

Brooke Kamler
Pete Schwartz
UNIV 391
3 November 2014

Gaviotas
A Village to Reinvent the World

Gaviotas, written by Alan Weisman is a story about a man in the 1970's named Paolo Lugari. Lugari comes across the Los Llanos region of Columbia, one of the harshest environments on Earth, and wonders if the uninhabited, rain-leached savannas can be made livable. Lugari figured if he could do it there, it could be done anywhere. He recruits a diverse group of visionaries; architects, engineers, botanists, biologists, doctors, teachers, and students from all over the country to come build a self-sustaining civilization "for the third world, by the third world"(39). Because he believed that, "when we import solutions from the United States or Europe we also import their problems"(39).

Gaviotas was not just an attempt for survival, but rather a utopia. His team was aware that in order to have a successful future for generations to come, they needed the combination of technology and nature. Gaviotas provided free housing, meals, and education for all. No one was paid, no one missed work, and no one complained. There were no police, politicians, or rules. Individuals continued to arrive to Gaviotas, a school was built, and children were taught what was occurring at Gaviotas, because one day they would run it themselves.

Some of the first inventions in Gaviotas were wind turbines to generate energy, sleeve pumps that could tap into deep-water sources, and solar collectors to heat and sterilize drinking water. They continued to build a hospital, a solar kitchen, and regenerate an entire indigenous pine forest. Gaviotas refused to patent any inventions. Instead they shared them freely with hopes that other villages would mimic them. The United Nations named Gaviotas the leading example of appropriate technology in the third world.

Gaviotas created a program named Agua Para Todos where they installed Gaviotas equipment to provide seventy villages with clean drinking water. But two years later when they went back to check on the project, the equipment either was not maintained properly or no one who knew how to use it. This brings up one of the common concerns surrounding development and the relationship between those who design and create it and those who attempt to use it.

Gaviotas survived amongst la guerrilla control, large-scale drug dealers, and ongoing poverty. "But Gaviotas is one tiny dot on the map" (154). Gaviotas is a peaceful, self-sufficient, zero waste, remarkable village. It stands as an incredible experiment of sustainability, one that our whole world should try to adopt.