Guerrilla Autobiographies and the Construction of Nation in Nicaragua

A Comparative Reading of Omar Cabezas' "Fire From the Mountain: the Making of a Sandinista" and Reynaldo Reyes' "Ráfaga: the Life Story of a Nicaraguan Miskito Commandante"

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Contents

Guerrilla autobiographies, along with other types of testimonial literature, have been important stratagems in the recent revolutionary struggles of Latin America. Since recent revolutionary movements, in Nicaragua as elsewhere in Latin America, have been framed by the goal of national liberation, guerrilla autobiographies also constitute, as Beverley and Zimmerman have argued of Central American literature in general, "an ideological practice of national liberation struggle" (1990:ix). They thus represent a new type of nation-building literature, and are, in essence, "narratives of nation-formation" (Rodriguez, 1994:4).

The aim of this paper is to examine and compare two guerrilla autobiographies from Nicaragua which arose out of and speak to the context of the Sandinista Revolution of 1979. Omar Cabezas' well-known "Fire from the Mountain: the Making of a Sandinista", first published in Nicaragua in 1981 as "The Mountain is Something More than a Great Expanse[1] of Green", was often claimed to be the most widely read book, both inside Nicaragua and by outside observers, of the Sandinista period. This paper will set out to show the way in which Cabezas' book operates as a foundational narrative of Sandinista Nicaraguan nationalism. It is a text, as I will argue, which clearly and intimately reveals the nationalist agendas of the Sandinista government as they articulate with the immediate post-revolutionary context of national reconstruction.

My aim in bringing Reynaldo Reyes' little-known book, "Ráfaga: the life story of a Nicaraguan Miskito Commandante" to bear upon Cabezas' text is to examine what kind of contestation of Sandinista nationalism it represents. The Miskitu Indians provided one of the most serious challenges to the Sandinista goal of creating a unified nation-state, when they took up arms against the new government in 1981, with the support and backing of the US government. I will argue that Ráfaga's guerrilla narrative should not be read, however, as a subaltern ethnic response to the limits of Sandinista nationalism, nor even as a specifically indigenous demand for "a redefinition of ... nationality along multicultural lines" (Rappaport, 1992:120). Rather, Ráfaga's testimony should be understood as a foundational act of Miskitu nation-building, and as embodying the agendas of Miskitu nationalism as they were elaborated in the context of the Nicaraguan Revolution.

This paper will begin then by examining how Cabezas and Ráfaga's texts operate as foundational literature within the context of Nicaraguan and Miskitu nation-building. The paper will go on to examine the way in which national agendas emerge out of their narratives. It will focus particularly on the way in which both Cabezas and Ráfaga attempt to establish their moral authority as leaders of the new national communities they represent, to construct new national subjectivities, and to reconfigure the 'nation-space' (Bhabha, 1990:3).

[1] The Spanish title is 'La Montana es algo mas que una immensa steppa verde'. I have followed Harlow's translation of the word 'steppa' as 'expanse' rather than steppe (1987:200).

Foundational Literature

The written word, it has frequently been argued, plays an essential role in the formation and dissemination of nationalism (Anderson, 1983; Bhabha, 1990; Brennan, 1990; Rappaport, 1992; Sommer, 1990). Anderson, for instance, famously argues that the novel and the newspaper provide the "technical means for 're-presenting' the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation" (1983:25), while literacy creates the nexus of "fellow-readers" that constitute "the embryo of the nationally imagined community" (ibid:44). Sommer meanwhile produces one of the most coherent of recent explanations for how nationalist imaginings are embedded in literature in the Latin American context, in her exploration of romance novels as "foundational fictions" of post-Independence Latin American nationalism (1990 (a); 1990 (b)). She contests that such romances constitute a "national project ... to produce legitimate citizens" (1990(a):85), and "to construct a legitimizing national culture" (1990(b):124).[1]

Of course, such a discussion of the role of writing within nationalist projects needs to be profoundly qualified by an analysis of the socio-political dynamics of literacy. In Latin America, as elsewhere in the Third World, literacy is structurally limited to the middle-classes, while the majority of the population belongs to a "speech community" (Guha, 1985:104), for whom nationalist writings have little political relevance. Yet, if literature has not shaped mass political affinities, it has been deeply influential upon the middle-classes for whom imagining the national community and their place within it has been a major preoccupation. And in the Latin American context it has, as Beverley and Zimmerman observe, been "formative of strata that have been and will be decisive in initiating revolutionary ideas and organisations" (1990:8).

Revolutionary nationalism in twentieth century Latin America has specifically sought to reconceive the role of writing within the nation in such a way as to democratise the written word, and to "reintroduc[e] the interplay of political and economic demands into the realm of literary history" (De La Campa, 1995:130). In so doing, it has given rise to a new type of foundational literature in the form of the testimony[2], a genre which is defined as a transcribed rendering of an oral narrative

[1] Sommers' definition of foundational literature is thus primarily predicated upon the intention of the writer rather than the impact of the book, although she mentions in passing that the novels she analyses were national texts, not because of their 'market popularity' but because 'they became required or anthologized reading in school curricula" (1990(b):128).

[2] This aspect of testimonial literature has generally been ignored in recent commentary on the genre. Beverley and Zimmerman for instance state that testimony "does not seem particularly well adapted to be the primary narrative form of an elaborated postrevolutionary society, perhaps because

told in the first person by the protagonist of the events recounted (Beverley and Zimmerman, 1990:173). The testimony, which rose to prominence with the Cuban Revolution of 1959, was originally conceived as a means to bypass representational middlemen — such as bourgeois novelists, now declared to be "shamanic distorters of the truth" (Barnet, 1986:308) — and "to return voice to the people and to grant them the right to be the promoters of their own messages" (ibid:307).[3] The testimonial genre thus emphasises orality, as a means to undercut the limitations of literacy, and seeks to excavate the voice of the people, in order to portray the popular nature of revolutionary nationalism.

The guerrilla autobiographies of Nicaragua both belong to the testimonial genre. They thus represent an attempt to establish a new relationship between the written word and nationbuilding. This section will examine the motivations of each of the guerrilla authors in giving their testimony, and their understandings of how their testimony articulates with the different and antagonistic processes of nation formation to which they bear witness.

Cabezas' text as foundational literature

Cabezas' testimony was recorded and published in the immediate period after the Sandinista Revolution of 1979. Cabezas himself was a prominent official within the Ministry of the Interior in the new government, and he was therefore intimately acquainted with and indeed a protagonist of the political goals and strategies of the Sandinistas. The Sandinistas stated intention upon taking power was "to consolidate a true Nicaraguan popular culture" (quoted in Whisnant, 1996:196). They thus sought to harness the production of art and literature to the task of promoting popular culture, as a means to engender a new national consciousness. It was a task that was of crucial importance in light of the fact that the project of nation-building in Nicaragua had never really been fully completed, and that Nicaragua has never, as Whisnant has argued, "had an extended period of cultural tranquillity or unity" (199:443).

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its dynamics depend precisely on the conditions of social and cultural inequality and direct oppression that fuel the revolutionary impulse in the first place" (1990:207). In this sense, testimonial literature has come to be defined as subaltern or "resistance literature" (Harlow, 1987, see also Gugelberger and Kearney, 1991, Yudice, 1991), or as the epitomy of a post-modern politics of difference (Sommers, 1991). The problem with this approach is that it avoids a detailed examination how testimonial literature interacts with particular political process, and that it appears to suggest that revolutionary politics can only be authentic if it is not successful but remains as a force of opposition.

[3] Gonzalez however argues that testimonial literature had more to do with winning over intellectuals than representing the voice of the people. He notes that this literature was "the testimony, for the most part, of the conversion of the intellectuals, who now told the epic history of the pre-revolutionary struggle or exposed the barbaric face of Batista's Cuba" (1984:70). It is clear that there were inherent contradictions in the promotion of testimony, since it still relied on translating the spoken word into the written word, which for all the mass education the Revolution provided, was still most conspicuously consumed by middle-class and intellectual audiences.

In order not to "denaturalise" Cabezas' text (Duchesne, 1986:86), then, it is important to understand Cabezas' political motivation in making his testimony. As the former general secretary of the Ministry of Culture in the first years of the Revolution, Xavier Arguello, puts it, Cabezas' book is first and foremost "a political instrument placed ... at the service of a cause" (Arguello, 1986:274) — the cause being most pressingly the generation of a new national and revolutionary culture. The tradition of revolutionary literature with a transformative political agenda that Cabezas draws upon — and had long been familiar with, as well as involved in the production of[4] — is that of political writings and guerrilla narratives which served as cadre literature (Zimmerman, 1991:46). In many senses then, his testimony is activist literature writ large and projected onto a national scale. And in giving it, Cabezas seeks to enlist people into the "collective practice" of national reconstruction, and to provide an exemplary model for the new "political subject" of the Revolution (Vilas, 1986:251–4) As Cabezas himself said of the book, it reveals "that things are possible, realizable, and that everyone carries a hero inside" (Barricada International, March 14, 1983).

Cabezas' foundational intentions are clear in the fact that, despite or perhaps because of Cabezas' middle-class background, he was particularly concerned to establish his authentically 'popular' location within Nicaraguan society. In his testimony, he stresses his working class credentials (1985:8), and when talking about the book after its publication, he stated:

> "I have the great virtue of being part of the masses ... I know how the average man feels. What moves me, moves others; what saddens me, also saddens the rest" (Barricada International, March 14, 1983)

Cabezas' goal in representing himself in this way reflects a more general effort by the new government to emphasise its working-class base in the face of potential class tensions arising from the profoundly middle-class nature of the Sandinista leadership (Whisnant, 1996:197). But it has a broader purpose. By portraying himself as of 'the people', Cabezas thus becomes representative of 'the people'. That is to say, his life-story becomes a national allegory (Frederic Jameson quoted Bhabha, 1990:292). And at the same time, Cabezas ultimately claims for himself the discursive space in which to construct through his narrative who 'the people', and thence who the new subjects of the revolutionary nation, are.

It is important to note that Cabezas' testimony is not, however, entirely characteristic of Sandinista nationalist project per se but rather of one particular narrative within it. Cabezas belonged to the *Guerra Prolongada Popular* faction which had developed out of the split in the FSLN in 1975. The GPP believed — in contrast to

[4] Cabezas describes at several points in his testimony the importance of particular texts for political activism and for an introduction into guerrilla theories (1985:19, 48). And he has also been personally involved in the preparation of one of the first Nicaraguan guerrilla testimonies written in 1970, Carlos José Guadamuz's "*Y ... "las casas quedaron llenas de humo"*, which was expressly used for Sandinista propaganda and recruitment drives (Beverley and Zimmerman, 1990:184).

the more urban *Tendencia Proletaria*, and the more pluralist and insurrectionary *Tendencia Tercerista* (Dunkerley, 1988:241; Hodges, 1986:233–40) — in the importance of sharing the hardships of the peasantry and in the necessity of a rural campaign in the Vietnamese style. The politics of the GPP shape the motifs and thematic emphases of Cabezas' testimony. Yet, though the factional splits within the FSLN continued to play a role in the internal politics of the government, despite their formal resolution just months before the Revolution, Cabezas' testimony should not be conceived of as factional propaganda nor as an attempt to promote one version of Sandinista nationalism over others.[5] His narrative resonates with the broader ideological platform of the new government in power, as later sections of the paper will show.

Cabezas' book then is shaped and motivated by foundational intentions. But it also achieved a certain foundational impact within the new Nicaraguan nation, through its immediate 'market popularity' (Sommer, 1990(b):128), particularly among young urban Nicaraguans. Within two weeks of its publication, the book had sold five thousand copies within Nicaragua, making it according to the reviewer Kathleen Weaver, "Nicaragua's bestselling book ever" (Nicaraguan Perspectives, No 11, Winter, 1985–6:29). But it also became foundational in another sense, as a symbol of the Nicaraguan Revolution to the outside world. The testimony was published in thirty two editions in ten different languages (ibid), and was an important component in the new government's strategy to garner international solidarity particularly in the face of the imminent threat of invasion from the US. As Ariel Dorfman wrote of the book:

> "Once in a while ... a book appears that reveals to us that the enemy is a human being, a book that ... may prevent a war ... Americans who read [Cabezas'] story ... may find it difficult to say, "This man is my enemy. This man must be eliminated" (Los Angeles Time, June 16, 1985).

Rafaga's text as foundational literature

For the Miskitu Indians, who live on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua, meanwhile, literature as such was of little relevance. A primarily oral culture, the only written documents that had any practical meaning within Miskitu communities were land titles and the Bible. Both were the result of a history of British engagement with the Atlantic Coast region dating from the sixteenth century until 1894, when the region was incorporated into the Nicaraguan nation-state. Communal land titles, given to Miskitu villages by the British in 1915, represented Miskitu "foundational literature" (Rappaport, 1992:120) in that they were symbolic of an ongoing relationship with a past period when the Miskitu had enjoyed political autonomy under a Miskitu King

[5] The second instalment of Cabezas' testimony which recounted the splits in the Frente was never published because public discussion of the schism was forbidden once the FSLN were in government, as a means to maintain an image of unity in the eyes of the nation (Arguello, 1986:277).

with British protection (Hale, 1994:74). The Bible, meanwhile, which had been translated into Miskitu by Moravian missionaries, was fundamental in providing the Miskitu with a sense of their linguistic distinctiveness, and in shaping Miskitu concepts of nationhood through its narratives about Israelite Kings and the promised land (Hawley, 1997).

Although Miskitu concepts of their own nation-ness had been encoded in their reading of the Bible and in land titles throughout the twentieth century, it was the Sandinista Revolution that generated an unprecedented Miskitu political mobilisation with nationalist pretensions. Many commentators on the Miskitu question understood the Miskitu response to the Sandinistas solely in terms of a passive or purely reactive indigenous response to state incursion, or as an outbreak of ethnic tension. But what was often ignored in the process was that Miskitu political aspirations were (and to some extent still are) galvanised not so much towards redefining their place within the Nicaraguan nation, but towards the establishment, or as they saw it, the re-establishment, of their own independent nation.[6] The Sandinista Revolution created the space for such a mobilisation, firstly discursively by elevating the nation to the most important unit of political community, and secondly, ideologically, by providing a focus of opposition around which Miskitu could unite.

Ráfaga's book is one of the only written records narrated from a Miskitu perspective, which attests to Miskitu nationalism as it emerged in response to the Sandinista Revolution. His narrative clearly constructs the Miskitu struggle against the Sandinistas as a formative and even foundational moment in the history of the Miskitu nation. He does so firstly by deploying the discourses of Sandinista nationalism to portray the Miskitu mobilisation as an "Indian Revolution", and to refer to

> "the heroes and martyrs who gave their lives in this Indian Revolution ... so that the Miskuyo nation could reclaim its rights and protect its sacred principles" (1992:183)

And secondly, he does so by representing the Sandinistas as perpetrators of a historic atrocity against the Miskitu. He states of the Sandinista evacuation of some 10,000 Miskitu villagers from the Río Coco as the war broke out:

> "Since the ancient days, this sort of tragedy had never before happened to the Miskitu nation ... The Sandinistas showed us a brutality that had not been seen in Central America for five hundred years" (1992:58).

Struggle and suffering thus become the tropes through which Ráfaga narrates the emergence of the Miskitu nation through its contestation of the Sandinista government.

[6] I have made this case in my doctoral thesis, *Does God Speak Miskitu? Religious Identity and Religious Nationalism among the Miskitu Indians of Nicaragua* (see also Hawley 1997). Moore meanwhile is one of the few academic commentators on the Miskitu question to understand it in national rather than ethnic or ethnonational terms (1986).

Rafaga's narrative is not just foundational in its representation of the Miskitu struggle, however, but also in the very claims that he makes about the purpose of his narrative. Ráfaga specifically sees his testimony as significant for engendering and maintaining Miskitu consciousness of themselves as a nation. At the end of his testimony he comments:

> "I would like for these things to be published some day in the Miskito language so my Indian brothers and sisters and our Indian children may read and understand this history in our native language ... and know that our struggle was not in vain. In a future time, perhaps ten or fifty or a hundred years from now, this recorded history may help an Indian child, a community, or even a nation to understand and remember the trouble through which we all passed because we wanted our people and our heritage to survive" (1992:182)

As this statement shows, however, Ráfaga's Miskitu audience is 'ideal' rather than real. Ráfaga's testimony was produced in English as a result of a series of interviews with a northamerican anthropologist, JK Wilson, and was never published in Spanish or Miskitu, nor disseminated beyond the bounds of the specialist Western academic community. And in fact, the very production of Ráfaga's text was originally motivated more by JK Wilson's belief in the "utility of life history methods in anthropological research" (Wilson, 1992:xiii), than by any political goal. Yet Ráfaga himself turns the life history genre into a testimonial one by his own explicit political agenda behind recording the testimony.[7]

On the one hand, Ráfaga's rejection of Wilson's original proposal to include his story alongside that of a Creole woman from the Atlantic Coast region — which would have been more representative of the multi-ethnic character of the region[8] — reveals his agenda to establish the legitimacy of the Miskitu nation as a distinct political entity. On the other, he sees in his English speaking audience a chance to represent the Miskitu nation to the outside world. He thus turns the limitations of the distribution

[7] It is important to recognise that Rafaga's narrative is also shaped by oral narrative forms among the Miskitu, such as the *kisi* or fables about the trickster, Jack, as Mark Jamieson perceptively pointed out to me. Very little attention has been paid to the importance of oral narratives in shaping and reproducing nationalist discourses, despite the fact that as Taussig observes, "it is in the coils of rumor, gossip, story and chit-chat where ideology and ideas become emotionally powerful and enter into active social circulation and meaningful existence" (1984:494). The attention there has been has tended to see the oral sphere as one of contestation, in which the nationalist ideology of elites is reworked or spurned at subaltern hands (Gutmann, 1996:27ff; Lancaster, 1988:144–5; McKenna, 1996). But in oral cultures, oral narratives can also be an important means of creating a sense of unity, and a unified narrative of identity, as the Miskitu trickster stories played during the 1980's.

[8] This rejection is in keeping with Miskitu assertions during their mobilisation that Creoles, who have a long historical presence in the region, as well as mestizos were "immigrants who have violated Indian rights" (quoted in Diskin, 1992:168).

of his book into a foundational advantage, when he states that "Today the Miskitu people will see one of our own race lift up our nation for all the world to see" (1992:4).

Thus, although Ráfaga's testimony cannot be seen as foundational in effect, since it had little impact upon Miskitu political affinities, it is foundational in intention. And he seeks through a written form entirely new to the Miskitu, to represent in the narrative of his own life, the trajectory of the Miskitu nation.

National Agendas and their narratival forms

It is in the unfurling narratives of the guerrilla autobiographies of Nicaragua that national agendas emerge as national projects. This section will explore how three complementary agendas are articulated in Cabezas' and Ráfaga's testimonies, namely the quest to establish moral authority as leaders of the national community, the construction of a new national subjectivity, and the conceptualisation of the national territory and its inhabitants.

Establishing Moral Authority: Sandinista legitimacy to rule

In order to cement its position as a legitimate leadership, the FSLN in the immediate post-revolutionary period was naturally concerned to establish the bases of its moral authority to rule the new nation. This was a doubly urgent task both because the FSLN was attempting to establish a new style of leadership in the wake of forty odd years of dictatorship, and because of the significant threat that the country faced from the US marshalling and funding of counter-revolutionary forces. Cabezas' text has to be seen in this light, and it can be read as a dual process of demystifying the revolutionary vanguard in order to make it more accessible to the population, and of romanticising it in order to make claims as to its suitability for leadership.

The demystification of the new Nicaraguan leadership is clear in Cabezas' own journey of discovery of who the FSLN leadership was during the insurrectionary period. He describes early on in his testimony, how before going to the mountains:

> "I wondered what the camps would be like, and what Modesto [Henri Ruíz] looked like, how tall would he be, if I had ever met him — all these things. What I mean is the idea of getting to the camp and demystifying, that's the word, demystifying it, once and for all, finally seeing it from the inside, that's what I'd spent almost six years working for day and night, with no Christmas, no Holy Week, no vacations ... I was going to see those famous men in person, the guerrillas, people like Che. What would their beards be like, and the battles, and the work with the campesinos? How would they cook?"(1985:63)

The very personal questions that Cabezas poses regarding the leadership in some senses depoliticises their authority, and reduces them to humans caught in the act of the most mundane of activities, such as eating. Cabezas' descriptions of his own adjustments to mountain-life, such as learning how to shit, to make fire and to deal with loneliness build upon this demystifying motif, which in essence creates a readerly identification with the new government as people rather than as leaders. As he said in interview after the publication of the book:

> "the reader identifies with the book, because everyone has gone through similar experiences ... what I do is show myself in my real, human, normal dimension" (Barricada International, March 14, 1983)

This personalisation of the Sandinista leadership resurfaces throughout Cabezas' testimony in the constant introductions that he makes to post-revolutionary leaders, and to revolutionary heroes and martyrs. He describes for instance, bumping into, "Joaquín — Joaquín Solís Piura, who is Vice Minister of Health today" (1985:36), and

> "Cuqui Carrión, who's a guerrilla commandante today ... I knew him because he ran around with Claudia and Guaba, who's the brother of Tito Castillo, the present Minister of Justice" (1985:50)

Roberto Huembes and Ivan Montenegro, meanwhile, Revolutionary martyrs after whom two prominent markets in Managua were renamed, are introduced with personalised reminiscences. Huembes, Cabezas recounts, "was a sort of hippie, going around in a T-shirt and thongs, with dirty trousers and shaggy hair," while Montenegro was "fat .. reliable but lazy, and always wearing a Banlong shirt and picking at his face" (1985:29).

These constant references to the new leaders of the Sandinista government initiate the Nicaraguan reader into the new corridors of power, as Cabezas' recognition becomes the reader's recognition. In some senses, then, Cabezas' account reflects a kind of gossipy entrée into the country's new leadership and its political mythology. As Lancaster noted, gossip was in fact essential to the establishment of "the normative authority of *Sandinismo*" (1988:144) — gossip, admittedly less in the official 'macro-discourse' that Cabezas' testimony represents, than in the 'micro-discourses' of *barrio* murmurings against those leaders who departed from revolutionary norms. But what Cabezas' book does is conflate the public and the private in a way that breaks down the dichotomy between leadership and popular discourses of power, and in a way that diffuses the conspiratorial and subversive potential of 'private' knowledge of public figures.

But Cabezas' testimony is also predicated upon a romanticised trope of one of the central symbols of Sandinista moral authority: that of the guerrilla. The importance of the figure of the guerrilla to Sandinista moral authority is perhaps best summed

up in Carlos Fonseca's famous phrase, "Those who give of their all, including their lives, have the right to demand sacrifices" (quoted in Lancaster, 1988:127). And it was "the will to sacrifice" (Hodges, 1986:256), that the new Sandinista leaders had to invoke in the Nicaraguan people by their exemplary leadership, in order firstly to build up the shattered, civil-war torn nation, and secondly, to defend the Revolution against the increasing attack it came under from counter-revolutionary forces backed and financed by the US. Sacrifice thus formed the bedrock of guerrilla ideology, and Cabezas' narrative is full of it.

Cabezas takes us through the gruelling physical induction into guerrilla life. He describes being reduced to the state of an animal by mountain leprosy, and recounts in intimate detail, learning to live with sexual deprivation, intense loneliness, and to adapt to a life "without a past, without caresses, smiles, colors, the company of a sherbet, of a cigarette, or of sugar" (1985:84). Cabezas' claim to moral authority on the basis of the sacrifices submitted to by the FSLN guerrillas is not just implicit however. He also makes explicit the entitlement to rule the new nation, when he describes how in the mountains the Sandinistas developed: "a spirit of iron, a spirit of steel, a contingent of men bound with a granite solidity, a nucleus of men that was morally and mentally indestructible, capable of mobilizing the entire society against the dictatorship ... Because, as the Christians say, we denied our very selves." (ibid.: 85)

And Cabezas likewise asserts the exemplary nature of the Sandinista leadership, when he recounts that life in the mountain was:

> "cleansing us of a bunch of bourgeois defects, a whole series of vices; we learned to be humble, because you alone are not worth shit up there. You learn to be simple; you learn to value principles. You learn to appreciate the strictly human values that of necessity emerge in that environment. And little by little all our faults faded out" (ibid:86)

The figure of the guerrilla as an important symbol of Sandinista legitimacy to rule had a contradictory edge to it however. On the one hand, it represented an inclusive symbol, spanning class-divides, since as Duchesne noted, "guerrilla heroism .. mak[es] itself present in the actions of men of whatever origin" (1986:100). In this sense, the symbol of the guerrilla was in keeping with the populist nationalist agenda of the Sandinistas which had a "strong supra-class component" (Dunkerley, 1988:242).[1] It was also inclusive however in the sense that it was potentially open to all who were

[1] Gonzalez however notes of the symbol of the guerrilla in Cuba, that it was a political symbol in which "the emphasis on consciousness and will could avoid the problems and contradictions arising from the distance between the revolutionaries and the class they claimed to represent" (1984:68). In this sense, he argues that rather than offering a cross-class political alternative, guerrilla politics was a means to avoid the real class dynamics within Cuban society. His critique however appears to come from a Trotskyite perspective, and his bottom line is that class war is the only genuine means to create an alternative society.

prepared to take on the mantle of sacrifice, making the figure of the guerrilla a vital mobilising symbol for the new citizenry of the revolutionary state. Particularly with the increased attacks from the counter-revolution, all who went to the mountains to defend the homeland, could themselves become guerrillas, and joining the Sandinista Popular Army was seen as an extension of the guerrilla lifestyle. At the same time, as Lancaster noted, the type of authority embodied in the guerrilla "implied a new egalitarian political culture: the political authority of revolutionaries was necessarily contingent on their acceptance of sacrifice in the name of the cause" (1992:288). That is to say, by making their legitimacy to rule dependent upon a certain and strictly prescribed style of behaviour, the Sandinistas created the means for the people to contest or delegitimise their authority if they were found wanting.[2]

On the other hand, however, guerrilla authority was exclusive in that it was most embodied in those "few, bold, heroic people [who] had taken up the challenge of history" (Cabezas, 1985:15–16) before the Revolution and had thereby made the Revolution a possibility. It was not accidental that it was almost impossible for anyone who had not been a guerrilla in the 1970's to hold any position of importance within the new government. The charisma of the guerrilla thus remained firmly routed in the pre-Revolutionary struggle, to which Cabezas' text bears witness, and limited in its purest form, to the revolutionary vanguard who had taken power in 1979.

But the guerrilla trope of Sandinista political mythology was also exclusive in that it was essentially a category for urban Nicaraguans. Being a guerrilla might be a cross-class category, but as Cabezas' text reveals, it was not a category into which rural populations could easily fit. Campesinos, because they are already 'of nature', cannot so dramatically undergo the transformation that guerrillas go through in becoming part of nature in order to overcome it and themselves (ibid:84). And perhaps even more fundamentally, if being a guerrilla necessitates sacrifice, those such as the campesinos, who have little to sacrifice, who live on the edge of starvation and in the face of death, fit ambiguously into an identity saturated with the language of renunciation. In this sense, being a guerrilla was fundamentally an existential and political quest undertaken by the cosmopolitan city-dwellers, who as Cabezas himself states: "are more complex, more abstract, more sophisticated, complicated — their feelings, emotions, ways of interpreting things" (ibid: 76).

Rafaga's Moral authority

Ráfaga's testimony is almost entirely concerned with establishing his moral authority as a leader of the Miskitu. This claim to leadership is however made in a context in which the previous leadership of the Miskitu movement had been almost entirely

[2] In keeping with this, the Sandinista leadership emphasised its 'parsimonious lifestyle' (Dunkerley, 1988:286), and in as much as particular leaders departed from this, they did indeed lose their legitimacy in the eyes of the population (Lancaster, 1992:288).

compromised by its corruption by US money in Honduras, and by the abuses it had committed against its own people. Ráfaga was one of the most well-known Miskitu commandantes to enter into peace negotiations with the Sandinista government after 1985, and actually returned to Nicaragua in 1986 to establish a 'peace zone' in the Miskitu community of Yulu. His claim to leadership is made within this context, and in his testimony, he attempts to trump the authority of the two most prominent Miskitu leaders, Steadman Fagoth,[3] based in Honduras, and Brooklyn Rivera, based in Costa Rica, when he asserts that he takes his:

> "advice from our old chiefs, not from leaders in Honduras who were being advised by the CIA, or from leaders in Costa Rica who were being advised by North American anthropologists and lawyers" (1992:163)[4]

In making his claim to authority, Ráfaga sets out to locate his style of leadership within a specifically Miskitu tradition, predicated upon and taking its cue from the traditional structures of authority within Miskitu villages, and within Miskitu society as a whole. The model that he draws upon for his leadership, for instance, is most embodied in his description of his grand-father, who he recounts was "a religious man ... a governor — a *kasiki* (in Miskito) or cacique (in spanish)" (1992:15), and "like a cowboy who lived to ride spirited horses and make love with lots of young ladies" (1990:76). Ráfaga asserts his direct descendency from his grandfather as a leader when he states:

> "whether engaged as a warrior, a commandante, a parent, a high sport, or a grandfather ... I can sense a portion of my grandfather Kleofas in myself" (1992:17) Ráfaga's discursive strategies to establish his legitimacy as a Miskitu leader are gradually built up during his testimony. He begins by asserting his educational credentials. Among the Miskitu, education had been intricately linked to leadership skills, ever since the Miskitu Kings had

[3] Ráfaga in fact devotes some attention to explaining Fagoth's role as a leader, and the way in which he lead the Miskitu astray. At one point, having spent several pages describing Fagoth's trickery, Ráfaga asserts, "I have described these events in order to show you how this Indian was a double-crosser" (1992:42). This has interesting resonances with Miskitu trickster stories, and one in particular, reported by Dennis and Olien, in which the trickster rabbit attempts to pass himself off as the water king during a period of extreme drought. At the end of the story it is only the Miskitu King who recognises the trickster immediately and calls his bluff (1984:731–2). Ráfaga meanwhile, in his narrative shows himself recognising Fagoth immediately to be an impostor, and even calling his bluff in the early stages (1992:40)

[4] Ráfaga is not entirely dismissive of Rivera's leadership however. At several points in his narrative he affirms his allegiance to Rivera, as the leader most suitable to carry out negotiations with the Sandinistas, and "the only man who had the respect of the people and the education necessary to fill that position properly" (1992:155–6). Rivera did in fact enter into negotiations with the Sandinistas but they continually faltered, due to the fact that the CIA continually attempted to undermine them by offering large sums of money to Rivera's field commanders, and by threats to kidnap peace negotiators (Sklar, 1988:378–9).

> "travelled to distant places to study with prestigious and wise strangers" (Dennnis and Olien, 1984:733). The rapid rise of Miskitu university students as regional leaders straight after the Revolution, was also firmly predicated upon the fact that they were seen as having gained such esoteric knowledge through their university education. Playing on this tradition, Ráfaga takes many pains in the early part of his testimony, to reveal his "ferocious desire to attend school" and clearly states that education was "most important part of my life" (1992:10).

Ráfaga goes on to represent his moral authority in religious terms. The Miskitu Indians belong for the most part to the Protestant Moravian Church, and Miskitu Moravian pastors had long since been the most important figure of authority within Miskitu villages. Ráfaga's portrayal of his religiosity is, in this context, an important legitimatory technique. And it is revealed most potently in his assertion of himself as a Miskitu Moses. At one point in his testimony, he asserts that:

> "I was made strong in my spirit by the presence of God ... like Moses in the presence of the burning bush on Mount Sinai" (1992:108–9)

And at another, he states that "God did cast the ways and the actions of Moses into the mind and soul of Ráfaga" (1992:129).

The most prominent and most important motif of leadership that comes out of Ráfaga's testimony, however, is that of himself as a guerrilla leader. The war against the Sandinistas resulted in the emergence of a new type of authority structure among the Miskitu, which came to replace that of village leaders and pastors, and that was the commandante. Ráfaga's testimony is a very clear example of this new style of leadership. Unlike the image of the guerrilla in revolutionary left-wing circles, however, for the Miskitu becoming a guerrilla had echoes with a past history of being warriors against the Spanish.

The theme of the guerrilla is reworked by Ráfaga to fit into this tradition. In the place of sacrifice we find military prowess, and in the place of hardship, unadulterated heroism — heroism not placed at the service of a cause as in Cabezas, but purely for itself. Thus, whereas Cabezas recounts few battles since his emphasis is more on a style of behaviour that accompanies being a guerrilla, than on the act of violence itself, Ráfaga's text is permeated by battle, and a constant litany of casualties inflicted upon Sandinista soldiers. Ráfaga's claim to moral authority in this context, is based upon his military skills. He spends a good deal of time laying out the military basis to his leadership, showing how it was his "comprehension, execution, discipline and sharing of scientific knowledge, counsel, and instantaneous inventions on the battlefield" (1992:63) that resulted in his being "respected by my people and especially by the Miskito warriors under my command" (ibid:65). And he goes on to relate how after one particularly heavy battle:

> "my boys, instead of calling me 'hero' called me Ráfaga, which is a spanish word that means a burst or volley of fire, or a gust of strong wind ... You see, the name comes from a brave deed, and I will always feel proud about how my boys gave me my war name" (1992:67–8)

But Ráfaga's elaboration of the guerrilla theme is not developed in isolation from, but in fact very much in relation, and even opposition, to the guerrilla mythology of the Sandinistas. In as much as the Sandinistas are seen as weak, vulnerable, and entirely vincible, they are exposed for not being true guerrillas. This motif comes up early in Ráfaga's testimony when he describes that upon joining the FSLN as a guerrilla:

> "I was patient with the Spanish youths because I understood that they were university kids who had gone from the classroom, the cinema and the stadium to the jungle. They tired easily and did not carry their weapons right" (1992:27)

Furthermore, Miskitu fighting skills are explicitly recognised by their Sandinista opponents in Ráfaga's testimony. At one point, for instance, Ráfaga and his troops overhear some Sandinista soldiers saying,

> "Honestly, those Indians should be honored and praised. They are more savage than the alligators. They are truly great men" (1992:179)

In some senses, then Ráfaga's reassessment of the Sandinista guerrilla motif in terms of military heroics, is an attempt to delegitimise their moral authority, in the same breath that it is an assertion of his own.

Construction of a new national subjectivity'

After the Revolution, the Sandinistas elevated Guevara's concept of the revolutionary 'new man' into a doctrine of national citizenship. In Tomás Borge's words, the creation of the 'new man' and 'new woman' was "the most important aspect of national reconstruction" (quoted in Hodges, 1986:259). The 'new man' and thus the new citizen of the revolutionary nation, was to be "hardworking, diligent and studious, pure and without corruption" (Lancaster, 1992:253), or in Tomas Borge's words, someone who "overcome[s] egoism, the aversion to work, and a domineering attitude" (quoted in Hodges, 1986:258–9). The charge to be a new citizen of Nicaragua was then as much moral as patriotic, and internal and personal transformation was portrayed as at the heart of the very process of nation-building.

The new man is intimately attested to in Cabezas' testimony, as Cabezas himself undergoes personal transformations through his struggle, both with the dictatorship and with himself, in the mountains. He describes this experience as a collective one, when he states:

> "the new man was being born with the freshness of the mountains. A man — it might seem incredible — but an open, unegotistical man, no longer petty — a tender man who sacrifices himself for others. " (1985:87)

But for Cabezas, it is also an intensely personal and total transfiguration, that is as corporal as it is psychic. He recounts, for instance, how, in the mountains:

> "when you lose your things, it's as if that many pieces of your present have broken off from you ... and each that you lose is like a paring away, a whittling down, a falling off of piece after piece of your person ... You are losing yourself; your expression is being transformed ... your very body is transformed into a new a different present .. So when you see yourself in the mirror, you realize you are not the same. You realize you are someplace else; you are another person." (1985:203–4)

Cabezas' narrative however encapsulates how the birth of the new man is the birth of a new national subject. As he sheds off of his past and personal identity, he is inducted into a new national identity. In the final part of his testimony, for instance, he describes passing by his home, at which point he realizes that he has lost "the organic unity of my past and present". The narrative leads inexorably up to his discovery of "the history of the Nicaraguan people ... Poor, barefoot people, but with an extraordinary sense of national dignity, with a consciousness of national sovereignty" (ibid. 220). Cabezas loses his home but gains a nation.

The new national subject is furthermore both manifested in and forged by the use of language in Cabezas' testimony. As Coronel Urtecho stated of Cabezas' book:

> "the language of Omar Cabezas in this book is already a language, if not the language of the Nicaraguan Revolution, the literary birth of a revolutionary Nicaraguan language ... The book .. is written in Nicaraguan, in pure Nicaraguan, in the language that we all speak" (Nicarauac, 1982:39).

That is to say, Cabezas in his testimony deploys and appropriates popular language as the language of the new nation, and by doing so turns vernacular transgression into a subversion of elite and bourgeois cultural norms that had previously prevailed as the language of power. In Lancaster's words, Cabezas' "profane language ... assault[s] the arbitrary and unjust rules of social and political discourse ... [and] symbolically substitutes the popular for the elite" (1988:133). And through this language the new national subject of the revolutionary nation is given a voice — both in terms of being ascribed a new idiom, and in terms of the popular classes finally being brought on their own linguistic terms into the public realm of national discourse.

Cabezas' linguistic style in his testimony is specifically predicated upon his understanding of language as a means through which the popular classes come to recognise their own cultural, political and ultimately national identity. As he says in his testimony, while engaged in political activism:

> "I discovered that language identifies. I discovered for myself how language communicates ... a swearword or a crude word used in the right way can be explosive, very sharp politically. It's one thing to go into a barrio and start lecturing about the current historical juncture. It's something else to start talking about how the rich with their fat investments are off whoring in Europe, see? Because the people start to identify with that viewpoint. They start to discover their own identity" (1985:46) Language is thus an inherently political tool in Cabezas' hands, for constructing a sense of the new Nicaraguan 'national-popular'.

Cabezas has been roundly criticised for reproducing both in his descriptions of the new man and in his rendering of national identity, the most virulent form of patriarchy, for "erasing woman altogether and replacing her with a line of self-same male heroes" (Marin, 1991:54), for "repeating] patriarchal privilege in the guise of a Sandinista uniform" (Yudice, 1991:17), and for establishing "masculinity as a foundation in nation-building" (Rodriguez, 1994:39). While Cabezas did indeed represent, as Lancaster comments, "the paragon of revolutionary machismo" (1992:263), as his testimony at certain points attests to,[5] these critiques do injustice to the way that the Sandinistas, and Cabezas himself in his testimony, took on board gender politics in their construction of the 'new man' and of a new national identity — albeit unsatisfactorily and incompletely (Lancaster, 1992:40; Whisnant, 1996:420ff). They also more fundamentally make assumptions about static gender categories (Gutmann, 1996:9–10), and thus ignore how Cabezas reveals in his narrative an emergent masculinity, one which is articulated in relation to the notion of struggle, and to Sandinista nationalism itself.

Cabezas displays his awareness of gender politics at several points in his testimony, less by specifically including women — although he does reserve special praise for a companera who had "a commitment to the emancipation of women" (1985:97) — than by confessing to and attempting to qualify his machismo.[6] He concedes that joining the Frente was "more or less a question of manhood" (ibid.:10), but he goes on to distance himself from machismo when he says of his motivation for going to the mountains:

> "maybe it was machismo or wanting to set an example, but I think more than anything deep down it was a sense of pride, which we all had, that I drew on when I felt tired" (ibid.64)

[5] Rodriguez has asserted that "the phallocentric principle of testimonial writing is hegemonic" (1994:40), thus arguing that it is the form as much as the content which is entwined in patriarchy. Sternbach however makes what I think is a more subtle and interesting point, when she says that the linking of the personal and the political in testimonial writing displays "characteristics we normally attribute to women's discourse" (1991:95). In this sense, men who reveal their intimate secrets in testimonial writing, as Cabezas does, are feminised by their very deployment of a particular narratival form.

[6] It is worth noting that Cabezas was in some sense forced to do so by the critical discourse that the Sandinistas instituted against machismo, leading to a strong sense of contempt for "machista revolutionaries" (Lancaster, 1992:40)

At several points Cabezas' narrative actually goes against the grain of "the ideals of machismo with its cult of aggressive masculinity defined as a mode of sexual and physical conquest" (Lancaster, 1992:40). He humorously deconstructs manly heroics, for instance, when he says of joining the guerrillas,

> "I was right in the middle of something that called for men. Men? Shit! ... Now I was nothing but a miserable dog" (ibid.).

At the same time, Cabezas devotes some attention to depicting a tender and even feminised side of the guerrillas, at one point relating how:

> "We transformed our loneliness into a brotherhood among us, we treated each other gruffly, but actually we loved each other with a deep love, with a great male tenderness. We were a group of men in a single embrace, as brothers, a group of men bound by a permanent kiss" (ibid. 86)

Cabezas' sole sexual encounter as a guerrilla, meanwhile, apart from with himself, is one of humiliation rather than conquest. Having been aroused by a nurse as part of a bet, essentially predicated upon Cabezas' ability as a guerrilla to withstand sexual temptation, he describes how:

> "there was nowhere to turn there on that cot, naked and totally erect, nervous and embarrassed. The woman started laughing" (ibid. 156)

Thus, far from being a straightforward assertion of machismo, Cabezas' testimony is a more exploratory, more tentative portrayal of revolutionary masculinity than some of the more superficial feminist critiques have allowed for.[7] Such a masculinity, as Cabezas' testimony attests to, was articulated to a transformative agenda based on the ideals of a non-machista 'new man', who was as Sandinista officials stated, to be "as solid in feminist practice as he was clear in political ideology" (Whisnant, 1996:420). But it was also contradictorily emerging in a context in which defence of the homeland and of national sovereignty required a spirit of masculine aggression and honor, in which standing up to US threats of invasion was a matter of not just national pride but also of virility. In such a context, machismo could not so easily be dispensed or done away with. The new national subject that Cabezas' testimony represents is thus one in which "two sets of values [machismo and the new man] coexist, compete and more than occasionally blur" (Lancaster, 1992:40).

[7] Cabezas gives a more detailed reworking of machismo in accordance with Sandinista gender politics in his second book, *Cancion de Amor para Hombres*, in which he questions the "machista canons" in which he was socialised, and is led to "place myself in the situation and the problematic of the woman ... and I thought how difficult and how sad it is to be a woman" (Pensamiento Propio, December 1987:48).

Rafaga's representation of the new Miskitu subject

The Miskitu mobilisation against the Sandinistas generated an awareness of themselves as a right-bearing group. The language of 'Indian Rights' permeated the political discourse of the mobilisation and was the symbolic force behind their taking up arms against the new government. Although this language suggests solely a fourth world agenda for the recovery of indigenous demands, 'Indian rights' became a blanket term for Miskitu political aspirations in which the quest for nation-hood was embedded. Miskitu political activists disseminated in the Miskitu villages the notion that the Miskitu had the right to "our own territory, the right to self-government and to live in harmony with one another" (Hale, 1994:79), at the same time that they taught about the Miskitu Kings and Miskitu history. The language of indigenous rights was thus conflated with the notion of recovery of the past in which the Miskitu had indeed enjoyed political autonomy and even, under the protection of the British, a certain style of state-hood. In this sense, the mobilisation itself engendered a new Miskitu subjectivity, bearer of rights and bearer of arms in the struggle to bring the Miskitu national community into existence.

Despite the fact that Ráfaga's testimony is set within the context of the fragmentation of the Miskitu struggle as a result of fierce internal fighting, disaffection with their US backers disregard for their political goals (Reyes, 1992:147), and the political about-turn of the Sandinista government in granting autonomy to the Atlantic Coast region, Ráfaga is concerned with re-affirming the Miskitu's 'Indian rights' and with establishing the distinctive identity of the Miskitu as a nation. His testimony is thus both a reflection and a representation of the new Miskitu subject that was born out of the mobilisation against the Sandinistas.

But for Ráfaga, Miskitu identity is not new, but grounded in Miskitu cultural tradition. In his testimony, he seeks to construct a Miskitu identity predicated not on the notion of transformation but on that of return to and continuity with ancient ways. He thus asserts at the beginning of his testimony:

> "Since the ancient days, we Miskito Indians have possessed great strength and wisdom, which has served to preserve and protect our traditions, our lives and our dignity as a nation" (1992:3)

Key sections of his following narrative are dedicated to establishing the antiquity and historicity of the Miskitu nation. He takes time out of battle for instance, to explore "a sacred hill that the old Miskitos call Muku Hill" (1992:108), where he experiences "the presence of many ancient Indian spirits" (ibid:109), and unearths an ancient Indian temple. Thus whereas in Cabezas, the mountain is primarily, though not solely a spatial metaphor, as the next section will show, for Ráfaga, the mountain is a temporal one — a moment of ethno-historical revelation.

Ráfaga's portrayal of the new Miskitu subject as part of a cultural continuum with their ancestors, is most potently symbolised in his discussion of Miskitu ancestors' discovery of fire. He states that:

> "some old people have told me that someone among the living Miskitos still protects that original flame, which has been burning since ancient days. And many of us still live much like those people" (ibid:113)

This understanding of fire in Ráfaga's narrative as a symbol of continuity contrasts starkly with that in Cabezas' testimony where fire is "a sign of subversion, a symbol of political agitation, of revolutionary ideas" (1985:44). And, as with the mountain trope, it reveals how they both curiously deploy similar themes in their enunciation of new national identities, but to entirely different ends.

In keeping with Ráfaga's theme of return, he institutes in his narrative a process of renaming. Whereas for Cabezas, the new subject of the revolutionary state is constructed through language, for Ráfaga, the new Miskitu subject is articulated through a return to what he claims, are its ancient terms of reference as a nation. Thus he asserts, the Miskitu are really called the Miskuyo, and their territory, Tawaswalpa — the name that it had before it was incorporated into the Nicaraguan nation-state in 1894 (1992:169). Interestingly, however, he predicates the process of renaming upon the Sandinista's revolution in language. Just as the Sandinistas redefined the terms of hierarchy, he states, so Miskitu terminology must be redefined (ibid:170). He thus appropriates Sandinista strategies of nation-formation to his own goal of asserting the ancient legitimacy of the Miskitu nation.

But Ráfaga is also concerned to represent a rather newer Miskitu subject who is formed within the crucible of struggle against the Sandinistas: the Miskitu fighter. In this he shows another reworking of a Sandinista trope, this time turning the 'new man' into the 'real man'. For Ráfaga, the struggle against the Sandinistas is located in the jungle, and it is

"the jungle [that] makes us knowledgeable and makes us real men with strong souls. There in the jungle we have been closer to God than anyone " (1992:177)

But the 'real man' for Ráfaga is also about stamina and discipline. He recounts, for instance, how after one particularly fierce battle,

> "not one of the boys wanted to stand watch because they were all so tired. I told them that a real man cannot be tired. A real man must try to hold up" (1992:126)

But the 'real man' is also ultimately about virility. In Ráfaga's narrative, prowess as a womaniser is a constant theme from the beginning. But it is on the battle-field that this prowess comes into its own. At several points, Ráfaga relates how Sandinista women combatants inevitably desert their side and come to fight with the Miskitu (1992:101, 165). In one instance, he recounts how

> "After four hours of fighting with our old and inadequate weapons, the two Sandinista women left their positions, ran over to us, and asked to join us. They turned their good weapons against the government soldiers and helped us to continue the fight" (1992:101)

These vignettes reveal more affinities with Miskitu oral narratives about the trickster rabbit, Jack, who manages to deceive figures of authority, such as the Miskitu King, to win over their daughters, than with the ideals of machismo.[8] But they also show how Ráfaga erects Miskitu masculinity as the standard bearer of the Miskitu nation, in which Miskitu women, apart from his mother, do not feature, despite the fact that it is Miskitu women who through matrilocality had long been the primary guardians of Miskitu cultural identity (Helms, 1971:205). *Sandinista reconfiguring of the nation-space*

The conceptualisation of territory has been fundamental to nationalist ideologies as a means to represent the nation-people "as living within a single, shared spatial frame" (Alonso, 1994:382). And it is the symbolic terrain where the land and its inhabitants meet that constitutes the nation-space. For the Sandinistas, the reconfiguration of the nation-space was an essential part of their nationalist agenda. This was not however an abstract task for them but was rather concretely grounded in their desire to forge the unity of the nation through territorial integrity and through the integration of all of the nation's constituent parts. At the same time, they sought to alter radically the natural and thence the political landscape of the nation by revolutionarising the rural areas through agrarian reform, and by incorporating more fully those areas, such as the Atlantic Coast which had hitherto constituted the "recesses of national culture" (Bhabha, 1990:3).

In Cabezas' testimony, we see the introduction scene by scene of the different sectors of the popular classes that the Sandinistas sought to represent, and thus the constituent parts of the new nation. He opens for instance, with the national ritual of Holy Week in his home city of Léon. It is to this backdrop that Cabezas brings onto the national stage, urban Nicaragua, weltering in that all too familiar heat. In many ways this opening scene conjures up what Anderson refers to as a "socio-scape" in which the representation of "everyday life [provides] a hypnotic confirmation of the solidity of a single community, embracing characters, author and readers" (1983:27). But at the same time, Cabezas introduces the semantics of the revolutionary nation into the scene, as he focuses on the "people out of the slums, workers, country folk" (1985:3), who overtake the town evacuated for the week by the rich, and gather in the popular den of the pool hall.

Cabezas' testimony then moves through the University into the barrios where he discovers the Indian, and in so doing, incorporates indigenous people into the nation-space. For Cabezas, the very space of Subtiava, the indigenous barrio of Léon, is "power"

[8] I am grateful to Mark Jamieson for this insight.

(1985:40). It is where he encounters the "march of Indians against colonialism ... against imperialism, a march of Indians that could mark the end or the beginning of the end, of the exploitation of our people" (ibid:42). In Cabezas' narrative then, the Indians are the historical foundation of the new nation-space, and a symbol of the inevitable victory of the Revolutionary struggle.

Most commentators have ignored these initial conceptualisations of the nation-space in Cabezas' narrative and moved straight to the mountain. And there can be little doubt that the mountain is for Cabezas, the pre-eminent symbol of the Nicaraguan nation-space (Duchesne, 1986:128; Beverley and Zimmerman, 1990:185; Rodriguez, 1994:41). Cabezas himself says of the mountain:

> "The mountain was a tremendous power ... [we] always talked about the mountain as a sort of mythical force ... it was our indestructibility, our guarantee of a future, the ballast that would keep us from going under in the dictatorship ... The mountain was our refusal to believe that the Guard was invincible" (1985:17)

The mountain is thus, as Rodriguez has observed, "the space that comes to define an initial national moment (1994:36). It is where the will to power was forged and maintained, and where an alternative nation-space was brought into being through struggle. But the mountain also embodies the very relationship between Sandinista nationalism and nature, and between Sandinista nationalism and the rural population.

In Cabezas' narrative, the mountain is both a return to nature and a mastery of it. He describes of being in the mountains, that:

> "you feel you are one more element, one more being in that environment which you have come to grips with and dominate, because you have reason. Because you have intelligence and dominate the environment for a purpose — to use it, in this case for the guerrilla struggle, the revolutionary war" (1985:204)

This theme of dominating nature comes out most clearly in Cabezas' anthropomorphic depiction of the mountain siding with the National Guard, as the guerrillas attempt to escape an imminent attack. Cabezas states that

"I had the impression that the mountain was starting to discern, starting to think, as if an inner force was leading her to think and take sides and judge ... I wanted to say to her, ... here you are, an inanimate being, but we are humans, rational creatures with soul and consciousness ... We bent her over; we shattered the neutrality of the rivers and gigantic trees; we brought her back to herself .. we brought her around by force" (ibid:126–7)

As this description shows, nature is a force both to be reckoned with, and to be tamed, even to the point of violent submission, in order to harness it to the right

political cause. For Cabezas then, nature is the foundation of the nation-space but only as it is yoked to the purposes of the new nation.

But the mountain is also the space which the campesinos with their "love of nature" (1985:58) inhabit. It is the land of which the campesinos dream (ibid:209) and which is "the soul of the campesino ... the element that gives him life" (ibid:212). Cabezas' narrative engulfs the rural population of Nicaragua into the new nation-space, which itself is reconfigured by their inclusion. As Cabezas comments

"the greatest crime of the dictatorship was to deny land to the campesino. Because denying the campesino land was like forcing him to wander in a living death" (ibid:211).

In contrast, the Sandinistas agenda to transform the countryside and their invitation to the peasants, "to fight for the land" (ibid:211), offers new life to the peasants, and brings them into being as a nation-people.

But there is one part of the nation-space that Cabezas omits, and that is the jungle. As Vilas observed:

> "the revolution was better able to understand the mountains than the jungle... The jungle, in contrast, was synonymous with primitiveness — a mystery, the unknown, not to be trusted" (quoted in Whisnant, 1996:262)

It is here that a comparison with Ráfaga's text comes into its own, because the jungle is that part of the nation-space in which the Miskitu, alongside other Coastal peoples, abide. And it is the jungle which Ráfaga reclaims as the Miskitu nation-space.

Ráfaga's configuration of the Miskitu nation-space

For the Miskitu, land rights were an essential part of their Indian rights, and were to become one of the main sticking points with the new Sandinista government. Whereas the Sandinistas were prepared to grant communal land titles to Miskitu villages, the Miskitu leaders had another goal in mind. In 1981, they put forward a claim for one contiguous land title covering 42,000 km^2 of the Atlantic Coast — 32% of the total national territory — over which they demanded almost sovereign rights. It was this claim that led the Sandinistas to imprison the Miskitu leaders, an act which the Miskitu perceived as a declaration of war, and which led to full-scale conflict.

The concept of a specifically Miskitu territory, upon which the Miskitu land claim in the Sandinista period was based — a claim, it is important to note, that had been entirely absent from Miskitu political demands and even political imagination before the Sandinista Revolution (Hale, 1991; Diskin, 1991:169–70) — is clearly present in Ráfaga's narrative. For him, this territory is not part of but adjacent to the Nicaraguan territory. This is revealed in his claim that:

> "Historically, we Miskito have received the respect of those who came to live in our territory as good neighbours in the family of man. But now, in

> my lifetime, ... we have been disowned by our neighbours the Nicaraguans, who have prevented us from exercising our right to life and to freedom" (1992:3)

The Nicaraguans, as 'neighbours', are thus specifically located outside the borders of the Miskitu nation-space, in the same process by which Ráfaga situates the Miskitu outside of the Nicaraguan one.

But Miskitu territory in Ráfaga's narrative is also a distinct political unit. His renaming of the territory, Tawaswalpa, is indicative in this regard. As noted earlier, the name Tawaswalpa suggests a return to the political autonomy enjoyed by the Miskitu before their incorporation into the Nicaraguan nation-state. And despite the fact that Ráfaga vigorously denies that it is independence that the Miskitu seek, he represents Tawaswalpa as having a territorial integrity of its own, and as necessitating a political structure which is more consonant with a nation-state than with an indigenous authority structure operating within a wider political unit. This is clear in his assertion that:

> "for the Miskuyo, Tawaswalpa does not have sections. Indeed we have 38 provinces, each of which will have its representatives; these assembled representatives will choose the "governor" and his or her cabinet. We may also want the governor to be elected in a democratic election" (1992:171)

For Ráfaga, the right of the Miskitu to this territory is predicated upon their cultural distinctiveness as a nation, and upon the primordiality of their ethnic difference from the rest of Nicaragua. Ráfaga begins his testimony by stating:

> "In the Indian villages on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua, we have our own way of living. We like to live in freedom. The people of Awastara, the village where I was born, like to live and think independently ... In our Miskitu villages, we exist as brothers and sisters who share one great spirit father." (1992:3)

In this sense, the Miskitu nation is characterised by its fourth world indigenaity, in its spirituality, but also by the trope of freedom — a trope which is consonant with western discourse about the political unit of the nation (Diskin, 1991:169). But it is also characterised by a primordial ethnic difference which arises out of the distinctive lifestyle of the Miskitu engendered by the nation-space. As Ráfaga reflects upon in his testimony:

> "some people in different parts of the world are strong and some are weak. Here on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua, we Indians eat plenty of fish, seafood and turtle, so we are stronger and healthier than those on the Pacific Coast, who do not eat these foods" (1992:116)

Ráfaga's transfiguration of Miskitu territory into a Miskitu nation-space is perhaps most clearly seen in his representations of the jungle. The jungle in Ráfaga's narrative is that space where the Miskitu nation is given birth to through struggle. It is the jungle which forms, protects and guides the Miskitu fighters, and which in Ráfaga's words "nourished our souls so that we would feel again like fighting" (1992:177). The jungle is also for Ráfaga no less than mother Nature herself, who unlike in Cabezas' narrative is not neutral, nor needing to be won over, but continually shows herself to be a willing assistant to the Miskitu struggle.. From the trees, for instance, Ráfaga gains military knowledge, and from the birds, directions (1992:1812). And from the potentially dangerous "big she-serpents", the Miskitu fighters gain, not a threat, but bed companions for the cool jungle nights (1992:127).

But the jungle is also where the Miskitu become aware of themselves as intimately connected to their nation space. As Ráfaga says:

> "a man with a good and true purpose, trying to live with a good conscience through his Indian courage, can learn many secrets from the jungle. If we respect nature, she will help us. We have great confidence in nature" (1992:125)

And it thus, that when Ráfaga hyperbolically asserts that the Sandinistas dropped bombs on jungle, and that "there were even some signs that they used chemical weapons that killed trees and animals" (1992:91), he represents them as a dangerous threat to the Miskitu nation itself.

Conclusion

As this paper has shown, the guerrilla autobiographies of Nicaragua belong to the testimonial genre which has come, in the context of Latin American revolutionary nationalism, to represent a new type of foundational literature. Cabezas's book, I have argued, is foundational of Sandinista nationalism in that it seeks to foster a new national consciousness, and to incorporate the new citizens of the revolutionary nation into the practice of national reconstruction. Ráfaga's book meanwhile, I contest, has to be seen similarly as an act of nation-building among the Miskitu Indians, rather than as an indigenous contestation of Sandinista nationalism. Both their testimonies thus constitute in themselves national projects, Cabezas' in the context of a successful revolution, and Ráfaga's in the context of a fragmenting yet forceful military struggle against the Sandinista government.

It is the way in which specific national agendas emerge out of both Cabezas and Ráfaga's testimonies, that most clearly reveals their political force as narratival strategies in the construction of nation. Although Cabezas' and Ráfaga's stories are obviously hewn of different cultural wood and thus bring their own cultural flourishes to bear upon their narration, they both tend in various direct and indirect ways towards similar projects. Both seek to demonstrate, as a legitimatory device, their moral authority as national leaders — Cabezas as a guerrilla and Ráfaga as a cacique-cum-warrior. Both also set out to construct new national subjectivities, Cabezas in the mould of the new man, and Ráfaga through the rediscovery of the primordial history of the Miskitu nation. And finally, both explicitly reconceptualise and thus rewrite the nation-space, Cabezas primarily through the motif of the mountain and the mastery of nature, and Ráfaga through the jungle and in the bosom of mother nature.

Ultimately, I have, by comparing the two autobiographies, sought to reveal how as Sandinista nationalism strove to give birth to the Nicaraguan nation, the great green expanse of the Miskitu nation was born in the shadow of its mountain.

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