took the helm of the canal, the country had no “water culture.” Rulfo claimed that even by 2017, the country lacked the necessary orientation to the management of its watersheds: “we don’t have a water culture, neither as a product nor an element. Our water culture consists of looking to the sky and hoping that it rains!” However, a type of water culture has necessarily emerged around the canal, Rulfo said, in large part because of its design. The canal’s elevated locks system requires the input of fresh water for the locks to function, making it completely dependent on the untold millions of gallons of freshwater that fall on isthmus’ mountains and flow to Gatun lake, which serves as the liquid backbone of the canal (Image 1). Rulfo explained that one aspect of his research, as an environmental historian, has been to consider the work and conditions required to transform water from a natural element into a natural resource. He argues that water flowing through the Chagres river transforms from a natural element into a natural resource as soon as it enters Gatun Lake.

Anthropologists have long dealt in the political currency of the culture/nature dichotomy (and the related human/non-human, mind/body, etc). They ask, for example: How is nature or the natural invoked and imagined and valued, especially when it is opposed to culture? By whom? For whom? In what historical or social contexts? Anthropological theories of nature have tended to avoid taking hard philosophical stances as monists (“nature-skeptical”: the nature/culture dichotomy is pure illusion!) or dualists (“nature-endorsing”: there are essential differences between nature and culture!), in favor of considering how people do or do not engage related categories (Descola 2013; Soper 1998). I take a similar approach here. Moreover, anthropologists have attempted to problematize dichotomized invocations of material assemblages, such as a lack of a water culture in Panama. These situated, or “territorialized,” assemblages, according to anthropologists Ong and Collier, “are sites for the formation and reformation of...*anthropological problems*” (Ong and Collier 2005, 4). Ong and Collier define anthropological problems as the “domains in which the forms and values of individual and collective existence are problematized or at stake, in the sense that they are subject to technological, political, and ethical reflection and intervention” (Ong and Collier 2005, 4). Below, I briefly problematize Rulfo’s positionality and conception of ‘modernity’ as anthropological problems.

It’s not self-evident, though, that the City of Knowledge should necessarily have a place at the table or any leverage in discussions of the country’s water management. Still, in discussions of the country’s management of its natural resources, City of Knowledge representatives like Rulfo situate the Foundation as a politically neutral force. Rulfo, speaking on behalf of the Foundation of the City of Knowledge, explained that the Foundation provides the platform for developing an “integrated vision” of the country’s

water management and its water culture overall. The City of Knowledge plays the role of fostering the development of the country's "competitive advantages," that, according to Rulfo, are currently obscured. These advantages include the country's water and biodiversity, and the natural organization of the territory which, according to Rulfo, allowed indigenous peoples, before the Spanish conquest and genocide, to sustain multiple interoceanic (north to south) trade routes. "Some of these trade routes are now being re-established, but without planning," he explained.

The City of Knowledge, then, fills a perceived planning void. Knowledge management, here, is in the service of integrating the canal zone's economic directionality with that of the rest of the country. It also provides the planning necessary to align trade with the natural organization of the country, to which the Foundation claims special insight. Knowledge, in this valence, stands as a novel connection between the City of Knowledge and the rest of the country and planet. Rulfo articulated the idea as follows:

"The integration of the canal to the economy accelerates economic growth and quickly transnationalizes [*transnacionaliza*] the economy. Secondly, the launch of the integration into the global economy deepens and diversifies the role that Panama has fulfilled in this global economy and produces a new phenomenon. This phenomenon is the creation of a platform of global services, centered around the canal. This platform of global services operates and is made up in two distinct ways. In the first, the platform is formed based on the development of economic activities that already existed. [...] The other has to do with maritime trade. When the ports of the canal—which were under American control—were incorporated with the country's economy, the process of integration with what already existed started to accelerate. In fact, the ports were very small. They were ports for the zone's necessity, not the country. [...] The canal, the ports, the financial center [downtown Panama City], the Colón Free Zone struggle with the problem of finding their path in globalization. It's still unknown what that path will be. [...] Still we are building up what was previously a series of dispersed services. [...] Within this platform of global services, a center has been established, a center of services of knowledge management. And that is the City of Knowledge" (2017a).

Within Rulfo's portrayal of the City of Knowledge's approach to knowledge management, the Foundation figures as a politically neutral and unquestionably beneficial force orchestrating the economic integration of the canal zone with the rest of the country and of the country with the world. Economic growth takes on a sense of organicity and inevitability, as if such growth was a natural result of the destruction of the canal zone's borders. Rulfo's words suggest that the Foundation merely provides the space for which knowledge operates to solve problems, not provide the actual services of ecosystem restoration and water management. While his words are not themselves highly technical, I argue that his language is technocratic because it makes claim to the

specialized knowledge required to talk about and provide economic services and it makes a claim regarding the special place of knowledge in processes of governance in Panama.

Ultimately, the City of Knowledge Foundation embodies an ideology that promotes an anti-interventionist state, the de-regulation of industry, and other free market ideals. Rulfo explains, for example, that the Foundation is working with entrepreneurs and interior communities in order to address restoration of “degraded ecosystems.” Although no permanent recruitment program exists yet, Rulfo explains, the Foundation is “trying to win the favor” of organizations and convince them to put down roots in Panama to sell their services (2017a). Such organizations include not just private corporations but also international universities, centers of scientific research, and NGOs whose missions align with that of the City of Knowledge, which is, according to Rulfo, to “put knowledge in the service of sustainable development” (2017a). More than a politically neutral facilitator of activities within the City of Knowledge, the foundation and its staff mold the very ways in which Panama’s modernity emerges and is entangled in conflicts such as indigenous peoples fight for sovereignty.

Rulfo’s conceptualization of the City of Knowledge’s role in knowledge management in Panama is an anthropological problem precisely because it invokes dichotomies (e.g. nature/culture, primitive/modern) that carry important consequences for the modes of existence of those supposedly under the governance of the Panamanian state and for the City of Knowledge’s technocratic language. The foundation’s vision for addressing the ‘integration’ of an othered nature with the nation’s economic activity is one where the City of Knowledge facilitates the enforcement of specific knowledge-regimes, made possible by claims to the appropriate role of knowledge in Panama.

Three: The Politics of Local Knowledge

A study of how the City of Knowledge’s project engenders a specifically environmental subjectivity in those participating in forms of trade and land management in the territory’s countryside remains outside the scope of this project but is a crucial question to put in dialogue with the Foundation’s rhetoric. The particularities of how subjectivities are voiced and intersubjectively constituted, linguistic anthropologists have shown, are crucial to understanding how personhood, agency, and other embodied concepts are forged between people. Working against common Western notions of personhood that locate intention and meaning in the individual speaker’s words, linguistic anthropologists have attempted to show how such concepts emerge between people in practice and in non-verbal ways as well (Rosaldo 1982). In goal-oriented speech events, people call forth registers, such as sets of social norms or particular legal contexts, in subtle and complex ways, as elaborated below (Silverstein 1976). In this section, I utilize anthropologist Michael Cepek’s approach to thinking through environmental subjectivities to consider my positionality in relation to Rulfo and to his critical distance.

Cepek attempts to unearth assumptions about the congruity between Western scientific environmental subjectivities and those of indigenous peoples dealing with Western environmental scientists. I show how Cepek’s warnings regarding the authority Western researchers grant some interlocutors over others are crucial to thinking through how Rulfo constructs his expertise on knowledge management. I heed Cepek’s warning that, “by devoting the bulk of our analytic attention to the rationalities that government

agents bring to bear on their work, as researchers, we grant them a power they do not possess” (Cepek 2011, 512). Indeed, an “implicit acceptance of the slippage from rationale to technique to subjective effect” would constitute a re-inscription of some of the colonial practices with which rural communities are painfully familiar (Cepek 2011, 512).

Governmentality, as Cepek describes, refers to the forms of discipline that people are invested in, including those forms that claim to bypass the state, such as those forwarded by some NGOs (Foucault 1991). In Cepek’s exploration of theories of governmentality in a conservation setting, also referred to as “environmentality,” he also points out that anthropologists simultaneously risk both “overestimating the grip that governmental rationalities have on government agents” and underestimating “interveners’ ability to transform subjectivities” (Cepek 2011, 512). For example, development scholar Arturo Escobar notes that anthropologist Marcelo Medeiros demonstrates how “indigenous peasants [in the Bolivian highlands] have their own situated understanding of development, which articulates their historical experience of modernity and coloniality” (Escobar 2011, xviii).

Bringing Cepek’s warning to bear, I note Rulfo’s own critical distance to the projects he was describing. Having explained what the Foundation aims to do, Rulfo elaborated on what he had said, emphasizing that what followed was his own opinion and not the Foundation’s. He argued that one must situate the City of Knowledge’s “human development” project within a history of how ‘development’ has changed over the course of the last several millennia. Capitalism, he claims, is just the latest modality of development schemes since feudalism in the West. He continued, saying that within capitalism, our crucial analytic is capital, not as a material thing but as a social relationship wherein workers sell their labor to employers who use that labor to commoditize the world and make a profit. When I pointed out to him that his articulation of this social relation appeared to me to be a Marxist orientation, he excitedly confirmed that it was and claimed it was crucial to understanding current Latin-American geopolitics:

“To deprive ourselves of Marx is to deprive ourselves of an incredibly important tool. I would say, for example, that the idea about the transformation of natural heritage into natural capital is a key idea to understand the environmental situation and environmental conflicts in Latin American nowadays.”

It’s useful to engage Rulfo’s remarks in order to help us understand where the City of Knowledge is imagined to fit within the matrix of imperialist violence visited upon Panama and Latin America more generally. However, a different kind of analysis, one that has been utilized by linguistic anthropologists, is salient here for the purpose of understanding what socio-political work the concept of knowledge does in the City of Knowledge. Here I refer to the dynamic strain of materialist semiotics within anthropology which has sought to understand how meaning, efficacy, and language itself emerge between persons and events in situated practice, as opposed to attempting to locate such concepts within individuals. The approach represents the proposition of an alternative social ontology and constitutes a dynamic critique of Western social theories

of language, especially of Saussurean approaches but also those of figures such as J. L. Austin and his student, John Searle.

Especially important at present are the ways that theorists have shown how event participants invoke varying and contested registers of social action as language use. Anthropologist Michael Silverstein, for instance, argues that to focus solely on modes of speech that reference signs is to miss much of what happens in many speech events (1976). Invoking a Peircean semiotics, Silverstein argues that much of what is missed in analyses of language practice are the abundant indexical modes that people evoke and recognize in goal-oriented speech events. Meaning making through the use of indexes, he argues, materializes the link between performance of speech and social behavior. Silverstein's approach allows for the generative *emergence* of meaning, where intentionality still matters but is not the singular source of all meaning making.

In a review of the literature of anthropology on "enactments of expertise," anthropologist E. Summerson Carr suggests that "expertise is arguably the exemplar of what Silverstein calls 'second order indexicality'—that is, historically constituted and contingent meta-discursive practices (e.g., rationalizations, evaluations, diagnoses) that mediate between would-be experts and some set of cultural goods" (Carr 2010, 18). The strands of anthropological analysis that Carr pulls together do not seek to question the realness or authenticity of claims to expertise. Instead, they attempt to show why a concept like expertise must be approached as an "intensively citational institutional action, rather than as a powerful cache of individual knowledge that is simply expressed in social interaction" (Carr 2010, 19). Key here is the way in which anthropologists have dethroned the individual and his or her self-awareness in favor of viewing personhood as always already emergent in and through the intersection of multiple registers.

In this vein, I argue that Rulfo's critical distance from past colonial regimes of environmental and social management does the work of indexing his expertise on the topic. That is, when Rulfo invokes this history of imperialism, he simultaneously positions himself as especially suited to coordinate the connection between a commodified knowledge and what he refers to as the country's social problems. By speaking of and extensively theorizing knowledge, Rulfo situates the Foundation as the singular source of the production of knowledge and of the proper management of it within the nation. Rulfo's action does the work of centralizing the occurrence of legible knowledge to the City of Knowledge.

From the beginning of our conversation, there was an unspoken tension regarding the nature of my relationship to Rulfo. When I solicited a meeting with him over email, I said that I was completing an ethnographic research project for an anthropology course in school. Upon meeting him in person, he asked me to elaborate on my project and what I wanted to ask him. I told him that the project involved learning the history of the Foundation's past but was also concerned with what exactly it is that the Foundation does. In an unhurried manner of speaking, Rulfo first launched into a short history of Fort Clayton. Explaining to me what the Foundation was designed to do, Rulfo commented, "I don't know what your economic courses in your anthropology degree have been like..." before continuing to explain the economics of the canal. I managed to squeeze in a short reply, letting him know that I hadn't taken any economics courses. It would be another 25 minutes before I decided to create the space in the conversation to ask him another question.

Any tension involved in the interaction had to do with the subtle contestation over the nature of the participation frameworks we were each invoking. To Rulfo, I was a student asking for information that he, as an informant, possessed. And this was, in fact, part of my purpose for being in his office. To me, however, my presence was of a dual nature in that I was there to learn about the history of the space as well as engage Rulfo as a subject of my research. My North American accent and grammatical mistakes in speaking no doubt reinforced his expectation of my desire that he convey as much information as he could regarding what it is that goes on in the City of Knowledge as opposed to offer his own analysis of the City of Knowledge's project. Perhaps not wanting to assume some exposure to Marx, Rulfo described to me the social relation at the basis of Marx's conceptualization of capital and the process of primitive accumulation without once mentioning Marx's name.

Having inserted myself into the conversation as a student familiar with Marx, I rested on the word "but" while I formulated my question pertaining to his discussion of Marx in Panama:

J: ...esto me parece un punto de vista bastante Marxista.

...that sounds like a Marxist point of view to me.

R: Si!

It is!

J: Si, pero... --

Yes, but... --

Immediately, Rulfo jumped in to explain the problem he saw with Marx. Just as I, as a researcher, might attempt to create a critical distance between my own and my interlocutor's assumptions, Rulfo was asserting his own expertise on the topic of environmental history of Latin America and as a rigorous scholar. That is to say, one of the features of his expertise was his critical distance from the larger processes that had taken place in Panama which the Foundation was there to reverse. No less important were the nonverbal aspects of this enactment. Rulfo's brow furrowing, indicating deep thought, complemented his laid-back posture. The presence of the audio recorder on the table capturing every knowledge-packed sound byte further assigned an importance to his words.

And then there were the equations suspended above our heads, scribbled in dry-erase marker on the glass wall-turned-whiteboard that Rulfo shared with another of the Foundation's top administrators. Serving as symbols of knowledge production, the floating equations and diagrams could not be missed. The equations re-spatialized the office space into *the* space of knowledge production in Panama. They confirmed the Foundation as the home of expertise on Panama's big questions. The actual sketches were a complex mixture of diagrams and variables, of arrows and question marks. The equations brought to mind Levi-Strauss' formula for the structure of a myth, which in many ways epitomized his search for the foundational and universal principles of human thought. His "science of society" functionalist project, as cited by Mark Mosko, allowed Levi-Strauss' "structure of a myth" equation, $f_x(a): f_y(b) \cong f_x(b): f_a - 1(y)$ to make sense (1991, 126). When I asked about his equations and diagrams over email later, Rulfo explained that one of the diagrams corresponded to the "civilizational process of transition" that the "world system" is going through today with "knowledge management

structures” that could be linked to each transition, as seen below (personal communication).

Transition	Structure of Knowledge Management
Antiquity to Middle Ages	Classical Academy
Middle Ages to Modern Age	Benedictine Monastery
Modern Age to Current	The 19 th and 20 th Century University

Rulfo added: “I am interested in building some kind of hypothesis about knowledge management in the coming world, based on experiences like that of the City of Knowledge.” Based on Rulfo’s comments, we might yet add another line:

Transition	Structure of Knowledge Management
Current to Future	[City of Knowledge?]

The schematic segments time and, I argue, spatializes it. The project of spatializing time, anthropologist Johannes Fabian argues, was a hallmark of evolutionary anthropologists, such as Lewis H. Morgan, during the 19th and 20th centuries. This paradigmatic view affirmed notions of difference between the anthropologist and the subject of his or her ethnographic investigation in terms of distance, thereby naturalizing violently unequal power relations (Fabian 1983). In fact, Fabian posits, this effort by such anthropologists, “contributed above all to the intellectual justification of the colonial enterprise” (Fabian 1983, 17). Non-white people in distant places—“primitives”—were human just like us, the European/American narrative went, but represented a previous stage of evolutionary development of the species. Fabian’s critique of the foundational epistemological orientations of the discipline also involved demonstrating how “temporal concepts” such as “primitive,” are in fact not objective truths but categories of Western thought (Fabian 1983, 18). Put another way, historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot has argued that such narratives constitute the discursive category of the “savage slot,” which Trouillot argues represents the “symbolic organization upon which anthropological discourse is premised” (Trouillot 2003, 9).

Rulfo’s depiction of knowledge management, then, is a thoroughly Euro-centric one wherein a particular regime of time is assumed to be singular and universal. He vaguely depicts the tropes Fabian critiques, bringing me to wonder where (and when) different ways of knowing enter into his conceptualization. To Fabian’s question of “whether and how a body of knowledge is validated or invalidated by the use of temporal categorizations,” we might suggest that Rulfo validates his quest for a thesis on the changing role of knowledge management with reference to a teleology that leads to the present moment, which is encapsulated in the City of Knowledge.

Carr points out that anthropologists have demonstrated that “institutions’ ability to organize ways of knowing rests on their ability to manage ways of speaking by providing

participants with semiotic resources” (Carr 2010, 24). The City of Knowledge Foundation’s technocratic slogan, promoting “knowledge in the service of human and sustainable development,” serves as an example of a set of such resources. Politicized notions of political economy, in turn, are limited to the repertoire of singular individuals (whether administrators or event participants). However, the City of Knowledge’s goal of “fostering business opportunity” involves tremendous stakes in terms of representation for peoples who are virtually without a voice in the room yet are implicated in such discourses, such as rural and indigenous populations.

The re-forging of these sets of semiotic tools was perhaps most poignantly present in an instant during the academic course on environmental management. Returning from a short time in small groups tasked with listing Panama’s greatest environmental problems, the representative of one group said that her group’s name would be “Green Revolution.” Immediately, she glanced to her side at a police officer in her group and jokingly said, “don’t worry, not a real revolution!” Half-amused chuckles reverberated throughout the room. Even the word revolution, used jokingly, was restricted from the set of semiotic tools the woman felt comfortable drawing from while present with the officers. This moment points to the power of such semiotic tools. Coupled with comments by participants and facilitators of the environmental course as well as Rulfo’s statements, these moments point to the ways in which foundation representatives and participants problematize the foundation’s technocratic language and project of knowledge management.

Conclusion

In this essay, I’ve argued that City of Knowledge event participants and Rulfo respond to the U.S. colonialist legacy in Panama by asserting local expertise on decision-making, especially regarding access to knowledge. To do this, I’ve drawn from comments by police officers in a course on environmental planning regarding their intervention in processes of environmental protection in rural Panama and from an extended conversation with a Foundation executive. In the first section, I argue that police intervention in rural Panama embodies the state intervention that neoliberal approaches to the free market rely on to create conditions for and enforce free market ideologies. I suggest that this approach represents one side of Mirowski’s notion of neoliberalism’s double truth and a particularly Panamanian approach to the application of the Foundation’s project of knowledge management. The double truth of the City of Knowledge environmental management occurs in a process whereby the free market and its new knowledge products are imagined to peacefully coexist with the disciplining of markets (and especially their imagined margins) by state agents such as the police. That is to say, I show how the City of Knowledge is a space where techno-scientific conceptualizations of knowledge are at once the public domain of the country’s progeny as well as the rightful property of the highest bidder. I highlight the Panamanian police’s practice as one application of the City of Knowledge project of knowledge management in order to make larger claims about how City of Knowledge participants situate themselves and the Foundation within transnational political contexts.

In the second section, I show how City of Knowledge participants’ claims about Panama’s “cultural problem” call forth the City of Knowledge’s goals and position. I

argue that, contrary to how foundation participants narrativize the City of Knowledge as a neutral facilitator, the foundation attempts to shape the contours of ‘knowledge’ and access to it or its application such that the concept becomes the very substance and process by which to recognize Panama’s entry to modernity. This process is made possible by the enforcement of specific knowledge-regimes in the countryside and within the City of Knowledge park. However, in this section and the next, I suggest that the technocratic language that the Foundation employs to position itself as a neutral facilitator of knowledge is problematized by event participants and the Foundation’s own executive representatives. In the third section, I show that Rulfo’s work of problematizing the Foundation’s articulated goals involves the infusion of Marx in analysis of the history of U.S. military presence and current capitalist formations in Panama. Moreover, I suggest that Rulfo situates himself as an expert by distancing himself critically from approaches to discipline and governance like the Foundation’s.

Economic anthropological analysis of the concept of knowledge as invoked in the City of Knowledge allows us to conceptualize how ‘knowledge’ is remade as the symbolic force with which agents in the City of Knowledge attempt to position Panama within broad narratives about modernity. In practice within the City of Knowledge, knowledge is refigured as the tool with which to measure of the political subjectivity of actors as diverse as indigenous populations to transnational businesspeople. Overall, I argue that the City of Knowledge Foundation speaks back to the U.S. colonial legacy in Panama by setting its own terms with regards to how knowledge is applied and contested within the nation. Crucially however, as demonstrated, making this argument requires diverse analytical techniques, including linguistic anthropological methods to understand how language and bodies are used to invoke and contest conceptualizations of modernity in Panama.

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