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*LATIN AMERICAN ESSAYS*

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# **LATIN AMERICAN ESSAYS**

## **MACLAS**

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## SANDINISTA IMPACT ON NICARAGUAN GENDER RELATIONS

John-Paul Wilson  
St. John's University

Over the centuries, three streams of cultural attitudes have shaped gender relations in Central America. Men, as result of Spanish *machismo*, have developed greater sense of invincibility that has guarded them against vulnerability;<sup>1</sup> whereas women, as a result of their more submissive roles, have been more vulnerable and subject to greater instances of social discrimination in comparison to the Spanish male.<sup>2</sup> The Moorish occupation of the Iberian peninsula has further colored gender attitudes to the extent that women have often been considered "sinful from birth [and] must be subdued with a stick and guided by the 'reins of religion'."<sup>3</sup>

At the time of the conquest, there was only one Spanish woman (Maria de Estrada) in all of New Spain; in which case, the *conquistadors* had demanded and received twenty Amerindian women as part of their alliance with local Amerindians in Tabasco.<sup>4</sup> Daughters of chieftans (such as *Malintzin*, later baptized as *Doña Marina*)<sup>5</sup> were often used as tokens of alliance in both Amerindian and Iberian culture. Males in Amerindian culture were prepared for life by their fathers who would train them in hunting, fishing, and farming; whereas females would be taught domestic skills such as spinning, weaving, and food preparation, by their mothers.<sup>6</sup> Mothers also taught their daughters modesty; and this would invariably lead to male-initiated courtships.<sup>7</sup> The *mestizo* offspring of Spanish fathers and Amerindian mothers would provide a fusion of these three cultures and form the basis of present-day Central American society with its prevalence of male *machismo* and female submissive roles. Under the Somoza dynasty (forty-three years), Nicaraguan economic life would shift from subsistence farming to agro-export production where many small farmers would be relegated to marginal lands and forced to supply seasonal labor for the burgeoning agro-export sector. This would leave many women in positions of sole responsibility for their families and any other activity required for its subsistence; and even as some women did seek employment outside their domestic sphere, their wages would often be given to their husbands as the head of household.

In the aftermath of a multi-class coalition that brought down the despised regime of Anastasio Somoza Debayle in July of 1979, the women of Nicaragua believed that the Sandinista victory would bring about a new social order in which the rights and interests of women were both respected and advanced. The Sandinistas had promised to improve the lot of women in their 1969 party platform, as a means of garnering support for their revolutionary efforts;<sup>8</sup> and, as a result, Nicaraguan women had played an active role in the armed insurrection that had defeated the forces of Somoza, fully expecting the new Sandinista government to reward their cooperation with new legislation that would abolish *Somocista* policies and change *macho* attitudes that had limited their participation in political and economic life. The Sandinistas had, indeed, set out to improve the status of women both in the domestic sphere and in the public realm.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, there were critics within the feminist community who believed that Sandinista policies had failed to address the underlying problems of male chauvinism and female stereotyping not only within the general population but even within the Sandinista party. Despite new programs that provided better jobs, health care, and educational opportunities for women, there was still a widespread belief that a woman's place was in the home as opposed to a factory or some other place of employment. Nicaraguan feminists, therefore, sought to influence the Sandinista political agenda so as to help redefine traditional roles for men and women.<sup>10</sup>

The Sandinista government was committed to achieving greater equality between the sexes; however, such concerns were secondary to those of national unity. The Sandinistas recognized that traditional notions of gender and gender roles were firmly established within the popular psyche of Hispanic culture. Moreover, they believed that any organized attempt to change these opinions, no matter how well-conceived, would create social disruptions which could undermine the more immediate goal of national unity and defense. As a result, the feminist lobby would become a thorn in the side of the Sandinista regime as it became more involved with fighting counter-revolutionaries than advancing social agendas. Even Thomás Borge, the main Sandinista advocate of women's issues, criticized their low participation in the militias and subordinated women's issues to the interest of the state.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, the women's movement saw these attitudes as being detrimental to their

cause, ultimately leading to large defections and the formation of new alliances and opposition feminist groups.

In this paper, I will first describe, in brief detail, the social and economic conditions that women experienced during the Somoza era to show the reader what problems the Sandinistas faced. I will then outline the Sandinista reforms and programs designed to improve the lives of women so as to illustrate how Nicaraguan feminists claimed that the government changed laws and created new opportunities yet failed to challenge sensibilities that encouraged discrimination. Out of this perceived failure on the part of the Sandinistas to change basic attitudes toward women, I will then explain how attempts to implement a feminist agenda were preempted by national security matters and how these concerns diverted resources away from social programs. In this way, I will demonstrate how the growing need for national unity and a strong defense against external enemies forced the Sandinistas to abandon much of their social agenda, including that of the feminists. I will then conclude with a discussion of the post-Sandinista status of women and their adjustment to new political realities.

### **Nicaraguan Women during the Somoza Era**

Prior to the Sandinista Revolution, most Nicaraguan women were imbued within family structures that were subordinate to the external economic and political activities of men. Whereas men had come to dominate labor related to the public realm, those public efforts were supported by those of women in the domestic sphere. Women were primarily involved in household activities which included childbearing, domestic chores, and care for family members. However, that was not to say that women were completely excluded from national economic life. As the Nicaraguan economy experienced market fluctuations that affected the livelihoods of sharecroppers and small landowners, men were forced to leave their families for the cities in search of additional earnings. As a result, women often found themselves in a position where they were required not only to care for their children and subsistence crops, but to also work outside the home for the income necessary to support them.<sup>12</sup>

The number of economically active women skyrocketed from about 50,000 in 1950 to 178,000 by 1980 as men became increasingly unable to provide for their families on the farm. In the absence of males, both women and children attempted to preserve family farms by harvesting cotton, sugar, and other seasonal products themselves; but as time went on, they too found themselves searching for employment in the cities. Once there, women were often prevented from getting decent jobs due to their lack of education and requisite skills. Less than 20% of women were employed in industry, whereas the rest were confined to the tertiary sector either working as domestic servants or engaged in informal activities. Consequently, most urban women remained single and poor with few opportunities for social advancement.<sup>13</sup>

With the exception of a few middle-class women who were wealthy enough to attend high school and/or college, the vast majority of women were destined for short, poverty-stricken lives with few comforts to ease their suffering. Life expectancy for Nicaraguan women was about 50 years whether they lived in the country or resided in the city. The average woman could expect her first pregnancy shortly after puberty and could anticipate around eight pregnancies in her lifetime yielding at least three or four children. As if the rigors of domestic and reproductive duties were not enough, women were also forced to contend with a legal system that kept them in a state of male subservience.<sup>14</sup> For one, a woman could not administer property apart from her husband regardless of whether or not the husband played an active role in the family. In many cases, this restriction prevented women from selling their farms to pursue more profitable opportunities elsewhere. Similarly, a woman could not easily leave her husband for his numerous infidelities, whereas a man could legally divorce his wife on the mere suspicion of such an act. Furthermore, a man could leave half of his entire estate to a mistress, whereas his wife was only entitled to a fourth. Such paternalistic and discriminatory legislation served only to further the notion that women held little value apart from men. In which case, women had little choice but to organize so as to protect what rights they had.<sup>15</sup>

Despite their growing resentment of the social structures that constrained them, most working-class women had neither the time nor the acumen to engage in political activities. Between wage labor and the added responsibility of domestic chores, the average female worker could hardly care for her family much less find the time to take part in some type of political rally or demonstration. As a result, the vast majority of early Nicaraguan feminists came from the wealthier classes who had

both the time and the financial resources to enter the political arena. Middle-class and elite women were often free from the occupational and marital constraints that restricted the activities of their poorer counterparts. In addition, these women enjoyed a higher level of education that contributed to the political consciousness of the women's movement as a whole.<sup>16</sup>

Female activists were first involved in *comunidades de bases* (Christian base communities, encouraged by the Church as a vehicle of social change)<sup>17</sup> and other popular grass root organizations that provided health care clinics, child-care services, reading and writing programs, and food distribution for the "poor and disenfranchised" living in both urban and rural areas.<sup>18</sup> However, as the specific needs of working-class women became increasingly apparent, Nicaraguan feminists formed the Association of Women Confronting the National Problem (AMPRONAC, *Asociación de Mujeres ante la Problemática Nacional*) in 1977 to address certain legal issues concerning the rights of women. Unlike other organizations which attempted to meet the more immediate medical and nutritional needs of women and their children, AMPRONAC aspired to change laws and social attitudes so as to reform conditions which had helped to create such deficiencies in the first place. Over the next two years, members of AMPRONAC conducted petition drives, mass meetings, and even hunger strikes in an effort to demonstrate the need for social and economic reforms. But despite having protested through strictly non-violent means, the Somoza government most often responded by increasing its level of repression.<sup>19</sup>

The *Somocistas* had been engaged in an ongoing military campaign to quell the civil unrest caused by revolutionary forces of the *Frente Sandinista Liberación Nacional* (FSLN). The Sandinistas, in an effort to coerce the state to make fundamental changes in its method of governing, had resorted to increasingly hostile acts against the government once it became clear that Somoza would not negotiate. Sandinista guerrillas conducted numerous operations involving the kidnapping and assassination of *Somocista* officials; but when the government looked to strike back at those who had committed such deeds, it was more often the non-violent protestor who would bear the brunt of the retaliation.<sup>20</sup> Popular organizations were a preferred target of the government due to their visible opposition to the regime and their extensive ties to the guerrillas. AMPRONAC members had established forums to encourage political activism on the part of women and had even gone so far as to suggest that women support the cause of the FSLN. The Sandinistas had expressed in their party platform of 1969 a commitment to "abolish the odious discrimination that women have been subjected to compared to men [and further] establish economic, political, and cultural equality between men and women."<sup>21</sup> As a result, a growing number of women who had been politically active in the women's movement would find themselves drawn into the ranks of the FSLN.<sup>22</sup>

As the Sandinistas stepped up their campaign to overthrow the dictatorship, the Somoza government began to look at all political opposition as a call to revolution. AMPRONAC leaders were either arrested or killed as the organization was continuously raided and driven further underground. Some women believed that they could escape the repression by refraining from political activities. However, as the state attempted to round up those who were merely suspected of being dissidents, it became increasingly apparent that such inactivity could not guarantee one's safety. The Somoza government was willing to go to any extreme to insure its own survival, suppressing dissent in the most brutal way possible; and as a result of this repression, more and more women began to look to AMPRONAC and the FSLN, not so much as a means for social change, but rather as a source of collective security against an out of control regime.<sup>23</sup>

Membership in AMPRONAC soared from 1,000 in 1978 to nearly 8,000 a year later. Much of this increase could be attributed to the repressive tactics put forth by the regime; however, there were a growing number of women who were enthusiastic over AMPRONAC's recent alliance with the FSLN. The Sandinistas sought to end discrimination against women by redefining societal structures along proletarian lines.<sup>24</sup> Although some middle-class and elite women would reject this call for class struggle, the vast majority of women recognized that a Sandinista victory was critical to the development of equitable gender relations. Therefore, a plurality of women involved with AMPRONAC would also become active participants in the campaign against Somoza.<sup>25</sup>

The FSLN decided to integrate women into the combat forces in 1967, starting with Gladys Báez, who was well-aware of her potential as a role model for women in that she refused did not seek any special considerations and refused to do men's laundry and cooking.<sup>26</sup> A second wave of recruits following the formation of AMPRONAC included Dorotia Wilson, who would later join the FSLN National Directorate in 1994.<sup>27</sup> During the final offensive of the war, AMPRONAC members assumed

intelligence and support capacities for the Sandinista guerrillas, who would take the fighting into the heart of the capital. At first, many of these women served as cooks and nurses, preparing meals and tending to the wounded, but as they received more extensive training in munitions and espionage, many took to the front lines either as spies or runners of guns and other supplies to those engaged in combat. Despite the obvious connotations associated with their subsidiary positions, FSLN apologists note that the subordination of women in the ranks of the FSLN had more to do with "strategic utility" than it did with outright sexism.<sup>28</sup> For one, women attracted less suspicion than men in the field. A woman could pose as a wife or mother allowing her access to areas where a man might appear more suspicious. In the same way, a woman might be able to run a safe house or stockpile weapons, whereas a man in a similar arrangement might be more susceptible to searches and seizures. These explanations do not explain female underrepresentation at decision levels within the organization, although the Sandinistas appreciated whatever assistance women were willing to contribute to the insurrection effort.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, there were still women within the organization who were not content with playing subordinate roles to those of the guerrillas. As the months wore on, younger women, with little or no family responsibilities, began to take up arms against the regime; and within weeks of its capitulation, these new female guerrillas would actually comprise one-fourth of the Sandinista military.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, one of the first FSLN victories was the liberation of León by a largely female brigade commanded by Dora María Téllez.<sup>31</sup> Even so, combat deaths of women were found to be about 6.6 percent, indicating that most women occupied non-combat or low-risk combat positions.<sup>32</sup>

### **Sandinista Reforms and Social Programs**

To women who had spent most of their lives in subservience to men, joining the resistance had been the "ultimate expression of female rebellion." For the first time, women had broken a traditional stereotype that had prevented females from aspiring to anything other than being mothers or housewives. Taking action towards a meaningful goal taught them important lessons in assertiveness and perseverance, even at high-personal cost. For example, by the time of the 1974 Christmas raid, in which three women commandos participated, Gladys Báez and Doris Tjeranio were captured and tortured and Luisa Amanda Espinosa was the first women killed in action.<sup>33</sup> Men and women had fought together as equals to bring down those forces that had divided them. Not surprisingly, women fully expected this kind of cooperation to continue into post-war development.<sup>34</sup>

In return for their invaluable contribution to the war effort, the Sandinistas assigned several women to prominent positions within the new government, although none were assigned to the powerful National Directorate<sup>35</sup> reserved for the top male leaders of the three FSLN factions (*Tendencia Proletaria, Popular Prolongado, and Terceristas*). AMPRONAC leaders Leah Guido and Vilma Nuñez de Escoria were assigned to the Supreme Court, and Doña Violeta Chamorro of the National Opposition Union (UNO) was offered a seat in the executive junta (although the junta was inferior to the National Directorate). Other qualified women either took on administrative posts within the civil bureaucracy or went on to have successful careers in the Sandinista Defense Forces.<sup>36</sup> The Sandinistas needed women to participate in the consolidation, reconstruction, and defense of the nation. Only a revolution for women "will complete the process of national liberation."<sup>37</sup> But despite their willingness to remove some of the obstacles to achieving gender equality, the Sandinistas would only work toward those goals that complemented "the broader strategies of the FSLN." The Sandinistas would, therefore, pursue a feminist agenda only as long as it did not detract from other concerns. Nevertheless, there were women who saw this Sandinista effort as nothing more than a half-hearted attempt to win female support.<sup>38</sup>

Shortly after gaining power, the new Sandinista government introduced the *Statute of Rights and Guarantees* in September 1979 that proclaimed "the full equality of men and women" in regard to outside work activity, wages, family relations, and civil rights. Social security would no longer be exclusive to male laborers seeing that women could expect "equal pay for equal work."<sup>39</sup> In the past "only the head of household received the wages of the family."<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, Tomás Borge pointed out the importance of "day care centers, laundries, and people's restaurants" for working mothers. Similarly, women could now become executors over their dead husbands' estates, whereas men would now be forced to pay alimony to their former wives. No other government had ever created such a wide-reaching document intended to empower Nicaraguan women. Nevertheless, there was still much skepticism over whether or not it could be enforced. Preconceived notions of gender and gender

relations were ingrained and slow to change, thereby requiring a certain level of social awareness to be brought about. The Sandinistas believed that such results could best be achieved by those who had worked closest with the common people. Consequently, the government looked to the women's movement as the means for social change.<sup>41</sup>

Even before the Sandinista victory, AMPRONAC had demanded that the Somoza government create social reforms and programs that would help improve the lives of women. The organization had been founded primarily on the basis of promoting gender specific issues. However, in light of the insurrection, those interests had been put aside for the sake of a broader revolution. AMPRONAC and the FSLN had fought together to overthrow the dictatorship and establish a new government based on social justice and proletarian values.<sup>42</sup> Yet, once the fighting had ended, AMPRONAC quickly returned to its initial task of advancing women's causes. Feminist leaders wanted to continue the partnership between their organization and the FSLN that had brought them so much success. In which case, AMPRONAC was reorganized into a new political unit that could work more effectively within the new state structure. As a Sandinista mass organization, AMPRONAC could now work to "guarantee the accomplishments of the revolution" while protecting the rights and interests of its constituency.<sup>43</sup> Such revisions calling women to help solve national problems, defend social, economic and political rights of women as part of the broader defense of human rights reflected an increased willingness on the part of feminist leaders to yield much of their authority to the volition of the Sandinistas.<sup>44</sup> In fact, AMPRONAC went so far as to rename itself the Luisa Amanda Espinoza Association of Nicaraguan Women (AMNLAE, Asociación de Mujeres Nicaragüenses Luisa Amanda Espinoza), after the first woman who had died fighting for the FSLN. The new organization, with its seat on the Council of State, would work closely with the government to change antiquated laws and address women's issues.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, this arrangement, which served to push the feminist agenda forward, would later become the barrier that held that same agenda back.<sup>46</sup>

During its first year, AMNLAE organized chapters of 30-100 members in at least ten different departments around the country. These chapters appointed representatives who would then travel to the national headquarters in Managua where each delegate could report their activities to an executive council. Each chapter worked in conjunction with the Rural Workers' Association (ATC, *Asociación de Trabajadores Cultivos*) and other government organs to help poor women in a variety of ways.<sup>47</sup> AMNLAE members helped to establish a weavers' cooperative in Esteli to increase the amount of income going to women and their families, whereas members in Matagalpa worked with the Ministry of Social Welfare to create day care centers in places of employment so that women might participate more completely in the tasks of national development. By the same token, AMNLAE encouraged some of its members to become teachers in the nationwide literacy campaign while inspiring others to help administer vaccinations, physical examinations, and other medical treatments as part of a public health crusade.<sup>48</sup> Such enthusiasm demonstrated by AMNLAE members toward the reconstruction process further endeared their organization to the Sandinista leadership. AMNLAE could now use its newfound influence to bring about meaningful legislation as it related to women. But, despite their proven commitment to achieving gender equality, there were a growing number of feminists who thought that AMNLAE leaders were ignoring some of the most important issues facing women.<sup>49</sup>

With its power firmly entrenched within the state structure, AMNLAE spearheaded a new campaign to reform the legal status of women. Through invocation and a fair amount of political persuasion, the organization convinced the government in 1981 to outlaw the sexual exploitation of women in the media. Whether on television or in print advertising, Article 30 of the new *Media Law* banned the depiction of women as sex objects so as to promote a greater sense of equality between the sexes.<sup>50</sup> Later that year, the Sandinistas passed the *Law of Relations between Mothers, Fathers and Children* which placed responsibility on men and women equally for the rearing of children. The new law removed any distinction between children born outside of wedlock and those born to legally married couples. In this way, men could be held responsible for their children whether or not they were conceived in marriage. Similarly, the law did away with the advantages that men had over child custody so that women might have an equal opportunity to keep their children following a divorce.<sup>51</sup>

The far-reaching changes brought about by the Family Code caused a great deal of contention among those on the right who still upheld the notion of male ascendancy. This controversy, however, was soon eclipsed by that of the next round of legislation that outlined family responsibilities even more succinctly than the last. The *Provision Law* of 1982 stated that parents were obligated to provide children with the basic necessities of life as well as maintain the emotional

and economic well-being of the family unit. The law was designed to improve women's lives not only in regard to financial security, but also in terms of free time, in that men were now ordered to share with domestic duties. Such legislation sought to "promote greater family cohesion" by holding men accountable for the families they helped to create. In this way, the government hoped to counteract those effects of male desertion, migrancy, and serial polygamy that threatened to keep women and their children in an unending state of social poverty.<sup>52</sup>

As the government continued to address gender inequalities on the domestic front, AMNLAE started calling attention to similar problems in the workplace. Since the early 1970's, women had been playing an increasingly significant role in the Nicaraguan economy. Whereas women had comprised 17% of the economically active population in 1971, this figure had risen to 41% by 1982.<sup>53</sup> Two-thirds of these women worked in agriculture, personal service, and petty marketing, whereas the rest earned what they could through informal activities. A small number of women were employed in the chemical and textile industries, yet the majority of these positions were temporary so that men might be able to serve in the defense forces. In truth, most women worked outside of any promise of permanent wage employment, whether it was in the factories or in the fields. Economically active women could expect hard lives with few benefits and little income. Few had the advantages of credit or technical training, whereas most shouldered the "double duty" of productive labor and domestic obligations.<sup>54</sup>

In an effort to alleviate those circumstances that had done much to deprive women, the Sandinistas enacted the *Law of Agricultural Cooperatives* in 1981 attempting to increase female involvement in productive and administrative activities. Under the new law, women were to be "fully integrated into the work of production cooperatives and incorporated as members under the same conditions as men."<sup>55</sup> In this way, cooperative members, whether male or female, could expect a similar set of rights and responsibilities. As workers on state farms, women were given access to productive lands, machinery, credit, and guaranteed prices for the first time. But despite such improvements in material assets, women were still subject to many of the same sexist attitudes found outside the confines of the cooperative system. Many employers considered female labor to be inferior in quality and efficiency to that of a male. They thought that women were incapable of making agricultural decisions and that men were best suited for the rigors of planting and harvesting. Women were seen not as equal partners in the pursuit of agriculture but rather as accessories to the efforts of men. For this reason, women were discouraged from working in technical and mechanized positions in that men were better qualified to perform the more crucial tasks of preparing soil and operating heavy machinery.<sup>56</sup>

Notwithstanding some of the residual discrimination toward women, most female cooperative members were able to increase their income so as to provide a higher standard of living for them and their children. As opposed to seasonal labor, state farm workers could expect regular salaries and social benefits that were only possible through the pooling of resources. Furthermore, national decrees 573 and 583 guaranteed "equal pay for equal work" in both the urban and rural sectors.<sup>57</sup> Women were appreciative of what the state farms had afforded them.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, there were a growing number of female workers who longed for the sense of affirmation that only leadership and decision-making could provide. Between work and domestic obligations, most of these women had neither the time nor the resources to learn the skills necessary to get ahead. But once the government made it possible for women to acquire new expertise at their place of employment, most female workers jumped at the opportunity to advance in their occupation.<sup>59</sup> In 1982, the Sandinistas assigned AMNLAE with the task of creating special schools on state farms and other collectives where women could receive the technical and vocational training they needed to help with the operation of the production cooperative. Workers were given time off during the day from which to attend classes. In addition, day-care centers were established for children so that women might be able to strike a better balance between work and school. Through education and hard work, women were then able to move up through the system and, in some cases, even attend the university.<sup>60</sup>

AMNLAE and other popular organizations had gone to great lengths to improve the lives of ordinary women. By acting as mediators between the FSLN and the rest of society, the women's movement had brought attention to a variety of feminist concerns that were then promptly addressed by the Sandinista government. AMNLAE leaders had also done much to raise political consciousness among a segment of the population that was less inclined to participate in the revolutionary process. For this reason, the Sandinistas had always considered their recommendations and provided them with

the resources necessary to continue their activities.<sup>61</sup> Within a five-year period, AMNLAE had grown from 17,000 members in 1980 to over 85,000 in 1985. Yet, regardless of its popularity among working and middle-class women, the organization had always received a lukewarm response from bureaucrats and other types of female professionals. Despite its attempt to represent the interests of all women, AMNLAE had never shaken its image as an association of mothers, housewives, and market women. Many self-proclaimed feminists within AMNLAE had in fact encouraged their leaders to take on the more uniquely feminist elements of the women's agenda. However, as long as the organization remained firmly tied to the Sandinista state structure, AMNLAE leaders were reluctant to take social and political positions that contradicted those of their benefactors.<sup>62</sup>

In their 1969 political platform, the Sandinistas had stated that the family was "the basic unit of society" in that it guaranteed "social reproduction" both from a "biological point of view" and in regard to values and principles in society. The family unit had the ability to not only reinforce a certain ideology among its more immediate members, but also transmit those beliefs to future generations.<sup>63</sup> Without laws to protect the family as an institution, the Sandinista government did not expect to continue the revolution beyond the lives of its current participants. In which case, the Sandinistas embarked on a public relations campaign so as to invite greater commitment to family life. In the interest of childcare, the government posted billboards and created television ads that promoted breastfeeding and stressed the importance of immunizations. Similarly, the FSLN encouraged employers to allow working women to take time off to care for their newborn children. For a country as underpopulated as Nicaragua, the state was looking for any incentive that might convince families to have more children. Therefore, the Sandinistas were less inclined to advocate contraceptives and other methods of birth control that diminished the capacity for parents to bear offspring.<sup>64</sup>

Despite the state's position on families and reproductive issues, AMNLAE proposed that medical abortion and sex education be made available to the general population so that women might be spared the mortality associated with venereal diseases and the illegal termination of pregnancies. AMNLAE leaders claimed that botched abortions accounted for 90 deaths per 100,000 live births in Nicaragua. By the same token, sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis and gonorrhea were responsible for a substantial number of sterilizations and deaths in that men and women lacked the proper information with which to protect themselves.<sup>65</sup> The Sandinistas agreed to help educate Nicaraguans about the dangers of promiscuous sex; however, they refused to legalize abortion on demand. The Sandinistas feared abortion would hinder their effort to repopulate the country, but more importantly, the state recognized the fact that by legalizing the procedure it risked alienating segments of the Catholic population who had supported the revolution thus far. As the war against the Contras began to escalate, the Sandinistas would need all of the support they could get to simply maintain internal stability. Therefore, the government accepted a compromise that made allowance for cases of rape and incest so that it might finally get all sides behind the war effort.<sup>66</sup>

In spite of the steps taken to resolve women's issues in the first few years of Sandinista rule, women were restricted to hold lower positions in the state and the party. No positions were given to women on the National Directorate and they were grossly under-represented at the higher levels of the national bureaucracy and government. For example, AMNLAE had a seat in the National Assembly which had no decision making capability.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, the vanguardism that was of great importance during the revolution continued in place (largely embodied in the National Directorate) for which women had little control and this lack of democracy within the Sandinistas became a source of friction not only to the women of AMNLAE but to factions within the FSLN. Even a hero of the revolution and Social Democrat, Edén Pastora, led the southern FSLN army into Costa Rica and formally broke with the Sandinistas<sup>68</sup> calling them "traitors and assassins" and forming a new liberation front in 1982.

Since the onset of the first counterrevolutionary (Contra) offensive in 1982, national security and unity had become a considerably larger priority to the Sandinistas. Not only did the state require soldiers who could fight on the battlefield, but it also needed skilled laborers who could stay behind and work the factories and the fields. The Sandinista Agrarian Reform and the *Law of Agricultural Cooperatives* had helped to establish women in a number of occupational positions that were once held exclusively by men.<sup>69</sup> For this reason, the government repeatedly turned down feminist requests that women be allowed to fight the Contras in the same capacity as men. Women had played a vital role in the popular insurrection that had brought down the regime of the *Somocistas*. Nevertheless,

the state was determined to keep women away from the fighting if only to fill those positions left behind by men. The deliberate exclusion of women from the draft helped to ease the burden of those female workers who were forced to strike a balance between productive labor and domestic obligations. More importantly, however, the decision served to cool the growing resentment of families who had already lost their fathers and sons to the armed conflict.<sup>70</sup> In distinction to the FSLN revolution, it has been estimated that ten to fifteen percent of Contra deaths were women.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, political scientist Karen Kampwirth found that the two groups of women most often joining the Contras were: those who profited from the Somocistas and middle peasants who were angered by the internal market policies caused when the Sandinistas replaced their bureaucracy for the Somocistas'.<sup>72</sup> This new economic policy would be introduced into the countryside as a main component of the literacy crusade, resulting in great controversy.<sup>73</sup>

As the Contra war continued into the middle of the decade, those policies and social programs that had done much to advance the cause of women became secondary to the all-consuming task of national defense. Regardless of the pride of AMNLAE leadership in their formation of women's militias, Tomás Borge criticized the lack of women's participation in the battalion at León (the city first liberated by a mostly female brigade and commanded by a woman).<sup>74</sup> The ever-expanding conflict had left few resources from which to maintain the process of social transformation. Moreover, the high costs of war materials and ongoing social services had created a large spending deficit that threatened to send inflation out of control.<sup>75</sup> The government had attempted to reverse the trend by shifting from domestic to a more export-oriented production. However, the economic disruptions caused by the transfer in commodities and a subsequent devaluation of currency had resulted in substantial job losses as well as numerous cutbacks in the fields of education and health care. As both employees of the state and recipients of social services, female workers were often the hardest hit by austerity measures in that most women were responsible for children in addition to themselves. Some women were able to find new jobs in the private sector, but most found themselves earning what they could through informal activities. Women who had supported the ideals of the revolution came to resent the course that its leaders had taken; thus when presented with an opportunity to change it, most women voted against those same political forces that had once given them so much promise.<sup>76</sup>

AMNLAE's identification as a Sandinista organization in which women's issues were subservient to revolutionary goals would lead to defections, the formation of alternate women's groups, and, ultimately, to the complete rejection of the FSLN in the 1990 national elections.<sup>77</sup> Soon after, the National Directorate would begin to fissure into two factions: one led by Daniel Ortega that retained the FSLN symbol and a second MRS (Movimiento de Renovación Sandinista, Sandinista Reform Movement) faction led by Sergio Ramírez (who objected to vanguardism and wanted a more democratic organization). Many of the dissenting women of AMNLAE would side with the MRS faction due to their overlap of interest. Dora María Téllez's critique noted that AMNLAE had operated under the FSLN to organize women and but not serve as a women's organization.<sup>78</sup> This subservient role of AMNLAE had resulted in feminist goals being relegated to a lesser priority compared to those of the FSLN, thus hindering the development of a clear independent feminist agenda. Clearly, some independent organization was required.

### **Post Sandinista Feminism**

The role for women within the FSLN would be a topic of discussion at their 1991 National Convention. Many had long-favored an expanded role for women within the organization; but it was not until 1994 that the FSLN would actually open the ranks of the National Directorate to female participation. That year, five Sandinista women were elected as the Directorate was expanded in size from nine members to fifteen; and although a number of prominent female figures had been selected, there was some surprise that Dora María Téllez, a proven field commander, an avid feminist, and an active contributor to the revolution had been rejected. Many women were angered by the manipulation of rules by which the Directorate had locked out Téllez, prompting her departure from the FSLN in 1995.<sup>79</sup> In the wake of the Téllez exit, women within AMNLAE would begin to lobby for the equitable treatment of women through a quota system within the FSLN; and after months of infighting, the Directorate finally agreed to establish a thirty percent quota for women at all levels of the party. At a practical level, women with electoral votes within the party could be elevated to office over men with larger number of votes in order to meet quotas.<sup>80</sup> At this point, it would seem that the

FSLN male leadership had finally got the point. Yet, it would be too late to prevent further defections from AMNLAE and the party, contributing to the FSLN's continued diminishment in Nicaraguan national life. There would, of course, be a later resurgence; but for the rest of the decade, the Sandinistas would have to contend with a failing agenda, including that of the feminists.

Nicaraguan feminist movements, up to the time of the 1990 elections, had been aligned politically either with the Sandinistas, the Contras, the conservatives, or one of the smaller autonomous groups. With the decline of the Sandinista, however, the politically diverse groups found common agreement on broad feminist issues.<sup>81</sup> During the 1990 campaign, Violeta Chamorro, the UNO opposition candidate, evoked family images of herself as a strong mother of a divided family, half conservative and half Sandinista, who could unite her nation as she did her family.<sup>82</sup> Although progressive feminists were aggravated by her image as a "homebody", they soon realized that feminism with less of an emphasis on political content could be the key to creating broad coalitions and a feminist agenda on a variety of issues. For example, in the male dominated society, women and children would have to report claims of violence and sexual abuse to an all-male police department, often receiving little support. But under Chamorro, women and children could now make such claims to Women's and Children's Police Stations run entirely by female officers, where they were more likely to be taken seriously, leading to a vast increase in reported rapes (497 in 1991 to 1,037 reported in 1995).<sup>83</sup> While many government programs were altered in part due to lack of funds, the health and education programs remained intact. Whereas many groups within the UNO had hoped to reverse many of the Sandinista programs, Chamorro, instead, took a more measured approach, accepting the 1987 Constitution and allowing land redistribution in the last two years of Sandinista rule.<sup>84</sup> Chamorro also formed an alliance with Daniel Ortega and the FSLN to get a voting majority within the Council of State; and this did much to raise her profile as well as those of women's issues.

The FSLN Directorate never implemented a Women's Secretariat to oversee government progress on women's issues until the party congress of 1998.<sup>85</sup> Still, the party remained dominated by macho culture. Any vestiges of Sandinista alignment had all but disappeared when Zoilamérica Ortega reported sexual abuse from her stepfather Daniel Ortega since she was eleven years-old. The revelation was of great disappointment to female Sandinistas, but the feminist movement took solace in the fact that their programs had made such reporting possible.<sup>86</sup> Most of the Sandinista leadership dismissed these charges as false allegations by radical feminist. At the 1998 congress, Daniel Ortega criticized the quota system for keeping highly qualified men from party positions. "Ortega's hostility toward women was obviously rooted in the Zoilamérica case."<sup>87</sup>

By the early 2000s, feminists were largely disengaged from the FSLN and had begun to develop their own agendas and to look to international organizations for guidance. In Latin America, a rubric has been established as a means to measure social accountability in governmental processes. The Index of Commitments Fulfilled (*Indice de Compromiso Cumplido*, ICC) is a single valued guide based on governments' improvements in three strategic areas: economic autonomy, health (including domestic violence), and sexual and reproductive rights. Nicaragua accepted the methodology in 2002-2003.<sup>88</sup>

## Conclusion

Following a successful revolution that had toppled the Somoza dictatorship, the women of Nicaragua had greeted the victorious Sandinistas with excitement and a feeling of optimism that the new government would redress longstanding social injustices that had kept them in a continuous state of female servitude. The Sandinistas had long professed their support for women's causes and thus it appeared as if those rights and interests would finally be addressed. For the first few years, the Sandinista government had received accolades for its social policies and programs that improved working conditions, provided health care and education, and appealed to the issue of gender inequality "as they appeared in the law, the media, and other social institutions."<sup>89</sup> The Sandinistas had worked with women at the local level, in both urban and rural areas, to raise social awareness and generate concern for a variety of women's rights and issues. But once those interests had come into conflict with the designs of the state, the cause of women's emancipation became increasingly subordinate to that of the revolution. Over time, organizations such as AMNLAE found less and less government support for their feminist agenda; and as the Contra insurgency threatened to overwhelm the nation, that agenda was deemed irrelevant when compared to the need for unity and a strong national defense. Following the 1990 election, Sandinista related groups such as AMNLAE de-

politicized their agenda and found broad agreement on common issues with conservative feminist groups allowing real impact on Nicaraguan society. By 1998, macho attitudes within the FSLN had led to many women leaving in disgust to form apolitical associations formulating feminist agendas and aligning with the international movements.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*. New York, Grove Press, 1985, 30.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>4</sup> Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *The Discovery and Conquest of Mexico*, New York, Farrar, Straus, and Cudahy, 1956, 62-64, 318.

<sup>5</sup> Dale Hoyt Palfrey, "The Spanish Conquest (1519-1521)," <http://www.mexconnect.com/articles/1538-the-spanish-conquest-1915-1521>

<sup>6</sup> Charles Phillips, *Aztec & Maya*, London, Hermes House, 2010, 348-355.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 350.

<sup>8</sup> Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), "The Historic Program of the FSLN." In *The Nicaragua Reader: Documents of a Revolution under Fire*. Eds. Peter Rosset and John Vandermeer (New York: Grove Press, 1983): 144.

<sup>9</sup> Glenda Monterrey, "The FSLN Opened the Door for Us." In *The Nicaragua Reader: Documents of a Revolution under Fire*. Eds. Peter Rosset and John Vandermeer (New York: Grove Press, 1983): 325.

<sup>10</sup> Luisa Amanda Espinoza Women's Association (AMNLAE), "From AMPRONAC to AMNLAE" In *The Nicaragua Reader: Documents of a Revolution under Fire*. Eds. Peter Rosset and John Vandermeer (New York: Grove Press, 1983): 323.

<sup>11</sup> Thomás Borge, "Women and the Nicaraguan Revolution." In *The Nicaragua Reader: Documents of a Revolution under Fire*. Eds. Peter Rosset and John Vandermeer (New York: Grove Press, 1983): 332-333.

<sup>12</sup> Linda Reif, "Women in Latin American Guerrilla Movements: A Comparative Perspective." *Comparative Politics* 11(4), (January 1986): 147-148; Susan E. Ramirez-Horton, "The Role of Women in the Nicaraguan Revolution." In *Nicaragua in Revolution*. Ed. Thomas W. Walker, (New York: Praeger, 1982): 148.

<sup>13</sup> T. David Mason, "Women's Participation in Central American Revolutions: A Theoretical Perspective." *Comparative Political Studies* 25(1), (April 1992): 72-74; Martha Luz Padilla, Clara Murguialday and Ana Criquillon, "Impact of the Sandinista Agrarian Reform on Rural Women's Subordination." In *Rural Women and State Policy: Feminist Perspectives on Latin American Agricultural Development*. Eds. Carmen Diana Deere and Magdalena Leon (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987): 124.

<sup>14</sup> Ramirez-Horton, "The Role of Women in the Nicaraguan Revolution," 147-149; Reif, "Women in Latin American Guerrilla Movements," 149.

<sup>15</sup> Ramirez-Horton, "The Role of Women in the Nicaraguan Revolution," 149.

<sup>16</sup> Reif, "Women in Latin American Guerrilla Movements," 150-151.

<sup>17</sup> John-Paul Wilson, "Church, State, and Society during the Nicaraguan Revolution." *Diálogos Latinoamericanos* 16, (2009): 121.

<sup>18</sup> Mason, "Women's Participation in Central American Revolutions," 78-79.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 79-81; Ramirez-Horton, "The Role of Women in the Nicaraguan Revolution," 151.

<sup>20</sup> Mason, "Women's Participation in Central American Revolutions," 66.

<sup>21</sup> Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), "The Historic Program of the FSLN." In *The Nicaragua Reader: Documents of a Revolution under Fire*. Eds. Peter Rosset and John Vandermeer (New York: Grove Press, 1983): 144.

<sup>22</sup> Stephanie Linkogle, *Gender, Practice and Faith in Nicaragua* (Aldershot, UK: Avebury Publishing Ltd, 1996): 76; Reif, "Women in Latin American Guerrilla Movements," 158-159.

<sup>23</sup> Mason, "Women's Participation in Central American Revolutions," 81-83.

<sup>24</sup> Thomás Borge, "Women and the Nicaraguan Revolution," 329.

<sup>25</sup> Maxine Molyneux, "Women." In *Nicaragua: The First Five Years*. Ed. Thomas W. Walker, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1985): 145; Midge Quandt, "Unbinding Ties: Popular Movements and the FSLN." *NACLA (North American Congress on Latin America): Report on the Americas* 26(4), (February 1993): 13.

- <sup>26</sup> Ilja A. Luciak, *After the Revolution*, (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001): 18-19.
- <sup>27</sup> Luciak, *After the Revolution*, 17.
- <sup>28</sup> Mason, "Women's Participation in Central American Revolutions," 64-65; Reif, "Women in Latin American Guerrilla Movements," 154.
- <sup>29</sup> Reif, "Women in Latin American Guerrilla Movements," 152-154; Ramirez-Horton, "The Role of Women in the Nicaraguan Revolution," 150-151.
- <sup>30</sup> Ramirez-Horton, "The Role of Women in the Nicaraguan Revolution," 152.
- <sup>31</sup> Luciak, *After the Revolution*, 21.
- <sup>32</sup> Carlos Vilas, *The Sandinista Revolution: National Liberation and Social Transformation in Central America*. New York, Monthly Review Press, 1986, 108-109.
- <sup>33</sup> Luciak, *After the Revolution*, 20.
- <sup>34</sup> Ramirez-Horton, "The Role of Women in the Nicaraguan Revolution," 150-152.
- <sup>35</sup> Richard R. Fagan, "Revolution and Crisis in Nicaragua." In *Trouble in Our Backyard: Central America and the US in the Eighties*. Ed. Martin Diskin (New York, Pantheon Books, 1983), 126.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.
- <sup>37</sup> Borge, "Women and the Nicaraguan Revolution," 329.
- <sup>38</sup> Molyneux, "Women," 146-147.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 146; Ramirez-Horton, "The Role of Women in the Nicaraguan Revolution," 149; Borge, "Women and the Nicaraguan Revolution," 331.
- <sup>40</sup> Borge, "Women and the Nicaraguan Revolution," 330.
- <sup>41</sup> Borge, "Women and the Nicaraguan Revolution," 333. Molyneux, "Women," 148.
- <sup>42</sup> Reif, "Women in Latin American Guerrilla Movements," 158-159; Norma Stoltz Chinchilla, "Revolutionary Popular Feminism in Nicaragua: Articulating Class, Gender and National Sovereignty." *Gender & Society* 4(3), (September 1990): 373.
- <sup>43</sup> Ramirez-Horton, "The Role of Women in the Nicaraguan Revolution," 155.
- <sup>44</sup> AMNLAE, "From AMPRONAC to AMNLAE," 323.
- <sup>45</sup> Institute for Central American Studies, "The Council of State and the Mass Organizations." In *The Nicaragua Reader: Documents of a Revolution under Fire*. Eds. Peter Rosset and John Vandermeer (New York: Grove Press, 1983): 275.
- <sup>46</sup> Molyneux, "Women," 147; Chinchilla, "Revolutionary Popular Feminism in Nicaragua," 376.
- <sup>47</sup> Ramirez-Horton, "The Role of Women in the Nicaraguan Revolution," 155-156.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 153-154; Molyneux, "Women," 152.
- <sup>49</sup> Chinchilla, "Revolutionary Popular Feminism in Nicaragua," 376; Ramirez-Horton, "The Role of Women in the Nicaraguan Revolution," 155-156.
- <sup>50</sup> Molyneux, "Women," 153; Linkogle, *Gender, Practice and Faith in Nicaragua*, 77.
- <sup>51</sup> Chinchilla, "Revolutionary Popular Feminism in Nicaragua," 380; Molyneux, "Women," 154.
- <sup>52</sup> Lois Wessel, "Reproductive Rights in Nicaragua: From the Sandinistas to the Government of Violeta Chamorro." *Feminist Studies* 17(3), (Fall 1991): 537; Molyneux, "Women," 153-154.
- <sup>53</sup> Molyneux, "Women," 155-156; Padilla, "Impact of the Sandinista Agrarian Reform on Rural Women's Subordination," 124.
- <sup>54</sup> Padilla, "Impact of the Sandinista Agrarian Reform on Rural Women's Subordination," 127-128; Molyneux, "Women," 156.
- <sup>55</sup> Molyneux, "Women," 157; Padilla, "Impact of the Sandinista Agrarian Reform on Rural Women's Subordination," 128.
- <sup>56</sup> Padilla, "Impact of Sandinista Agrarian Reform on Rural Women's Subordination," 129-131.
- <sup>57</sup> Borge, "Women and the Nicaraguan Revolution," 331.
- <sup>58</sup> Padilla, "Impact of Sandinista Agrarian Reform on Rural Women's Subordination," 131-133.
- <sup>59</sup> Margaret Randall, *Gathering Rage: The Failure of the Twentieth Century Revolutions to Develop a Feminist Agenda* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1992): 46.
- <sup>60</sup> Molyneux, "Women," 157; Padilla, "Impact of the Sandinista Agrarian Reform on Rural Women's Subordination," 133-135.
- <sup>61</sup> Ramirez-Horton, "The Role of Women in the Nicaraguan Revolution," 155; Molyneux, "Women," 151.
- <sup>62</sup> Chinchilla, "Revolutionary Popular Feminism in Nicaragua," 376-377.
- <sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 371
- <sup>64</sup> Wessel, "Reproductive Rights in Nicaragua," 538-540.

- <sup>65</sup> Ibid., 542; Randall, *Gathering Rage*, 47.
- <sup>66</sup> Molyneux, "Women," 159; Chinchilla, "Revolutionary Popular Feminism in Nicaragua," 382.
- <sup>67</sup> Luciak, *After the Revolution*, 171.
- <sup>68</sup> Shirley Christian, *Nicaragua: Revolution in the Family*. (Random House, New York, 1985): 391-394.
- <sup>69</sup> Molyneux, "Women," 148-149; Randall, *Gathering Rage*, 46-47.
- <sup>70</sup> Linkogle, *Gender, Practice and Faith in Nicaragua*, 78; Chinchilla, "Revolutionary Popular Feminism in Nicaragua," 381.
- <sup>71</sup> Victoria González and Karen Kampwirth, *Radical Women in Latin America*. (Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, 2001): 79-81.
- <sup>72</sup> Ibid., 87-89.
- <sup>73</sup> Sheryl Hirshon, *And Also Teach Them to Read*. (Lawrence Hill & Co., Westport, 1983): 141-143.
- <sup>74</sup> Monterrey, "The FSLN Opened the Door for Us," 327; Borge, "Women and the Nicaraguan Revolution," 332.
- <sup>75</sup> Padilla, "Impact of Sandinista Agrarian Reform on Rural Women's Subordination," 138; Florence Babb, "After the Revolution: Neoliberal Policy and Gender in Nicaragua." *Latin American Perspectives* 23(1), (Winter 1996): 30-31.
- <sup>76</sup> Babb, "After the Revolution," 32; Linkogle, *Gender, Practice and Faith in Nicaragua*, 80-81.
- <sup>77</sup> Luiak, *After the Revolution*, 171.
- <sup>78</sup> Ibid., 171.
- <sup>79</sup> Kampwirth, *Feminism and the Legacy of Revolution*, 172.
- <sup>80</sup> Luciak, *After the Revolution*, 176.
- <sup>81</sup> Karen Kampwirth. *Feminism and the Legacy of Revolution*. (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2004): 63-64.
- <sup>82</sup> Karen Kampwirth, "The Mother of the Nicaraguans: Doña Violeta Chamorro and the UNO's Gender Agenda." In *Rereading Women in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Eds. Jennifer Abbassi and Sheryl L. Lutjens. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Group, 2001): 180-183.
- <sup>83</sup> David Close, *Nicaragua: The Chamorro Years*. (Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, 1999): 94; Kampwirth, "The Mother of the Nicaraguans," 68-69.
- <sup>84</sup> Close, *Nicaragua: The Chamorro Years*, 46.
- <sup>85</sup> Luciak, *After the Revolution*, 179.
- <sup>86</sup> Kampwirth, "The Mother of the Nicaraguans," 73-74
- <sup>87</sup> Luciak, *After the Revolution*, 181.
- <sup>88</sup> Teresa Valdés and Alina Donoso, "Social Accountability and Citizen Participation." In *Feminist Agendas and Democracy in Latin America*. Ed. Jane S. Jaquette, (Duke University Press, Durham, 2009): 170-171.
- <sup>89</sup> Babb, "After the Revolution," 31.

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## **PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE AND DEMOCRACY IN GUATEMALA: AN INVESTIGATION OF CITIZENSHIP, COMMUNITY AND POWER**

Brendan Halloran

School of Public and International Affairs, Virginia Tech

Though often elegantly theorized as the product of discrete factors, governance is often a complex practice that involves politics and power. This paper investigates the politics and power of local governance in Guatemala. I make use of three different lenses for viewing the dynamics I explore: citizenship, community, and power. Each of these frames provides critical insights into the intentions and understandings that underpinned the institutionalization of a participatory governance regime. Decisions about how to understand citizenship, community, and power have shaped the practice of participatory governance in Guatemala and have broader implications for democracy in the country.

The central question is: participation, so what? Is participation simply a means to generate efficiency gains in public service provision? Or to legitimize a regime? Or is participation an end in and of itself? Is the very act of participation somehow empowering as seems implicit (and often explicit) in many of the claims made about its virtues? How one addresses these questions depends on the intentions of those who initiate, design, and manage participatory governance processes. What is clear is that participation directly addresses issues of power and politics and those concerns must be addressed in any analysis of participation (Chhotray and Stoker, 2009). Sherry Arnstein (1969) noted 40 years ago that participation can be empowering or disempowering and others have confirmed this (Cornwall, 2004). Thus, observers must be careful to ascertain whether a "rhetoric of empowerment" corresponds to specific institutional features, and political will, which might allow for its realization in practice.

To the extent that increased citizen participation challenges existing power configurations, it will be resisted by entrenched power holders (Hordijk, 2005) and constrained by the realities of power politics (Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003). Indeed, any participatory governance experiment that does not face resistance should be worrying to those seeking to catalyze empowerment; it may signal that existing power holders are co-opting the process or perceive that their interests will not be threatened. Hordijk has highlighted the danger that participation will reinforce existing power structures by privileging traditional leadership roles in the participatory process (2005; see also Fung, 2004; Kohl, 2002; Williams, 2007). Understanding this challenge, Cornwall and Coelho have provided useful benchmark criteria by which to evaluate efforts to galvanize participation, if such initiatives are to succeed:

Amplifying the democratic potential and enhancing the democratic legitimacy of the participatory sphere...needs to take place on three fronts: catalyzing and supporting processes of social mobilization through which marginalized groups can nurture new leaders, enhance their political agency and seek representation in these arenas as well as efficacy outside them; instituting measures to address exclusionary elements within the institutional structure of the participatory sphere, from rules of representation to strategies that foster more inclusive deliberation, such as the use of facilitation; and articulating participatory sphere institutions more effectively with other governance institutions, providing them with resources as well as with political 'teeth'. It is with addressing these challenges – for theory, as well as for practice – that future directions for participatory governance lie. (2007: 24-25)

### **Participatory Governance: The Guatemalan Case**

Guatemala has a long history of centralized authoritarian rule. However, the country has, for the past 25 years, been taking halting steps towards decentralized and democratized decision-making. The Guatemalan national government has devolved significant responsibilities to municipalities and has created community and municipal development councils, charging them with the administration

and monitoring of local development decisions and initiatives. These changes have been accompanied by a rhetoric of democratization and citizen and community participation and empowerment.

Guatemala made a formal transition to democracy in 1985 and has taken further steps to consolidate democratic institutions. Yet undemocratic and authoritarian elements remain in national and municipal institutions and the country's political culture. The salient question is what room has this left for eliciting citizen participation in local governance efforts?

Guatemala's adoption of a new constitution in 1985 represented its first concrete step on the road to decentralization and democratization. Article 119 of that charter endorses "administrative economic decentralization" to achieve development goals. Article 4 concerning executive administrative processes specifies they should be carried out in a manner consistent with, among others, the values of decentralization and citizen participation. But the new constitution was short on details concerning how this participation would be achieved and the extent citizens would have a say in important decisions. This gap between rhetoric and practice would be repeated.

Soon after, Congress passed a law instituting strong community participation in local decision-making. However, that statute was quickly declared unconstitutional on the ground that municipal autonomy was being infringed. Thereafter, there was little concrete progress on ensuring participation in governance for several years. Then in 1996 the 36-year Guatemalan civil war came to an end with the signing of a set of Peace Accords. That agreement's sections on Socioeconomic Aspects and the Agrarian Situation committed the nation's central government to decentralizing decision-making power and resources in order to encourage efficient development and closer interaction between state entities and the population (FUNCEDE, 2002).

Just three years later, a constitutional reform referendum also prominently included the idea of formalized community involvement. The Guatemalan people, however, rejected the reform proposals. That outcome suggested continuing popular confusion concerning the role of citizens and communities vis-a vis their governments in decision making.

In 2002 a new law was passed that gave every community in Guatemala the right to form a development committee (COCODE, *Consejo Comunitario de Desarrollo*) with responsibility to plan, coordinate and implement development activities. Beyond involvement in development decisions, the law of development councils included among its principles "the promotion of processes of participatory democracy, under conditions of equity and equality of opportunities" (Article 2). Development and democracy were thereby formally intertwined in national policy; participatory development was defined as participatory democracy.

At the municipal level, the new law also mandated the equivalent of the COCODE, the COMUDE (*Consejo Municipal de Desarrollo*). The law explicitly states that community representatives (representatives of the COCODEs) and organizations, NGOs and associations in the municipality must form a part of the COMUDE, along with municipal elected leaders (mayor and municipal council) and any public entities found in the locality. The COMUDE is allowed (though not legally mandated) to create sub-committees dedicated to education, health, infrastructure, and other relevant policy and development sectors. These committees, with the aid of municipal technical staff, would have the responsibility of offering plans, policies, and projects within their specialty to the elected municipal council.

This brief introduction to participation in Guatemala suggests the national government has indeed opened legal spaces for citizen participation at the local level. However, viewing this participation through the three lenses of citizenship, community and power will better enable us to understand the potential for the empowerment of individuals and communities within this framework.

### **Citizenship**

Citizenship, as defined by Articles 135 and 136 of the Guatemalan constitution, consists of civic and political rights and responsibilities. Delimited civic rights and responsibilities are as follows:

- Serve and defend the nation
- Assure that the constitution is followed
- Work for the civic, cultural, moral, economic, and social development of all Guatemalans
- Pay taxes
- Obey the law
- Give due respect to authorities
- Engage in military and social service, according to the law

Political rights and responsibilities include:

- Register in the Citizen Registry
- Vote and be elected
- Contribute to the liberty and effectiveness of suffrage and the purity of the electoral process
- Compete for public office
- Participate in political activities
- Defend the principle of one term elections at the presidential level

Participation in decision-making and implementation is not a core part of the civic and political rights associated with citizenship in the Guatemalan constitution. Voting is the only explicit form of civic or political involvement mentioned. Democratic participation and involvement must be extended beyond voting if citizens are to broadly exercise their rights (Diamond, 2008; Gaventa, 2006; Torres Rivas, 2001). Defining democracy as participatory, as Guatemalan lawmakers have, implies a citizenry which is more than an "occasional legitimator" of existing power structures (Poitevin, 1992: 27). The Guatemalan constitution, despite allusions to a more active role for citizens, does not guarantee the right to participate beyond voting to Guatemalan citizens.

Although the constitution narrowly defines citizenship, national laws have expanded the scope of citizen participation. Still, these laws have left the nature of that participation ambiguous. The laws that mandate participation do specify the individual citizen's right to participate, instead focusing on groups and communities. The law that legalizes the COCODE system, for example, refers to "participation of all the *pueblos* (a somewhat ambiguous term used to refer to both communities and peoples) and sectors of the Guatemalan population". For its part and similarly, the Law of Decentralization discusses citizenship and citizen participation, but also in reference to the community, as discussed below. The Municipal Code also addresses citizen rights and responsibilities, among them political participation, participation in development planning and participation in the audit of municipal activities. The right to participate in *Consultas Populares*, community and municipal referenda to decide important issues, is also specified in the Municipal Code, yet all these rights to participation have limits that will be discussed below.

Citizenship is mentioned in these important laws, but it not their central focus. The Municipal Code, at least, does make it clear the Guatemalan legal system envisions active participation by individual citizens. As mentioned, the *Consultas Populares* supplement voting rights by providing citizens with a potential check on their elected officials' power. Many communities have made use of the *consulta* mechanism and there has been remarkable consistency in their focus and outcome: the rejection of mineral extraction and large-scale hydroelectric dam projects in their localities. However, these popular actions have caused governance problems as the central government has ignored these *consultas*, citing a constitutional right to water and subsurface minerals. Clearly the national government did not foresee that the *consultas* would be used to reject its activities. The refusal of recent administrations to address this issue has demonstrated that the government's commitment to citizen participation will not be allowed to infringe upon national economic objectives.

Other citizenship rights will be discussed further below in the context of community and power, but the pattern revealed by the *consultas populares process* repeats itself. Thus, while the Guatemalan congress has established citizen rights to participate in local governance, it has not intervened while the mechanisms it put in place have been abused and ignored. Given this reality, much of the government's rhetoric of citizenship has lost a share of its luster in the face of continuing resistance from political elites not accustomed to recognizing citizen power or oversight.

## Community

The idea (and ideal) of community is central to the concept of participation enshrined in Guatemalan law. Indeed, the principal vehicle for participation is the community, not the individual citizen. The relevant laws design systems of participation that rely on assumptions that communities are unitary and harmonious. This is particularly the case with indigenous Mayan communities. The Municipal Code, for example, states that Mayan communities are "natural forms of social cohesion". This may very well be true, yet to the extent that a formal focus on the unitary and cohesive character of such communities silences voices of dissent and obfuscates differences, this assumption may work to disempower some community members and excluded their voices from communal decisions (Chhotray and Stoker, 2009; Cleaver, 2004).

The Law of Decentralization, which establishes general legal framework rather than legalizing a specific system of participation, also addresses participation. Yet, this law refers to the participation of the "organized community", rather than individuals or citizens. Each COCODE is charged with representing the "organized community's" priorities for development to the municipal government. Formally, the COCODE is composed of all members of a community, in a general assembly. However, the COCODE also has a coordinating committee made up of between seven and fifteen community members. While the rights and responsibilities of the COCODE are officially invested in the community assembly, the reality is that the coordinating committee exercises those rights and addresses those responsibilities.

Thus, community decision-making is delegated to a subset of community members which may or may not include equal representation of all sectors of the community. To the extent that interests within the community do not conflict, unequal representation will not undermine democratic decision-making (Mansbridge, 1980). However, it may be that interests do indeed conflict across the divisions that exist within any given community. A coordinating committee dominated by larger land-holders, for example, might be more interested in complex irrigation systems than poorer farmers who would favor technical training or access to credit. Similarly, a coordinating committee with weak or non-existent representation by women might favor economic development over maternal health care. Given that the method of decision-making in the COCODEs is not specified in any law and that providing facilitation for each COCODE meeting is beyond the means of most municipalities, the possibility that the interests of community elites are masqueraded as broad community consensus is real.

It is, however, necessary to distinguish between control of decision-making by community elites and the capture of resources by those elites. The former may result in projects that benefit the poor and marginalized and while latter is less likely to do so (Fritzen, 2007). Furthermore, Michael Reisch and Dana Guyet (2007) have argued that to the extent that communities formulate a shared identity, a definition of group membership, and some sharing of needs and goals, they can indeed form cohesive units based on trusting relationships; processes further strengthened by collective action and networking. These possibilities are achievable within the COCODE framework. Thus, while it is important to investigate what voices are heard and not heard in processes of participation, community can often be a significant resource for the poor and the most effective (and often only) platform available to pursue their collectively determined goals.

### **Power**

Historically, Guatemalan municipalities have been viewed as little fiefdoms by their mayors. This conforms to a long tradition of using public office, and especially any budgetary discretion, for personal advancement (Trudeau, 2000). Such practices should have ended with the full implementation of the citizen oversight envisioned in the new Municipal Code. Article 132 obliges mayors to create mechanisms to allow community organizations to participate in budget development. Article 135 stipulates that every three months the mayor will present a progress report on municipal spending to the COMUDE and transmitted to the communities via their COCODE representatives. These two measures provide for the possibility of active citizen participation in the creation and oversight of the municipal budget and amount to a major shift of power from the mayor to engaged citizens through participation, accountability, and transparency. Full realization of the potential implied in these laws would represent a welcome change for a country ranked 91st out of 178 by Transparency International in their latest Corruption Perception Index, with a 3.2 out of 10 rating.

However, just as in other parts of Latin America (see Hordijk, 2005), the national legislation in Guatemala, in this case the Municipal Code, that calls for participatory measures in the budget does not contain any "teeth" to ensure that such participation occurs. The National Office of Accounts and the Ministry of Public Finances, to whom the municipalities must also send quarterly reports, do not have any effective sanctions to levy against non-compliers. Thus, mayors still have the de facto option of disallowing any citizen participation in the creation and oversight of the budget.

The continuing lack of accountability is due both to a weak institutional framework and an unwillingness to cede power on the part of municipal officials. Yet part of the responsibility lies with citizens and community organizations. These actors have often been passive rather than demanding inclusion in the formulation and oversight of the budget. Instead these actors have too often focused on making individual demands for resources and services, which conforms to prevalent clientelist

modes of governing. This failure is most likely due to a lack of understanding of their rights and a political culture not yet accustomed to collaborative governing (FUNCEDE, 2002).

Just as with the budget, many mayors have ignored or marginalized the COMUDE in their municipalities. Many COMUDEs are hollow, with no real decision-making being carried out. In fact, as of the end of 2007, no COMUDE existed whatsoever in more than 50 of Guatemala's 333 municipalities (and 5,000 of 17,000 communities lacked a COCODE) (Fernandez, 2007). This situation appears to confirm Fung and Wright's thesis that in the absence of countervailing citizen power, participatory institutions will not lead to authentic participatory governance (2003). It also suggests that absent strong support from, and system of accountability linked to, a central authority, local participatory efforts are often undermined (Fung, 2004).

In a recent survey of 16 COMUDEs, less than half were determined to have basic organization, only three had formalized internal rules and none had functioning committees (Fernandez, 2008). This lack of organization, which may result from an array of specific contextual conditions, cripples the ability of a COMUDE to carry out its role and functions. According to one NGO leader Fernandez interviewed, some mayors are simply ignorant of the laws and functions of the COMUDE, but others see the initiative as a threat and infringement to their power and therefore have no incentive to ensure it functions properly (Fernandez, 2005). As this leader also pointed out, without a well functioning COMUDE, the COCODEs are left in limbo. They have no mechanism to propose their projects and programs and no way to audit the progress of projects and municipal expenditures. The COMUDE serves as the site for these critical participation and oversight functions. It would almost be preferable to have no COMUDE rather than, as in the words of one community representative, for it to be "like a caterpillar without legs: it's alive, it moves, but it doesn't go anywhere" (Fernandez, 2008).

The COCODE system is meant to empower communities to take charge of their development and thus, according to the legislation, to promote "participatory democracy". This would indeed be empowering, but a real threat exists that COCODEs are becoming ensnared by the patronage practices they were established to help to break. When COCODEs have clashed with municipal or departmental authorities, COCODE leaders have been threatened (or worse) and parallel COCODEs have been formed, all with the goal of bringing the COCODEs into the orbit of influence of local political elites (Infopress, 2008). The leader of one NGO that works with COCODEs sees the process of the politicization of COCODEs as a critical threat to what could be a revolutionary instrument for local development (Fernandez, 2005).

These observations reinforce a principal finding of Robert Putnam's Italian case study (which was overshadowed by the focus on social capital) that new institutions tend to adapt themselves to the underlying culture in which they are established (1993). They also underscore findings that clientelism has adapted to decentralization and democratization reforms (Escobar, 2002; Fox, 1994; Garcia-Guadilla, 2002; Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007). Thus, while the COCODEs do offer communities a legal path to relative autonomy and empowerment, that course runs through the maw of centuries of authoritarian tradition. Doubtless, some COCODEs will overcome this obstacle. Many, however, will not.

### **The Challenges and Possibilities of Participatory Governance**

Analysis of participatory governance inevitably involves asking questions about the role of the state and that of society. Some authors see the state as the only actor capable of supporting participatory and collaborative governance (Sirianni, 2009) while others are convinced that empowered participation can only be achieved through the countervailing power of organizations from civil society (Fung and Wright, 2003). Irrespective of this debate, all acknowledge that the state is a key actor in securing conditions for citizen engagement, but one whose actions and motivations should be examined critically.

The tension inherent in the role of governments in participation has been amply demonstrated in Latin America. Governments throughout the region have adopted a variety of participatory institutions and frameworks (see Peruzzotti and Selee, 2009). Yet as we have seen, many of the government institutions, including local governments, charged with implementing these participatory spaces face questions as to their commitment to a truly participatory project. Too often, there is little incentive for the empowering potential of these spaces to be realized. Thus, participation is politically sanitized in an attempt to turn questions of power and interest into neutral development

objectives. Participation becomes empty, often generating results that support, rather than challenge, the status quo (Chhotray and Stoker, 2009). Is this in fact the case with Guatemala's community and municipal development councils?

The limited evidence presented above (see also Gibson, 2006) suggests that Guatemala's attempt to decentralize state powers towards more directly democratic structures is being shaped by local realities. These include, principally, a population unaccustomed to engaged participation and elites unused to sharing power. These twin realities may not portend either the inevitable erosion of authentic democratic governance by clientelism and patronage or the replacement of such authoritarian traditions with new more democratic ones. Instead, outcomes will likely vary with the socio-cultural contexts prevailing in specific communities. Many local governments will continue to utilize previous systems of authority while others will brave new territory, encouraging and promoting democratic participation utilizing all the options at their disposal. The majority of Guatemalan local governments will likely act in ways that leave them somewhere between these poles. Some participatory institutions will be put into place, but will remain un- or under-utilized. These fledgling institutions will provide spaces in which participation exists, but is devoid of any potential for empowerment. Many community leaders will make use of new these spaces, but only to make demands on, or submit petitions to, local governments, rather than to collaborate in the making of decisions and the solving of problems.

Returning to Cornwall and Coelho's call for democratizing participation may allow us to judge how far Guatemala has come in creating participatory institutions that encourage authentic participation and what obstacles remain to be addressed. Cornwall and Coelho identify the need for "supporting processes of social mobilization" for marginalized groups so they might operate effectively in participatory arenas. While Guatemala's system offers legalized avenues for participation, it does not in any way address or validate social mobilization, particularly by marginalized groups. In fact, mobilization may well be hindered by the channeling of participation through the circumscribed avenues of official structures. This is a key weakness of institutionalized participation that is difficult to overcome.

Many Guatemalan municipalities have begun to open women's offices to address the specific concerns of that half of the population. To the extent those offices support women's organization and participation this could be a first step toward increasing the capacities of women to participate, but, it now seems likely it will constitute the only step. Furthermore, these offices exist at the convenience of the mayor. Should he (or in six out of 333 cases, she), perceive the women's office is stepping beyond its proper role, financial or other limits will likely be applied.

Cornwall and Coelho have highlighted the need to examine participatory structures for exclusionary elements. As mentioned above, the Guatemalan system is based on organized communities. The legal framework does not address the potentially exclusionary or fractured character of many communities. Individuals and groups who face exclusion within their communities have little recourse within the system. If the excluded are numerous enough and geographically concentrated, they are legally empowered to form a new community. However, those who do not meet this criterion will likely find their voices silenced or ignored within Guatemala's participatory framework.

Many have pointed out the need for facilitation to empower marginalized actors within participatory institutions (Abers, 2003; Forester, 1999; Fung, 2004). In Guatemala, the representative of one major European Union project working to the build capacity of COCODEs said that it would take five or six more projects like his working simultaneously to have a real impact (Fernandez, 2008). In the absence of external support, much facilitation work is left to municipal civil servants. While there is no *a priori* reason why these individuals could not be potentially effective facilitators, they are often limited by a lack of training in effective facilitation (particularly how to support marginalized individuals and groups), few resources, and political imperatives that may conflict with the goal of empowerment and authentic participation. Thus, the threat of exclusion within the participatory framework is real and remains unresolved.

Finally, Cornwall and Coelho note that participatory institutions must be seen in the context of the broader institutional framework in any given locale and that one island of participation amidst a sea of non-participation will not likely lead to significant social change. These authors further underscore the need for participatory institutions with resources and "teeth". While the COCODE system can be conceived as a broad institutional arena for decision-making at the community and

municipal level, to be combined with *consultas populares* and participation in the municipal budget, the reality is that the COCODEs are often reduced to a technical role that does not extend beyond making requests for development projects that may or may not be honored (similar to any other patronage system, but under the guise of democratic participation).

As for the *consultas* and budgetary oversight, they have not yet been utilized to their potential either. Resources and teeth are lacking in the participatory system in Guatemala. Every aspect of participation ultimately depends on the directives of municipal political leaders. As long as this remains the case, the participatory spaces that do exist will not likely be sites of social change or transformation. They do present spaces in which organized communities and civil societies can press their claims, but they also present an equal opportunity for authoritarian leaders to strengthen and legitimate their positions, diffuse social mobilization, and extend and solidify clientelist networks.

Thus, only a partial legal groundwork has been laid for authentic participation in Guatemala. Many challenges remain. National leaders must imbue the participatory system with the resources and teeth it needs to address local authoritarian cultural mores. These national leaders must themselves respect the participatory processes that they have instituted, even when the voice of the community speaks out against these leaders' proposals and designs. Progressive local governments must become models for the rest of Guatemala by making full use of all the participatory instruments available and taking concrete steps to make participation a catalyst for social mobilization, social learning through deliberation, and the empowerment of marginalized groups.

There are also challenges for Guatemala's civil society organizations. Leaders from this sector must focus their attention on the possibilities that do exist in participatory spaces and challenge municipalities to respect the laws that mandate participation. Civil society must also advance beyond traditional ideas of participation as either petitioning or demanding and focus on its capacity to be a partner in governance. Finally, challenges remain for donors, development professionals, volunteers, and others who find themselves working in Guatemala's communities as potential change agents. These individuals can be facilitators, educators, agitators, collaborators, and can demand that their work must take place through the legal channels of participation, be responsive to the multiple voices within communities and be an opportunity for individuals and groups to learn about empowering participation by practicing it as citizens and partners, rather than clients.

Addressing these challenges would be good news for Guatemala's nascent democracy. For, to borrow from Latin America observer Michael Reid, the pendulum between democracy and dictatorship has stopped swinging in Guatemala, and it is pointed at democracy. However, it remains to be seen what kind of democratic regime will finally emerge. Various adjectives have been used to describe Guatemala's democracy, none of them complimentary. But a democracy with no adjectives may not be sufficient either. Guatemala's most recent governance reforms seem to point to a desire to become a participatory democracy. This is a good start, but only so long as that participation is held to a high standard. For the nation to realize its democratic aspirations, it must devise means to secure authentic and empowering participation. Thus, much work remains. But if a new generation of leaders can create new opportunities to strengthen democracy and tackle problems collaboratively, there is hope for those aspirations to be achieved.

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## THE 2009 HONDURAN CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS: PROSPECTS FOR FUTURE DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT

Tyler A. Darr, Ensign, United States Navy

(The views and opinions of this paper are the author's and do not reflect those of the United States Navy or United States Government)

The early morning sounds of Tegucigalpa, Honduras can be described as anything but peaceful. The clamor of roosters, fruit salesmen, and the occasional weapon discharge pervade the air. On the morning of June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2009, these sounds veiled the movement of Honduran soldiers as they carried their orders to arrest the President of Honduras, José Manuel Zelaya Rosales. President Zelaya was subsequently loaded onto an aircraft and flown to Costa Rica (U.S. Congress. House Subcommittee Report, 2009, p.37). With this act, the nation of Honduras was vaulted onto the international stage and thrust into a media firestorm. Some observers state that these actions effectively ended over a decade of democracy in the region, yet others insist that this was a legitimate expression of the will of the Honduran people. As is often the case, the truth is somewhere in the middle.

The most vexing aspect of the crisis is that despite all attempts to the contrary, the situation cannot be crammed into a neat, well defined box of political norms. The result is that casual observers and the uninformed were apt label June 28<sup>th</sup> a military coup d'état reminiscent of Cold War interventions and military juntas. These swift judgments resulted in immediate condemnations and declarations that Zelaya's removal shattered decades of democratic tradition in Central America. This analysis examines Zelaya's removal; outside of the vacuum constructed by a frenzied media, a polarized foreign policy community, and feeble international and regional institutions. At the same time, the paper proposes to differentiate between the legal removal of President Zelaya from office, and the military's highly illegal expulsion of a Honduran citizen from the country. Actors across the board overstepped their constitutional authority, and addressing each act individually allows for a more thorough understanding of the situation as a whole. Through an exploration of the timetable of events, the players involved, and the Honduran legal and political system; this paper asks the question "why did this happen?" and seeks answers that facilitate both reconciliation and the promotion of a consolidated, liberal democracy.

### **The Events of June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

In order to fully understand the ramifications of the June 28<sup>th</sup> coup, we must have a solid understanding of the events that led up to that day, the actions taken during the coup itself, and what transpired in the days and weeks following. Without this understanding it is easy to jump to inaccurate and hasty conclusions regarding the nature of the sudden change of power in Honduras. Also, an in-depth investigation of the historical nature of Honduran politics is necessary to understand the system that allowed itself to be brought to this degree of conflagration.

On June 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>, 2009, international media outlets and newspapers ran startling images of Honduran soldiers, clad in digital camouflage and armed with the ubiquitous M-16 rifle, climbing under the gates of the Honduran Presidential palace in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. The contingent of about 200 hundred soldiers donned black balaclava masks and stormed the Presidential residence around 0600 in the morning (Associated Press Latin American Service [AP], 2009). The Honduran army troops overpowered the presidential honor guard after a brief standoff and made their way into President Zelaya's bedroom (Malkin, 2009). The Honduran President, still in his pajamas, was placed on a Honduran military transport and flown to Palmerola airbase, about thirty miles north of the capital of Tegucigalpa. From Palmerola, the aircraft continued on to San Jose, Costa Rica, where Zelaya was safely released and made his initial TV appearances (FYI Report *Tegucigalpa Canal 3*, 2009).

At the same time that Mr. Zelaya was being taken away to Costa Rica, Roberto Micheletti, the leader of the Honduran congress, was chosen as the interim president of the country. The Congress first accepted Mr. Zelaya's letter of resignation, which Zelaya insisted he never wrote, and then swore in Mr. Michelleti (Malkin, 2009). In his speech to the nation on Sunday evening Mr. Michelleti stated that "What was done here was a democratic act...Our constitution continues to be valid, our democracy continues to exist" (Cordoba, 2009). Despite Mr. Michelleti's exhortations the nation was

sharply divided; massive protests and counter-protests choked the major cities, and a nine p.m. curfew was imposed on the country to prevent further violence. A large portion of Tegucigalpa lost electrical power and several of the major news stations went off the air (2009). The official government channel 8 and channel 36, which were primarily pro-Zelaya, both ceased broadcasting during the initial hours of the crisis (Flores, 2009). This pre-emptive move of repression and violation of free speech by the interim government was extremely damaging to relations between the two sides.

From Costa Rica, Mr. Zelaya held a press conference on the Venezuelan television station Telesur. Costa Rican President, Oscar Arias, welcomed Zelaya to the country and provided him facilities and the ability to communicate with other Latin American and international leaders. Zelaya used this forum as his first opportunity to implicate the United States in his ouster. Zelaya went on to state that "If the United States is not behind this coup, these coupists (sic) will not be able to stay in power more than 48 hours" (FYI Caracas *Telesur*, 2009). The White House was quick to issue a statement on the events which declared the United States' concern for the state of democracy and civil order in Honduras. At the same time the General Secretary of the Organization of American States, Jose Miguel Insulza, called an emergency session of the group and drafted a statement demanding the immediate return of Zelaya to power (FYI Caracas *Telesur*, 2009).

The day ended with massive pro and counter-Zelaya protests around the presidential residence, forcing the military to step up its posture to prevent chaos. The following days were a blur of confusion, accusations, and counter-accusations. As June came to a close the pace of events surrounding the crisis inside and outside Honduras accelerated at an alarming rate. The month of July was defined by a series of foiled re-entrance attempts by Zelaya and a progressively deteriorating negotiation process.

### **The Events of July 2009**

As it became clear to the international community that the new interim government had no intention of backing down, nations started recalling their ambassadors and shutting off aid in protest of Zelaya's removal. The world looked on as the interim government stood up to an immense amount of international pressure and refused to acquiesce. On June 30<sup>th</sup>, Zelaya traveled to the United Nations General Assembly to speak, and lauded the unanimous adoption of a resolution demanding his reinstatement (Open Source Center [OSC] Caracas TV Report, 2009). Zelaya then traveled to Washington D.C. for an emergency meeting of the Organization of American States, which adopted a resolution calling for Honduras to re-instate Mr. Zelaya within seventy-two hours or face suspension from the group under the authority of Article 21 of the Inter-American Democratic Charter. Zelaya continued on to Panama where he indicated that at the end of the 72 hour deadline he would be entering Honduras with a number of other South American Presidents and the Secretary General of the OAS (OSC Madrid EFE, 2009). At the same time the Honduran congress suspended certain civil rights for a period of 72 hours in order to maintain order in the streets (OSC *El Tiempo*, 2009). The interim government's insistence on this curfew, along with reports of government censoring of the media served to further alienate Michelletti's camp from the international community.

Zelaya attempted to enter the country on July 5<sup>th</sup> in a Venezuelan aircraft, accompanied by the UN General Assembly President, Miguel d'Escoto. The aircraft was turned back by the Honduran military, which blocked the runway with armored personnel carriers and emergency vehicles. After circling the airport several times, the aircraft diverted to Managua and on to El Salvador, where Zelaya met with the Presidents of Argentina, Ecuador, Paraguay and El Salvador to discuss future plans (OSC AP, 2009). This incident also resulted in the shooting death of a Honduran youth participating in the protests at the airport, elevating the consternation and angst towards the interim government. Toncontin Airport in Tegucigalpa was closed for a period of five days to prevent Zelaya's return and to deal with the massive protests and counter-protests that were asphyxiating the city.

When it became apparent that Michelletti would not step down, nor accept Zelaya's return as president, the United States, along with many other nations, backed an initiative to have Oscar Arias, then president of Costa Rica, mediate the crisis (Markey and Rosenberg, 2009). Arias, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1987 for helping to end the brutal civil wars in Central America, helped draft with the Tegucigalpa- San Jose Accords in late July. Negotiations between teams from both sides lasted well into August, September, and October. The main points of contention for the interim Honduran government were clauses calling for Zelaya's return to power and temporary political amnesty for both

sides. Michelleti was insistent that Zelaya would be charged according to the laws as a regular citizen if he were to return to Honduras. Under no circumstances would the interim government accept Zelaya's return to power (CNN, 2009).

### Recent Events

On September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2009 it was confirmed through Venezuelan television network Telesur that Manuel Zelaya had secretly entered Honduras and was taking refuge inside the Brazilian Embassy in Tegucigalpa. President Hugo Chavez, in his statement on the matter said: "I inform you that President Zelaya, traveling for two days, crossing mountains, rivers, risking his life, with only four companions was able to arrive to the capitol city of Tegucigalpa" (Aponte, 2009). Mr. Zelaya ensconced himself in the Brazilian embassy and was locked down by Honduran security forces for the remainder of his stay. Mr. Zelaya's return precipitated a new wave of protests and violence between the two factions. The nights of twenty two and twenty three September saw a number of stores looted and destroyed by Zelaya supporters in Barrio El Pedregal. Zelaya supporters, calling themselves 'the resistance' also blocked major thoroughfares inside of Tegucigalpa and the surrounding areas (OSC *El Herald*, 2009).

Zelaya's clandestine entry into the country and subsequent sit-in at the Brazilian embassy did garner him some more time and negotiations, but as September ended and October dragged on, it became apparent that the negotiations were faltering. A power sharing deal was struck between the two sides at the end of October, but when the Honduran congress failed to re-instate Mr. Zelaya after a week, he pulled out of the deal (Kiernan and Solomon, 2009). Mr. Michelleti made it clear that he intended to hold general elections as scheduled at the end of November. In October and November the two main candidates for President stepped up their campaigns in earnest. Porfirio Lobo, of the conservative National Party was pitted against Liberal Party candidate Elvin Santos. Despite much of the international community refusing to recognize the results of the election, several key countries such as Costa Rica, the United States, Canada, Peru, and Panama indicated that they would be willing to 'reset the clock' after free, fair, and participatory elections in November (Xinhuanet, 2009).

When the November 27<sup>th</sup> elections rolled around, more than 4.6 of the 7.7 million inhabitants of Honduras were registered for the election. Porfirio Lobo, the conservative candidate gained 55.9% of the electorate and was declared the official president-elect of Honduras (Xinhuanet, 2009). Despite Zelaya's calls for Hondurans to boycott the elections voter turnout was around 61% which was higher than the previous election (Casey & Luhnnow, 2009). For the most part the elections, administered by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, were held peacefully throughout the country. Both the International Republican Institute and the National Democratic Institute, who monitored the elections, witnessed "an election free of violence and overt acts of intimidation" (International Republican Institute, 2009). San Pedro Sula, the country's industrial capitol, did have violent confrontations between police and protestors, but they were diffused without serious injury or interruption to the elections (Xinhuanet, 2009). It was also noted that the Supreme Electoral Tribunal "employed new measures to improve the counting and tabulation processes which traditionally have been marred by a lack of transparency and allegations of fraud" (Nunez & Swigert, 2009). President-elect Lobo immediately began pressing the international community for recognition and gained some allies within the first couple of months. Mr. Lobo's argument was that those refusing to recognize the new government "are punishing those who went to vote, who do so every four years, and have nothing to do with what happened on June 28" (Casey and Luhnnow, 2009). This argument, along with reports of legitimacy from election monitoring agencies carried a significant amount of weight in the international community.

On January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2010, the new president of Honduras, Porfirio Lobo Sosa, took the oath of office. Four hours afterwards Lobo allowed Zelaya and his family safe passage to the Dominican Republic through the efforts of that nation's president, Leonel Fernandez. These events effectively signaled the end of the seven month standoff and crisis in Honduras (Llorca & Olson, 2010). The peaceful end to the crisis stands in stark contrast to the extreme tension in the months and weeks leading up to the June 28<sup>th</sup> crisis. The process of reconciliation speaks of the nation's capacity for peace and democratic development, but does not explain why the country found itself in the situation in the first place. How did Honduras go from being considered a stable democracy, to having the Supreme Court order the military to remove the president from his position by force? What factors and events lead to the creation of this extremely complex situation, and at what critical moments could the

crisis have been prevented? The following section attempts to shed light on the answers to these questions through an investigation of the months and weeks leading up to June 28<sup>th</sup>.

### **What Precipitated the Crisis?**

The events of June 28<sup>th</sup> did not occur in a vacuum or without any prior warning. The crisis was months in the making and could have been prevented at a number of opportunities. It is apparent that the international community and media tuned in too late to a situation that had already devolved into an irreparable state. On June 28<sup>th</sup> the Supreme Court and Congress of Honduras removed President Zelaya from his position through their interpretation of the constitution after he violated several standing Honduran laws.<sup>1</sup> This removal was ordered due to a number of factors; including Zelaya's actions and refusal to acknowledge the legitimate power and responsibilities of other branches of government.

The constitution adopted by Honduras in 1982 came after nearly ten years of military rule in the nation. The military rule of Lopez Arellano was initially directed towards reform, but this was hampered by a trend of military councils deposing the leader in power and having them replaced. Finally in 1981 a new constitution was written and Roberto Suazo Cordova assumed the presidency in early 1982. The 1982 constitution provided a first step towards democracy that was long overdue (Rosenberg & Shepherd, 1986 p. 26). This is the longest lasting in the history of the nation. Under this constitution there is some room for change and adaptation as political attitudes evolve, but fundamental flaws exist. One of the most egregious errors in the current version of the constitution is the lack of an expressed or implied ability of the legislature or judicial to remove the executive from office before the end of their term for any reason.<sup>2</sup> This deficiency resulted in an overly powerful executive that can act without fear of removal or any serious consequences.

In his statement to the U.S. House Committee on International Affairs on July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2009, the Honorable Guillermo Perez-Cadalso (2009) stated that:

The military is not in charge of Honduras; the constitutional order remains intact. Our government continues to be led by a civilian Executive Branch and a duly elected Congress, guided by our 1982 constitution and the rule of law. Indeed, it was the proper application of our Constitution and the rule of law that initiated the recent events in Honduras

The recent events to which Mr. Perez-Cadalso refers began much earlier than the actual removal of Mr. Zelaya on June 28<sup>th</sup>. In March of 2009 Mr. Zelaya announced a referendum with the intent of creating a new constitution. This proposal known as 'La cuarta urna' translates to 'the fourth ballot box', in reference to three other unrelated votes scheduled for June 28<sup>th</sup>, the planned day of the referendum ("La Cuarta Urna..." *El Heraldo*, 2009). Two days later the Attorney General of Honduras began an investigation into the legality of this order. On May 8<sup>th</sup>, the Attorney General completed his investigation, declared the referendum illegal, and asked the Administrative Law Council to annul Zelaya's declaration. On three separate occasions in May, the Administrative Law Tribunal issued prohibitions or injunctions on any and all activities that would lead to the carrying out of the referendum (U.S. Congress. House Subcommittee Report, 2009, p.27). As the process continued several risk assessment firms, such as the Latin America Monitor, began indicating that the ballot proposal was an attempt at solidifying consecutive presidential re-election (2009).

While the *proposal* of such a referendum appears insignificant, this move was reminiscent of actions attempted by other presidents in the region who have consolidated power through referendums (Sanchez, 2009). More importantly, Article 239 of the Honduran Constitution states that:

No citizen who has already served as head of the Executive Branch can be President or Vice-President. Whoever violates this law or *proposes its reform* [emphasis added], as well as those that support such violation directly or indirectly, will *immediately* cease in their functions and will be unable to hold any public office for a period of 10 years.

Despite the Appellate Court of Administrative Litigation unanimously declaring that Mr. Zelaya's proposal had violated the constitution, Zelaya pressed on with his proposal. On June 24<sup>th</sup> Zelaya

ordered the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Army General Romeo Vásquez Velasquez, to have the military provide security and distribute the necessary ballots for the referendum. When the military refused this order, Zelaya relieved Chairman Vásquez of his command. This action was followed by the resignation of the Minister of Defense and those of the respective heads of the Honduran army, navy, and air force (Subcommittee Report, 2009 p. 27).

As the tensions between the military and President Zelaya reached a boiling point, the Attorney General requested that the Supreme Court intervene on General Vásquez's behalf. The Supreme Court found the General's dismissal to be unconstitutional, and the Supreme Electoral Council ordered the military to seize the ballots in order to prevent the referendum (Subcommittee Report 2009). President Zelaya urged his supporters to continue distributing ballots on Friday, June 24<sup>th</sup>. Saturday the 25<sup>th</sup> saw the President hold an interview with local newspaper *El País*, in which he stated that the referendum would go on and that the situation in the country was under control (Mendelson, 2009). On June 26<sup>th</sup> Mr. Zelaya led a group of supporters to the air force base adjacent to Toncontin International Airport in Tegucigalpa to seize the referendum poll ballots being guarded by the military. The same day the Supreme Court of Justice issued an arrest warrant<sup>3</sup> for President Zelaya and asked the military to carry out the order, pursuant to Article 272 of the Constitution, which declares the military the rightful guardians of the Constitution (Subcommittee Report, 2009 p. 29-30).

Tensions finally culminated with Mr. Zelaya's removal on June 28<sup>th</sup> by the military. The Honduran Congress went on to vote that day to remove Zelaya from office officially. Of the one hundred and twenty eight members of Congress in attendance, one hundred and twenty three voted to remove Zelaya from office, including a great number of congressmen from his own liberal party (Sanchez, 2009). In justification for their removal and replacement of President Zelaya, the National Congress employed several articles of the constitution. Chief among them were Sections 10 and 20 of Article 205. "Section 10 grants the power to the National Congress to interpret the Constitution;" while "Section 20 of the Constitution gives the National Congress the power to "approve or disapprove" the administrative conduct of the Executive and Judicial branches..."(Gutiérrez, 2009). It follows that without the ability to remove Zelaya from office after his previously listed abuses of power, the National Congress felt compelled to remove him with the help of the military.

Ultimately, it was the employment of the military that proved most damaging to the legitimacy of the orders of the National Congress. After the arrest of Zelaya, the military had him flown out of the country without presenting him to the judicial system for a proper trial. It is unclear whether the military acted far outside of the scope of the arrest warrant, or were interpreting vague orders to the best of their ability. What is clear is that the expulsion was a violation of Article 102 of the Honduran Constitution, which prevents the expatriation of Honduran citizens from the country (Gutiérrez, 2009). While these events are not the singular cause of the crisis, they do go a long way in explaining the events of June 28<sup>th</sup>. Another significant factor is the style and shape of democracy in Honduras which cannot be ignored in any sound analysis.

### **Defining Honduran Democracy**

For a significant period of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Central American democracy was simultaneously defined and hampered by violent conflicts. While Honduras avoided much of the bloodshed on its own territory, it was affected by these events. Since this time, all of the nations in Central America have shifted to democratically elected governments, although they do not fall under the category of *consolidated democracies* (Dominguez & Lindenberg, 1997 p.8). The "Third Wave" of democratization, as defined by Samuel P. Huntington (1993), did not completely saturate the region of. The result of the third wave in Latin America has often been "'electoral democracies' (formal elections are held) but not 'liberal democracies,' in the sense of being open, pluralistic, and egalitarian" (Wiarda & Kline, 2007 p. 29). Consequently, The Freedom House "Map of Freedom" now rates all the nations in Central America with a green (free) or yellow (partly free) rating (Freedom House *Map of Freedom*, 2010). While these colors are inviting, the reality is that that Central American nations are dominated by gang violence, government corruption, and foreign intervention. Also, the style of political participation in the region is distinct from what we understand it to be in the United States or Europe. Despite these inherent and systematic flaws, Hondurans have consistently shown faith in their democratic institutions.

As earlier stated, the circumstances of the 2009 situation in Honduras were entirely unique. Throughout the period of violence and upheaval in Central America, Honduras had more or less

managed to stay stable and safe. Mr. Donald Schulz (1992), in his study for the U.S. Army War College, sheds light Honduras' rare political framework in this way:

In short, Honduran society was characterized by an elaborate network of interlocking interest groups and political organizations which mediated conflicts and channeled personal ambitions that might otherwise have proven explosive. The constant struggle within and between competing groups has constituted the essence of Honduran politics. Loyalties are always shifting and often for sale; this has enabled both military and civilian authorities to use state resources (jobs, bribes, and favors) to defuse potentially destabilizing movements before they become dangerous. At the same time, the very fact that Honduran elites have been flexible enough to allow political space for so many groups has meant that the system has been able to co-opt important socioeconomic and political forces that were denied participation in neighboring lands.

As evidenced by Mr. Schulz's statements, a rare combination of factors and events allowed Honduras to skirt much of the revolutionary violence of its neighbors during the perilous years of democratic formation in Central America.

Mr. Schulz's assertions can be interpreted in one of two ways. The first interpretation is that the social unrest 'release valves' failed at the critical moment in June of 2009. The second interpretation is that the valves were functioning as designed in order to prevent the gestation of a more complex and damaging situation. If Honduras has typically avoided the sectarian political violence of its neighbors, it logically follows that there must have been a set of extreme circumstances that forced the adoption of such unorthodox measures in June of 2009. It is unclear whether those responsible for Zelaya's ouster were motivated by a genuine regard for democratic principles, or acting to preserve the social and economic status quo. It is clear however, that the development of one political relationship in particular was a motivating factor.

### **The ALBA Connection**

In 1998, very few Hondurans would have taken note of the rise of a young, ambitious Venezuelan army colonel to the position of President of Venezuela. In the summer of 2010 many Hondurans would not only know this name, but come to associate it with many of the political problems in their nation. Despite the distance of almost 1,400 miles that lies between the capitals of Tegucigalpa, Honduras and Caracas, Venezuela, President Hugo Chavez slowly exerted growing influence in the Honduran capitol. President Zelaya and President Chavez began their courtship when the Venezuelan President first visited Central America in January of 2008. The same month Zelaya announced that Honduras would be joining Petrocaribe, a Venezuelan subsidized soft-loan oil initiative. Honduras and Venezuela over time continued to strengthen their ties and engagement (Bushby, 2008).

The primary vehicle for this engagement was the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas, or ALBA for short. ALBA has been defined as "an initiative designed to encourage greater trade, solidarity and exchange between nations standing outside of the usual market strictures..." which is succeeding in furthering "South American integration and moving away from U.S. influence, as well as the rejection of the neo-liberal model..." (Kolzof, 2008 p. 54-56). President Zelaya announced that Honduras would be joining ALBA in July of 2008, thereby solidifying the relationship between Honduras and Hugo Chavez's ever-expanding network of socialist-leaning presidents in the region (Bushby, 2008). It is difficult to imagine that President Chavez was interested in Honduras for purely economic reasons. The country's capacity for oil consumption was not significant enough to warrant so much attention from President Chavez. As President Chavez consolidated his network through the hemisphere, it would have been difficult not to take note of the horse-riding, cowboy-like personality being cultivated by President Zelaya. Chavez already had a strong ally in the region in Daniel Ortega, the President of Nicaragua. Zelaya presented an opportunity for President Chavez to add an additional country to his group of Bolivarian nations. Dr. Ray Walsler of the Heritage Foundation writes that; "Following Zelaya's June 28 expulsion, ALBA has worked overtime to make Zelaya the poster child for the "new democracy" in Latin America, portraying him as a humble reformer standing against corrupt elites, outdated institutions, and the evil military of Honduras" (Walsler, 2009). The image propagated

by ALBA in this case is exactly the type of populist propaganda employed by aspiring caudillos in Latin America for centuries.

The concept of a *caudillo* is all too familiar to the population of Latin America. The term is often used in the region to describe a populist authoritarian. David Luhnnow (2009) presents the most comprehensive definition of the term and its implications:

...modern day caudillos use a combination of personal magnetism, patronage—and sometimes, selective brute force. In Latin America, the strength of the caudillo weakened the region's institutions. Political parties centered on caudillos often collapsed after the caudillo's death and never professionalized. As a result, Latin Americans seem perennially ready to trust their fate to a providential "man on horseback" who comes to their nation's rescue, rather than on the ability of the nation's institutions to provide security and prosperity

President Zelaya rallied a large majority of both the rural and urban, under-educated populace as he subtly but effectively strong-armed the other branches of Honduran government.

In modern Latin America, the *caudillo* is often manifested in the form of a democratically elected president who incrementally acquires increasing authority by undermining otherwise independent government institutions. The executive branch tends to be especially powerful in Central America, where cronyism is common and the ruling elite are a small group. One of the most persistent problems that arises from this arrangement is that members of the executive branch operate with impunity. This trait often directly correlates to another concept in Latin American politics, *continuismo*, which is a tendency to extend one's rule beyond what was originally planned or allowed (Sanchez, 2009). President Zelaya fit this paradigm and attempted to exert power beyond the limitations of his office on a number of occasions. In one instance Mr. Zelaya attempted to push through a highly inefficient and controversial vehicle use and consumption limitation law against the will of both the Supreme Court and National Congress. Although ultimately unsuccessful, this attempt at overstepping the bounds of presidential authority became emblematic of the Zelaya administration (Freedom House *Honduras Freedom Assessment, 2009*).

In Hugo Chavez, President "Mel" Zelaya saw a benefactor, protector, and example to follow. Zelaya looked on as President Chavez gradually secured his power through the erosion of Venezuelan democratic institutions and limitations. The rest of the Honduran government recognized this transition and felt compelled to act preemptively in order to avoid a similar situation in Honduras. These were the circumstances that compelled the National Congress, Supreme Court, and military to remove Mr. Zelaya from power. In fact, "in Mr. Micheletti's take on events, it was his government who avoided another, slow-motion coup—by Mr. Zelaya himself. Mr. Michelletti's supporters say Mr. Zelaya was a dictator in the making, a modern-day *caudillo*..." (Luhnnow, 2009). Mr. Zelaya's inclinations towards *caudillismo* caused a deep rift in Honduran society which had to be addressed at one point or another. The final section addresses the reactions of the various international and domestic players to the crisis, and how this affected both the interim and newly elected governments' ability to foster democratic development in Honduras.

### **Foreign Policy Community Response**

Through research for this paper, two trends have become apparent. The first is that after the initial media firestorm died down, Honduras was once again relegated to its previous third world backwater status. The dismal amount of *scholarly* writing published on this incredibly significant event in Latin American politics is indicative of this status. The lack of publications may be a product of either Honduras' real or perceived political insignificance in the global scheme, or the relatively short period of time which has elapsed since the crisis. The second trend is that within the foreign policy community, there is very little un-biased writing on the subject of Central American politics.

The current generation of scholars on the subject is absolutely polarized due to historical events which shaped their political perspectives. Most Central American scholars have yet to successfully separate their feelings and opinion on events like the Iran-Contra affair from their analyses of current politics in the region. Unfortunately, for both the Hondurans and the scholarly community, this was very much the case with the 2009 crisis. Political bias was evident on both sides of the spectrum. Respected conservative experts such as Kevin Casas-Zamora and Otto Reich

weighed in, the latter having stated that the Honduran crisis was akin to the opportunities presented by Reagan's invasion of Grenada (Reich, 2009). The Honduran crisis was a singular event with its own set of circumstances and invoking Cold War imagery inhibits the scrutiny necessary for such a crisis. On the other end of the spectrum, The North American Congress on Latin America published numerous articles on the crisis, and from the outset their intentions were clear. Inflammatory titles such as "Honduras: Repression Intensifies, Resistance Deepens, and Washington Promotes Recognition of the Post-Coup Regime" leave little room for substantive, thoughtful analysis of the situation (Fitzpatrick-Behrens, 2010). When the scholarly community fails to produce significant research on a subject, the international community is forced to turn to mass media, which can have damaging effects on perceptions of events, as was the case in Honduras.

### **U.S. and Foreign Media Response**

The response from U.S. and foreign media outlets was predictable and disappointing. Twenty four hour news networks leaped at the opportunity to report on a coup d'état in Central America. The media reaction can be characterized as melodramatic and ill-informed about the situation on the ground. Pictures of armed soldiers clad in digital camouflage entering the presidential palace and confronting crowds were broadcast to the world without a serious investigation of Zelaya's departure. Following the initial 'shock and awe' stage of media frenzy, some outlets did begin a more thoughtful analysis of the subject. However, by the time this occurred the images were burned into the minds of the readers without the proper explanatory context.

There are six major national newspapers in Honduras. While radio and television are used widely, most Hondurans still receive their news via newsprint. *La Tribuna* and *El Heraldo* are both center-right papers, while *El Tiempo* is mostly left and *El Periodico* is further right leaning. Finally, *La Prensa*, based out of the industrial center, San Pedro Sula, is often favorable towards the military and government sectors (Karich, 2009). These newspapers all covered Zelaya's push for the Cuarta Urna extensively and had a vested interest in providing accurate reporting during the crisis. Events were reported often but with the bias that comes from the desire to make few enemies in order to have a seat at the power table, regardless of the outcome. These major outlets carried stories related to Zelaya's corrupt politics but were reluctant to investigate in depth some of the more troubling stories of the violation of civil liberties and human rights by the interim government.

### **International Community Response**

The international community and regional institutions, in an effort to appear "for democracy" made similar mistakes as the media. These institutions acted within a culture of fear, fueled by a twenty four hour media firestorm, and condemned the government takeover without really understanding what precipitated the crisis. In an effort to follow the "letter of the law" on democracy promotion, the "spirit of the law" was shortchanged. What is surprising about the crisis is that despite a general consensus and resolution by the OAS and international community. Honduras was able to withstand the international pressure until the elections and prevent Zelaya's return to power, which many critics saw as inevitable (Drezner 2009).

Within six days of Zelaya's removal from the country, Honduras had been suspended by the OAS in an attempt to persuade the interim government to return him to power. The unanimous 33-0 vote to remove Honduras isolated the nation and allowed for the possibility of sanctions and the withdrawal of much needed financial aid to the country. Much of the rest of the international community, including Western Europe followed suit, isolating Honduras to an extent not seen even in the treatment of the defiant, authoritarian and more dangerous regimes of Cuba, Iran, or North Korea. In a country with little strategic significance and few known petroleum resources it is politically undemanding to support "democratic institutions". Many nations seized the opportunity to gain a future bargaining chip with their immediate condemnation of the situation.

### **United States Response**

Within hours of the news of Zelaya's ouster from Honduras, it became apparent that the United States was going to distance itself from the actions of the interim Honduran government. One of the most negatively defining moments of President George W. Bush's administration, in Latin America's eyes, was the appearance of acceptance for the April 2002 coup attempt in Venezuela. Reacting to this, the Obama administration seemed compelled to avoid this type of imagery, especially

at such an early point in the administration. President Obama immediately issued the following statement”

I am deeply concerned by reports coming out of Honduras regarding the detention and expulsion of President Mel Zelaya. As the Organization of American States did on Friday, I call on all political and social actors in Honduras to respect democratic norms, the rule of law and the tenets of the Inter-American Democratic Charter. Any existing tensions and disputes must be resolved peacefully through dialogue free from any outside interference (White House. Office of the Press Secretary, 2009).

This statement is indicative of part one, of what would come to comprise the three stages of the United States’ response to the Honduran crisis. This first stage was the initial statement of condemnation and immediate calls for Zelaya’s reinstatement within the first few days of the crisis.

The second stage, which lasted a number of months, was Secretary of State Clinton’s effort to mediate the situation with Costa Rican President Oscar Arias. This stage was largely a diplomatic balancing act as details on the crisis started to emerge and become public. Within the United States, the State Department was criticized for not participating in the original Congressional hearing held on the crisis on July 10<sup>th</sup>. Secretary Clinton and the administration attempted to put their weight behind the mediation efforts of President Oscar Arias, while maintaining a safe distance from and possibility of implicating the United States in the coup (Casas-Zamora [Interviewed by Bernard Gwertzman, 2009]). The administration did win a number of allies in the region by refusing to intervene on either side to restore Zelaya or support the interim government, which some have said will disarm critics of U.S. policies in the region (Noriega, 2010). The decision not to support the new government however left many in Honduras feeling abandoned by the nation claiming to be the defender of democracy.

The third stage, in which the U.S. government currently finds itself, consists of the acceptance of the newly elected government and the attempts to help it reform the system that allowed such events to develop in the first place. This stage is best defined as the ‘quiet exit’ scenario, which is the best the U.S. could have hoped for concerning its image. By accepting the November 29<sup>th</sup> elections and recognizing the newly elected government of President Lobo, the administration managed to extricate itself with minimal damage, and maintain a positive relationship with Honduras (Cardenas, 2009). This historically strong relationship of trust has been severely damaged however and will need to be mended through cooperation and a genuine commitment to improvement by both countries.

### **The Way Forward for Democracy in Central America**

One of the most compelling arguments that democracy survived the 2009 Honduran presidential crisis is that the fact that on January 21<sup>st</sup>, de facto president, Roberto Michelletti, announced that he would be leaving the presidential palace, and ceasing to make public appearances in an official capacity. This effectively signaled the peaceful transition of power to the new democratically elected government of Porfirio “Pepe” Lobo (HRN *La Voz de Honduras*, 2010). Since winning the November elections, Lobo has gained some of support and recognition needed to lift Honduras out of the crisis. President Lobo is also riding a wave of popular support in his country. A March 2010 Gallup poll of over 1,200 adults showed that eighty five percent of Hondurans feel that Lobo is the rightful leader of Honduras (U.S. Department of State. Office of Research, 2010). These are compelling numbers for a president that many nations still refuse to recognize as the legitimate leader of Honduras.

President Lobo cannot sustain this level of initial popularity indefinitely. In fact, it will most likely ebb as he attempts to address the very serious problems confronting his nation. Poverty, crime, and corruption top the list of these problems. Unless *serious* and *meaningful* measures are adopted quickly in these three key areas, Lobo will lose his mandate for leadership and governance. The most important of these three areas to be addressed is that of elite corruption. Despite the fact that the interim government survived and in fact prevailed, “Honduran elites ought to take the past year as a wake-up call that a sizeable portion of the Honduran population feels alienated from current political and economic arrangements and wants (and deserves) something better...” (Cardenas, 2009). The predominant theory regarding the ousting of Zelaya is that it was undertaken by the ruling ‘oligarchy’ of Honduras, who felt threatened by Zelaya’s leftward shift. This also implies that the removal of

Zelaya has only produced more of the corrupt and exclusionary politics which were the initial sources of the crisis.

The accusation by some that "The Honduran political elite are reading this outcome as an unconditional victory and, above all, as a license to return to politics as usual, as though nothing happened..." could carry some truth, and is potentially damaging to Lobo's fledgling administration (Casas-Zamora, 2009). In order to counter this perception, Lobo must seriously address the corruption which is endemic to Honduran politics. He can do this by creating and enforcing a zero tolerance policy for politicians caught stealing from the state. This will benefit the nation two-fold. First, it will prevent government funds from being drained into the pockets of corrupt officials, a problem which has long plagued the nation. Second, it will put a stop to the alienation of the populace by the ruling elites. Political participation is a mainstay of a liberal democracy, and until Hondurans feel that they can trust their officials, they will not invest themselves and their futures with democracy in Honduras.

As it becomes increasingly apparent that Honduras will not be participating or benefitting from the ALBA model of economic dependency and support, Honduras will be forced to find a viable solution to address the grinding poverty that impedes forward momentum in the nation. A viable solution to the poverty problem has already been created and implemented, albeit ineffectively, in the form of the 2001 Honduran Poverty Reduction Strategy. This program, created to facilitate the proper expenditure of funds from the Millennium Challenge Corporation, has thus far failed to accomplish its goals on a wide scale. The new administration has the momentum and public support to institutionalize this plan and prioritize a number of highly effective public projects to re-ignite the program. Attempts at implementing serious infrastructure projects in order to facilitate an expansion of vital industries such as tourism, clean energy, and agriculture will also yield benefits for the Poverty Reduction Strategy (Cuesta, 2007). Without a serious, well publicized, and dedicated plan to address poverty, the new administration has little chance of implementing truly effective democratic reforms.

While the issues of poverty, corruption, and violence must be addressed in order to stabilize democracy in Honduras, there exists a more profoundly damaging, yet nuanced issue that must be addressed by the Lobo administration. Acknowledging and remedying the grievous errors made by the interim government in the areas of civil and human rights violations is pivotal to the healing of the nation. Creating a safer environment for journalists and activists is also paramount to legitimizing the new government. President Obama recently made a call to Honduran President Lobo to commend him for his leadership, but urged strong and thorough investigations of the "suspicious killings of a number of journalists and civic activists" (The White House. Office of the Press Secretary, 2010). This trend will prove to be incredibly damaging to Honduran democracy if it is not seriously and immediately addressed by Lobo's government. In the wake of Zelaya's removal, having a journalistic community that can write and print free of fear, is the greatest advantage that the government can give itself.

### **Conclusions and Future Democratic Prospects**

Rarely do armed soldiers escorting a democratically elected leader out of the country signal the opportunity for democratic development, especially in Latin America. In the case of Honduras, however, that is exactly what happened on June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2009. After a long period of disregard for the rule of law and the constitution of Honduras by President Manuel Zelaya, Honduras' democratic institutions held him accountable for his actions. This removal, and the events that followed, do not fit any of the political models yet developed for the advancement of democracy. In fact, Zelaya's ouster is antithetical to the typical democratic promotion and protection paradigms in Latin America. This however, does not signify that there is not value or merit in its outcome.

The new Honduran government finds itself in a sink-or-swim crossroads scenario. If it succeeds, it may be lauded as the first democratic revolution of its kind in the region. However, if the status quo of elitism and political and socio-economic alienation are maintained, history will not be kind to Mr. Lobo or Mr. Michelletti. If it does succeed, the international community must decide what course of action it will take should other similar actions occur. Will we take the time to understand the situation and analyze it critically? Or, will we react on impulse and fear in order to protect the image and not the substance of democracy. There are many lessons to be learned from the situation in Honduras, and should they be ignored, situations similar to that of the 2009 Honduran Presidential crisis will continue to arise.

## Epilogue

This paper was originally written in March and April of 2010. Since that time a number of developments have transpired which are pertinent and helpful in better understanding the situation. On January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2011, President Lobo reached the one year in office milestone. In that year, the government of Honduras has been recognized by over 100 countries, but remains suspended from the Organization of American States (AP 2011).

More importantly, the Honduras Truth and Reconciliation Commission opened in Tegucigalpa on May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2010. This commission, due to submit its report in January of 2011 is tasked with addressing the crisis, its causes, and repercussions (United Nations Department of Public Information, 2010). Similar commissions in Chile, Argentina, Peru, Guatemala, and El Salvador have been somewhat successful in facilitating a peaceful national dialogue. This commission and their report have become even more vital as the number of murders of journalists has continued to rise. 10 journalists were murdered in Honduras in 2010 by 'unknown assailants'. One government official went so far as to deny that any of the murders were related to the work of the journalists. The majority of those killed were reporting on the narcotics trade or writing political opposition to the government. In at least one case, the facts point toward the journalists reporting on the narcotics trade (Trudeau, 2011). However, the government's failure to vigorously investigate the murders suggests a tacit complicity to many critics. The culture of fear under which journalists work is damaging President Lobo's legitimacy and eroding the already-damaged rule of law.

One promising development has been the groundswell of Honduran civil society as a result of the crisis. The National Front for Popular Resistance (FNRP) or more commonly, *Frente*, has emerged as the largest and most vocal anti-Lobo block. The movement is largely peaceful and is composed primarily of labor, women's, and indigenous populations (Frank, 2010). Tangible results and meaningful change in Honduras are certainly possible if both the Lobo government and the *Frente* are willing to participate in the new political dialogue, while acknowledging past mistakes.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Most notably Zelaya violated Article 239 of the Honduran Constitution, which is explained in greater detail in following sections of the paper.

<sup>2</sup> In her report to the United States Congress, Norma Gutiérrez cites Decree 175-2003, which repealed the section of Article 205, Section 15 that previously allowed for impeachment of a government official.

<sup>3</sup> Available from Corte Suprema de Justicia, Comunicado Especial, June 20, 2009, at 4, *available at* <http://www.poderjudicial.gob.hn>. Reproduced in Norma Gutiérrez's report to United States Congress. Page 4.

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## WHILE THE UNITED STATES SLEPT, SOUTH AMERICA WALKED

By Thomas Andrew O'Keefe\*  
Stanford University

### I. INTRODUCTION

Since the terrorist attacks on the United States mainland in September 2001, the strong political and economic influence that the United States once wielded over South America has steadily eroded as a result of rising new global economic powers and a multiplicity of self-inflicted foreign policy fiascos under the Bush administration that forced officials in Washington, D.C. to turn their attention elsewhere in the world. Despite initial promising rhetoric from the Obama administration of a new relationship with the South American continent premised on a partnership, particularly on the issues of energy security and climate change, the loss of influence continues. The United States remains mired in intractable conflicts in Western Asia, its economic recovery tenuous, and a highly partisan political system at the Federal level makes it impossible to achieve a consensus on addressing major issues of importance to the future of not only the country but the planet.

South America has taken advantage of the lack of attention from Washington, D.C. during the past decade to solidify regional efforts that bring leaders from a myriad of ideologies together to tackle problems that have long bedeviled the continent. Not surprisingly, given it is largest country in South America and has the biggest population and economy, Brazil finds itself at the center of these efforts. Despite this, Brazil has avoided assuming an overt and aggressive leadership style preferring to work through regional or multilateral frameworks. In part this reflects a conscious desire not to be seen as replacing the United States as the new hegemonic power in the region, something that would generate inevitable resentment and backlash from its smaller neighbors.

The purpose of this article is to explore the Brazilian-led initiatives of the past decade in South America and discuss their achievements and shortcomings. This article also examines how these initiatives have the potential to complement a visionary U.S. policy for the continent that supports goals that are of mutual interest to the inhabitants of both North and South America. For the latter to succeed, however, it will require a major paradigm shift among U.S. policy makers that appreciates South America's new role a political and economic power on the global stage. At the same time it will also require that Brazil take on the type of responsibilities associated with responsible global leadership that may occasionally demand sacrificing short term national gain in favor of long term regional stability. In that regard, Brazil may also find it necessary to rethink its traditionally strong opposition to anything that limits its sovereign powers in favor of the establishment of strong regional institutional bodies.

### II. THE STEADY EROSION OF US POLITICAL CLOUT IN LATIN AMERICA SINCE THE ADMINISTRATION OF GEORGE W. BUSH

The inauguration of George W. Bush as 43rd President of the United States was greeted with cautious optimism throughout Latin America. Bush had previously been the governor of Texas and had encouraged cross-border cooperation between his state and Mexico. The fact that Bush's first foreign visit was to Mexico City and not Ottawa, thereby breaking a long-standing tradition by American Presidents, further fed this guarded optimism. During its first year in office, the Bush administration exhibited interest in reforming U.S. immigration policies by recognizing the need to facilitate the legalization of millions of undocumented workers, most of them from Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>1</sup> The terrorist attacks in the northeastern United States on September 11, 2001 quickly brought any initial heightened concern shown to countries south of the border to an abrupt halt. The United States became preoccupied with border security as well as Central Asia and the Middle East, eventually leading to the invasion of Iraq, a quagmire that continues to consume billions of dollars in resources on a weekly basis.<sup>2</sup>

The pre-emptive U.S. invasion of Iraq in search of supposed weapons of mass destruction that proved to be non-existent was never approved by the United Nations (UN) Security Council. The United States was unable to secure a unanimous vote approving the invasion from the permanent

members of the Security Council as well as a majority of the temporary members that included Chile and Mexico. This was despite a public apology made by the then U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell for acts committed by the Nixon administration that contributed to the overthrow of Chilean President Salvador Allende on September 11, 1973 and veiled threats not to ratify the Chile-U.S. free trade agreement. The actual invasion of Iraq in March 2003 was therefore illegal under Public International Law and revived memories of the worst excesses of historical US violations of national sovereignty throughout Latin America.<sup>3</sup>

The Fourth Summit of the Americas held in the seaside city of Mar del Plata, Argentina, on November 4-5, 2005 signaled the demise of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) project that had been greeted with enthusiasm by Western Hemisphere governments when it was first announced a decade earlier in Miami. Although 28 of the 34 participating countries in the Western Hemisphere supported a US proposal to reinstate FTAA negotiations in early 2006, the four MERCOSUR countries (*i.e.*, Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay) and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela refused. At an alternative "People's Summit of the Americas" held in a large soccer stadium across town, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez delighted the crowds with fiery denunciations of the FTAA as a project designed to make Latin America and the Caribbean the economic vassals of US imperialism.

The election of Barack Hussein Obama to the White House in November 2008 was greeted in Latin America and the Caribbean---as in much of the rest of the world--- with relief. The new U.S. president, the first with visible African ancestry, came across as charismatic, articulate, and intelligent and promised to put an end to the divisive unilateralism that had characterized the foreign policy of his predecessor. Nothing during the campaign indicated, however, that an Obama presidency would renew U.S. interest in working with its hemispheric neighbors to resolve mutual problems. In truth, Obama's campaign threats to withdraw his country from the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) implied just the opposite. Furthermore, candidate Obama only once gave a policy address on Latin America and the Caribbean. That one speech was in May 2008 before the right-wing Cuban American National Foundation in Miami. The speech was intended primarily to attract votes from Cuban-Americans and increase support for three Cuban-Americans running as Democrats in Florida against three entrenched Cuban-American Republicans for seats in the US House of Representatives.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, policy proposals for Cuba dominated Obama's address in Miami, including a pledge to retain a trade embargo older than he. Obama also pledged to fight drug trafficking in Colombia, but this was undermined by his subsequently expressed opposition to ratification of the Colombia-U.S. free trade agreement and enhancing opportunities for Colombians to engage in alternative export activities not centered on the drug trade.

The Fifth Summit of the Americas in Port of Spain, Trinidad in April 2009 served as an expensive debutante ball for Obama for which the hapless taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago were saddled with paying much of the tab. Underscoring the clever politician that he is, Obama diverted attention from the fact that the United States was unable to offer anything that the rest of the Western Hemisphere needed or wanted by saying he was there to "listen". The fact that the United States was not in a position to commit itself to anything in Port of Spain was understandable. The United States economy was still in a free fall with the biggest U.S. banks teetering on bankruptcy, the number of unemployed Americans dramatically increasing, and a foreign policy agenda dominated by withdrawing U.S. troops from Iraq, stabilizing Afghanistan, and resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The scant attention the Obama administration continues to pay the Western Hemisphere after the Trinidad Summit displays a shocking ignorance of the importance of the region for the long term economic health of the United States. For example, nearly half of all U.S. imports of crude oil and refined petroleum products come from the Western Hemisphere (versus 21 percent from the Persian Gulf).<sup>5</sup> That proportion has the potential to increase in the future in light of recent discoveries of massive off-shore oil deposits in Brazil. Trinidad and Tobago is already the largest source of Liquefied Natural Gas imported by the U.S.<sup>6</sup> Increased use of bio-fuels and other alternative energy resources by the United States, coupled with the need to establish a workable "cap and trade" program on carbon emissions, requires enhanced not reduced cooperation with countries in the Western Hemisphere. At the same time, the U.S. pay-as-you-go social security system is increasingly sustained by a steady inflow of young immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>7</sup>

### III. THE ENERGY AND CLIMATE PARTNERSHIP OF THE AMERICAS

At the margins of the Fifth Summit of the Americas in Trinidad, the U.S. delegation floated the idea of establishing an Energy and Climate Partnership of the Americas. Precisely what this initiative would consist of was left for a June 2009 meeting of energy ministers in the Peruvian capital.<sup>8</sup> At the June meeting in Lima, U.S. Energy Secretary Steven Chu was noticeably absent. He preferred to address the delegates in a prepared speech delivered through video conferencing technology that permitted no opportunity for debate or intense discussion. Perhaps not surprisingly, the meeting concluded without any firm commitments on energy security, alternative energy promotion, or even common goals for confronting climate change. Among the few concrete achievements was a bilateral agreement signed by U.S. and Peruvian officials to establish a Regional Energy Efficiency Center. For its part, the Mexican government agreed to fund a Regional Wind Center.<sup>9</sup> The U.S. delegation also proposed a "Low Carbon Communities Program" by which the Department of Energy will "partner with countries in the region to provide technical assistance and limited funding to develop building standards and adopt modern urban planning strategies including transit-oriented development to achieve low carbon communities."<sup>10</sup> Besides being presumptuous, given that many South American cities such as Bogotá (Colombia) and Curitiba (Brazil) are already well ahead of their U.S. counterparts in substantially reducing carbon emissions, critics point out that this new effort appears remarkably similar to the Clean Cities International Program first proposed by the Clinton administration with Chile in the 1990's.<sup>11</sup> That initiative was ultimately hampered by a lack of funding. Given the massive fiscal deficit amassed by the United States in recent years and the need for major cuts to the federal budget for the foreseeable future, Low Carbon Communities appears doomed to the same fate as its predecessor proposed in the 1990's during a period of fiscal surplus.

An Energy and Climate Partnership that seeks to integrate energy markets throughout the Western Hemisphere can provide the participating nations with enhanced energy security. Latin America alone currently accounts for 13.8 percent of world oil output but consumes only 8.1 of global oil production.<sup>12</sup> The prospects for a fully integrated hemispheric energy market in traditional fossil fuels are currently hampered, however, by the fact that not all the major fossil fuel producers utilize market mechanisms to set prices. In addition, some governments such as Argentina and Peru impose restrictions on exports, while others such as Mexico severely limit private sector involvement in the petroleum sector. These problems are political in nature and not insurmountable if the right type of leadership and diplomatic acumen is applied. The truth is that the limitations of nationalistic petroleum policies and market interventions are already becoming evident as reserves continue to shrink and energy shortages abound in those countries pursuing this route. Up until now, however, the United States has not exhibited the required leadership role or made the necessary resource commitments to turn the Energy and Climate Partnership of the Americas into a reality. For example, it took a year for the first Energy and Climate Ministerial of the Americas to be held in Washington, D.C. on April 15-16, 2010. One reason for the long delay in holding a Ministerial after ECPA was first proposed at the Fifth Summit of the Americas in Trinidad was the debilitating turf battle between the *Clintonistas* in the U.S. State Department and the Obama political appointees at the U.S. Department of Energy over who would have the lead role in representing the United States. The fact that Energy Secretary Chu and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton were both keynote speakers at the first ECPA Ministerial in April 2010 indicated that this dispute had finally been resolved in favor of a joint, cooperative inter-departmental approach.

Similarly, domestic political constraints in the United States currently undermine the feasibility of an integrated Western Hemisphere market limited to renewable energy resources. The United States maintains a corn based ethanol program that cost U.S. taxpayers an estimated US\$ 9.2 to 11 billion in 2008 in subsidy programs.<sup>13</sup> These subsidies, when combined with the 2.5 percent *ad valorem* duty, a surcharge of 14.7 cents per liter, as well as restrictive volume caps, currently keep out less costly, more efficiently produced, and environmentally friendlier sugar-based ethanol from Brazil.<sup>14</sup> For the time being, the U.S. Congress has shown itself resistant to any attempt to remove the protection and subsidies provided to corn-based ethanol produced in the United States.<sup>15</sup> Given the political capital expended by the Obama administration in enacting health care reform and the limited capital still available to pass other pressing legislation, it is unlikely to want to engage in a battle to liberalize imports of ethanol and other biofuels that directly compete with U.S. production. Furthermore, the difficulties confronting the Obama administration in getting Congress to approve any

type of climate change related legislation have been greatly exacerbated by the Republicans gaining control of the House of Representatives following the mid-term elections in November 2010.<sup>16</sup>

An important pillar of the Energy and Climate Partnership of the Americas should be the establishment of a Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) limited to the Western Hemisphere. Under the current UN administered CDM, credits can be issued to a developed country and its companies for financing projects in the developing world (*e.g.*, building a more expensive thermal plant fueled by natural gas or a hydro dam to generate electricity instead of a cheaper coal powered generator) that reduces global greenhouse gas emissions and would not have been built but for the funding emanating from the rich country donor. The credits received through the CDM can then be used to offset mandated emission reduction targets at home.

Unlike the multilateral CDM established by the Kyoto Protocol, a hemispheric version would be less susceptible to the type of fraud that plagues the current UN administered system.<sup>17</sup> This is not only because of the smaller number of countries involved, but also because of the plethora of potential institutions in the Western Hemisphere that can more effectively administer a hemispheric cap-and-trade program. For example, the Andean Development Corporation (CAF) already oversees a Latin American carbon market through the registration and issuance of certified reductions in the transportation sector. The CAF has also signed contracts for carbon emission sales with public and private agencies (including Spain's Ibero-American Carbon Initiative) and investment funds resulting in new energy generation facilities using renewable resources, forestry related activities, and an expansion of biofuel production.

A CDM limited to the Western Hemisphere provides a way to move the Caribbean and Central America away from their traditional heavy reliance on fossil fuels. It also provides a means for sharply diminishing Brazil's role as a top source of global carbon emissions. In contrast to the situation in China or the developed world, the bulk of Brazil's greenhouse gas emissions come from the burning of its tropical rain forests. The continued burning of trees in Brazil, home to the 65 percent of the Amazon rain forest, also exacerbates global climate change given the important role the Amazon plays in naturally sequestering greenhouse gases and its impact on regional rainfall patterns. While forest conservation or reforestation projects can be used to obtain carbon offsets under the current multilateral CDM, Brazil---citing sovereignty concerns---has so far refused to permit any type of Amazonian conservation or sustainable use initiative to generate carbon credits. Brazil would be less likely to resist an effort to utilize projects in the Amazon to gain carbon offsets under a CDM limited to the Western Hemisphere, particularly if as part of a grand bargain, the United States agreed to eliminate its current arsenal of tariffs, hefty surcharges, quota restrictions, and subsidies that effectively keep out Brazilian sugar-based ethanol. In light of the previously discussed difficulty in getting the U.S. Congress to get rid of its ruinous corn-based ethanol program or pass a climate change bill, however, a hemispheric CDM seems unlikely at this point.

#### IV. SOUTH AMERICA PULLS AWAY FROM THE UNITED STATES

Whereas the United States was the destination for a majority of Latin American and Caribbean exports before 2000 as well as a source of much of the region's imports, that is certainly no longer the case today.<sup>18</sup> For the largest economies in South America such as Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, trade with Asia, the European Union, or even the rest of Latin America far surpasses that with the United States.<sup>19</sup> European-based companies are also the most important source of foreign direct investment capital in the Southern Cone countries of South America, while Asian firms are increasing their presence.<sup>20</sup> Even South American militaries no longer look automatically to the United States for weapons procurement, but now scour the international arms market instead.<sup>21</sup>

In February 2009 Brazil announced that it would supply China with long-term supplies of oil in return for loans to develop huge reserves of petroleum found in off-shore fields under several kilometers of ocean, rock, and a hard- to-penetrate layer of salt.<sup>22</sup> China has also been assisting Venezuela to break free from its heavy dependence on the United States as a market for its oil by accelerating the reconfiguration of state-run refineries to handle more of the heavy Venezuelan crude oil. China recently loaned Venezuela some US\$ 8 billion to be repaid with future oil exports, allowing Caracas to avoid turning to the International Monetary Fund (IMF).<sup>23</sup> Taking advantage of booming soybean exports to China, Argentina used its cash reserves to pay off its US\$ 9 billion debt to the IMF in early 2006, a move intended to achieve freedom from the economic prescriptions dictated by the

IMF and its principal shareholder, the United States.<sup>24</sup> In March 2009 China agreed to a 70 billion *renmenbi* currency swap with Argentina allowing for payment of Chinese exports to Argentina in *renmenbi* instead of U.S. dollars. Ostensibly the move was an attempt to unblock trade financing severely curtailed by the global recession. However, the deal followed on the heels of China's public questioning of the dollar as an international reserve currency and was seen by some analysts as an attempt to promote wider international use of the non-convertible *renmenbi* and boost China's financial presence in Latin America.<sup>25</sup> Less than two months after the Argentine currency swap deal, Brazil and China announced plans to work towards using their respective national currencies in trade transactions rather than the U.S. dollar.<sup>26</sup>

The erosion of U.S. economic and political influence in South America is further underscored by what happened in December 2008 when meetings of four different regional organizations were held concurrently in the northeastern Brazilian seaside resort of Costa do Sauípe.<sup>27</sup> The four regional entities included MERCOSUR, the Rio Group (*i.e.*, all the Spanish and Portuguese speaking nations in the Western Hemisphere plus Belize, Guyana, and Haiti), UNASUR (*i.e.*, the Union of South American Nations), and the newly created Organization of Latin American and Caribbean States (whose name was changed to the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States following its second plenary session with the Rio Group in Cancun in February 2010). The United States and Canada are excluded from all four of these organizations.

At the December 2008 meeting of the Rio Group, Cuba was formally inducted as a full member, even though the other states had to disregard a clause that limits inclusion to democracies. For good measure, the U.S. trade embargo against Cuba was categorically condemned. The action of the Rio Group follows Cuba's 1999 incorporation into the Latin American Integration Association (ALADI) and its membership in the newly created Community of Latin American and Caribbean States. Building on this momentum, the United States found itself outmaneuvered at the June 2009 plenary session of the Organization of American States (OAS) held in San Pedro Sula, Honduras and was corralled into voting with Canada and all the Latin American and Caribbean countries in rescinding the 1962 resolution that had suspended Cuba's membership in the OAS.

Perhaps nothing better underscores the weakened position of the United States in South America than its inability to get support from Brazil for a new UN Security Council resolution to impose sanctions on Iran over alleged efforts to develop a nuclear bomb. Given Brazil's status at the time as a temporary member of the UN Security Council, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited Brasilia on March 3, 2010 to enlist its support but was rebuffed by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva who remarked "[i]t is not prudent to push Iran up against a wall".<sup>28</sup> So long as Brazil remains unconvinced that Iran's nuclear program is for anything other than peaceful purposes, it will not support any move towards sanctions. Undoubtedly, Brazil's tough position reflects the successful diplomatic and commercial ties that Iran has established with many South American countries over the past decade. Argentina and Brazil are both major suppliers of foodstuffs to the Middle East, including Iran. Since 2007, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has been warmly received during state visits to Bolivia, Ecuador, and Brazil. Iran also has significant petroleum investments in Venezuela and there is a direct Iranair flight linking Caracas and Tehran.<sup>29</sup>

## V. BRAZIL AND UNASUR

The Union of South American Nations or UNASUR that was formally launched in May 2008 seeks to integrate the entire South American continent at the political, social, cultural, economic, financial, environmental, and infrastructure level. Integration of energy markets and preparing the continent to adapt to climate change are now also important items on the UNASUR agenda. UNASUR was first proposed at a meeting of the South American heads of state in Cuzco in December 2004. UNASUR's intellectual author is Brazil, which was also the primary promoter of the Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South America (IIRSA) initiative launched in 2000.<sup>30</sup> UNASUR builds upon the work the Secretariats of ALADI, MERCOSUR, the Andean Community, and CARICOM have been doing since 2005 to examine ways to create a South American free trade agreement through convergence of existing sub-regional free trade agreements and bilateral preferential market access accords. Operating under the auspices of UNASUR is the South American Defense Council which seeks to promote a continental consensus on defense related issues and avoid conflicts by, among

other things, requiring the South American governments to reveal their national defense budgets and cooperate in developing new technologies.

UNASUR and the closely associated IIRSA initiative promote "an understated, consensual style of leadership in the South America continent; a 'discreet, fit-to-Brazil way' of conducting its diplomacy."<sup>31</sup> UNASUR, like IIRSA, provides "an attractive political cover for the affirmation of Brazilian regional leadership, using the theme of economic integration."<sup>32</sup> In many ways UNASUR is a response to what was perceived as the overly commercial emphasis of the now failed FTAA. In that respect, UNASUR offers a South American approach to integration designed to overcome current differences in the types of political and economic policies being pursued in individual countries.

One concrete result of UNASUR to date has been the elimination of the use of passports and visa requirements for nationals of one South American country to travel to any other. Quick implementation of this proposal was facilitated by the fact that nationals of countries participating in the various sub-regional economic integration processes such as the Andean Community and MERCOSUR have long been allowed to travel among the participating states with only a national identification card.

In September 2008 UNASUR was mobilized to prevent a *coup d'état* against President Evo Morales in Bolivia. The United States was reduced to the status of an uncomfortable bystander, its own Ambassador expelled from La Paz for alleged complicity in the coup plot.<sup>33</sup> What is most interesting about the strong support orchestrated by UNASUR in favor of Morales was that it occurred while UNASUR's rotating presidency was held by Chilean President Michelle Bachelet. This reflects the type of visionary leadership that a country like Chile is able to provide to UNASUR, allowing historical animosities to be overlooked in favor what is in the best long-term interest of the continent. Perhaps the move was also based on a calculation in Santiago that Morales may provide the best chance for resolving the long standing territorial dispute with Chile arising from the 19<sup>th</sup> century War of the Pacific that prevents energy-starved Chileans from accessing Bolivian natural gas resources. In the past, Morales has used the loss of Bolivia's access to the sea for his own political gain and is the first Bolivian president to win power with a clear majority since the 1960's. Accordingly Morales is in similar position as strongly anti-Communist Richard Nixon was when he decided to visit the People's Republic of China in 1972 without worry that he would come under sharp political attack at home.

Although UNASUR can be characterized, up to now, as more of a "talk shop", it does provide a means of achieving continental consensus on potentially contentious issues that will be necessary to economically and physically integrate South America. The fact that two CARICOM countries (*i.e.*, Suriname and Guyana) are also involved means that UNASUR can serve as a bridge for incorporating the Caribbean nations into that continental consensus as well. So far Brazil, supported by countries with stable political and economic regimes such as Chile and Uruguay, has been able to use UNASUR to keep countries with mercurial leaders such as Venezuela in check. In the past, the charismatic Hugo Chavez has challenged Brazil's aspirations to regional leadership, providing a clear and competing project centered on a largely rhetorical anti-American discourse and the consolidation of an increasingly authoritarian regime supported by abundant petrodollars.<sup>34</sup> To date, Hugo Chavez has remained at the UNASUR table and feeding at the IIRSA trough as more South American countries appear poised to cooperate with Brazil's politically moderate vision of South American cooperation and closer economic integration than with Venezuela's more ideological and polarizing dream of a Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of our America or ALBA.<sup>35</sup> That opens up the potential for the United States to work with UNASUR on issues of energy security and climate change.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The fantasy of generations of leftist and nationalist Latin Americans looms on the horizon: the end of American hegemony in the Western Hemisphere. The United States is currently in a similar position to the United Kingdom between the First and Second World Wars. Although inter-war Great Britain still had significant overseas possessions (despite the recent loss of its oldest colony, Ireland) and pound sterling remained the international monetary unit of reference, the handwriting was on the wall. Similarly, the sun is setting on domination of the global economy by US firms as the media abounds in reports of efforts to dump the US dollar as the preferred reserve currency by central banks throughout the world or, at the very least, increase the use of currencies other than the dollar in global trade and finance.<sup>36</sup> Whether South America can benefit from the collapse of US hegemony

depends on how well Brazil can turn UNASUR into a viable vehicle for continental economic integration, thereby raising South America's profile on the international stage so as to achieve a more balanced insertion into the new global economic and political order. The MERCOSUR experience certainly does not offer much room for optimism. Nearly two decades after it was launched, MERCOSUR has fallen short of its stated goal of establishing a common market. Indeed, MERCOSUR has failed to advance beyond a much less ambitious free trade area plagued by weak institutions incapable of quickly resolving the perennial commercial disputes that arise among its four core member states.

The reference to MERCOSUR as an analogy for what may lie in store for UNASUR, however, may be unfair. When MERCOSUR was launched in 1991, Brazil was still a developing country plagued by economic and political instability and the majority of its citizens were classified as poor. By contrast, the majority of Brazil's citizens are today deemed to be middle class, hyperinflation has been relegated to the ash heap of history, and Brazil's political system rests on a solid institutional foundation. Brazil is also a much more technologically sophisticated country fully integrated into the global economy. This new reality provides Brazil's leadership with sufficient confidence to, *inter alia*, make the type of astute concessions required to secure the enthusiastic participation of her neighbors in constructing a viable UNASUR. That self-confidence is already apparent on the global stage, where former President Lula strived to position Brazil as a voice for emerging nations and a mediator in global disputes.<sup>37</sup> Lula even promoted Brazil as a privileged interlocutor in the search for peace in the Middle East as seen in the joint effort with Turkey in May 2010 to broker a deal with Iran to send its uranium abroad for enrichment. Under the Lula government, Brazil also became one of the world's biggest providers of aid to poor countries.<sup>38</sup>

Within South America, the Lula administration showed itself to be especially savvy in its dealings with neighboring countries. When Evo Morales sent troops to nationalize Petrobras refineries in Bolivia in 2006, Lula resisted calls from the Brazilian media and political elite to respond forcefully and even militarily. Recognizing that it was in Brazil's best interests to have an economically stable and political neighbor, Lula pursued a shrewder and less confrontational tact. Eventually La Paz did agree to pay adequate compensation for the nationalized Brazilian refineries and Petrobras remains the largest foreign producer and biggest purchaser of Bolivian natural gas.

Similarly, in 2009 the Lula administration defused a long simmering dispute with Paraguay over the price of the electricity generated at the massive bi-national hydroelectric dam at Itaipú. Although built primarily with Brazilian capital and technology, because Itaipú sits astride the Paraná River that serves as the border between Paraguay and Brazil, Paraguay is entitled to 50 percent of the generated electricity. Historically, Paraguay has never had need for all that electricity, and was obligated by a 1973 treaty to sell any excess to Brazil at well below market rates. Although legally not bound to do so until 2023, the Lula administration renegotiated the treaty and agreed to pay Paraguay a more equitable price. Brazil also agreed to permit Paraguay to sell any unused electricity of its allotted quota to any country after 2023. The move was seen as a way to shore up the sagging political fortunes of President Fernando Lugo, the first Paraguayan head of state in modern history not to come from the notoriously corrupt Colorado Party.

Although Lula is no longer the President of Brazil, his successor Dilma Rousseff, who also hails from the Workers Party, has shown in her first month in office to be an efficient pragmatist, responding quickly to the housing crisis caused by the massive floods and mudslides that ravaged Rio de Janeiro and putting a cap on an increase in the minimum wage despite threatened opposition from coalition partners.<sup>39</sup> The fact that her first foreign visit as Brazilian head of state was to Buenos Aires underscores that she will continue the policy launched by Fernando Henrique Cardoso and intensified by Lula of prioritizing relations with the country's continental neighbors as a way of enhancing the country's global presence. High on Rousseff's diplomatic agenda should be a major effort at rapprochement with Colombia in order to repair relations that became strained when then President Alvaro Uribe signed a deal in 2009 to allow the United States access to Colombian military bases to help with operations against drug trafficking and terrorism. That deal was subsequently ruled unconstitutional by Colombia's Constitutional Court after Uribe had already left office because it had never been debated and ratified by the Colombian Congress. By the same token, nothing prevents the United States to reach out to the new Rousseff administration to work as genuine partners on issues of mutual concern. For that to succeed, however, it will require Washington, D.C. to get its own

house in order and to wake up to the vast possibilities that an emboldened South America offers as a continent no longer in anyone's backyard.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Thompson, *U.S. and Mexico to Open Talks on Freer Migration of Workers*, N.Y. Times, Feb. 16, 2001, at A1; Weiner & Thompson, *Bush Gives Mexico Backing on Drive Against Narcotics*, N.Y. Times, Feb. 17, 2001, at A1.

<sup>2</sup> In the 2008 book he co-authored with Linda Bilmes, *The Three Trillion Dollar War*, the former World Bank Chief Economist and Nobel Prize laureate Joseph Stiglitz estimated the Iraq War was costing U.S. taxpayers US\$ 12 billion a month, or US\$ 3 billion per week.

<sup>3</sup> The Latinobarometro Report 2008 notes that positive views of the United States among Latin Americans fell from 73 percent in 2001 to 58 percent by 2008. The Southern Cone of South America was the most critical, with only 32 percent of Argentines, for example, having a positive image of the United States. Interestingly, the 40 to 61 year old group throughout Latin America had the least positive image of the United States (31 percent) which the report points out was the generation that experienced the brunt of support by the US (but for the Carter administration) of brutal military dictatorships from the 1960's to the 1980's. The full report can be accessed at:

[http://www.latinobarometro.org/docs/INFORME\\_LATINOBAROMETRO\\_2008.pdf](http://www.latinobarometro.org/docs/INFORME_LATINOBAROMETRO_2008.pdf) The impact of the Iraq War on generating negative opinions of the United States can be surmised from a survey by the Pew Global Attitudes Project which showed that favorable images of the US held by Brazilians, for example, fell from 52 percent in 2002 to 34 percent one year later. See, June 2003 *Views of a Changing World* report available at: <http://www.pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/185.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Luce, *Obama Woos Cuban-Americans with Promises*, Fin. Times, May 24, 2008. One of those Democrats was himself the President of the Cuban American National Foundation. Notwithstanding the strenuous endorsement by Obama, all three Democratic candidates lost to the Republican incumbents.

<sup>5</sup> See, US Energy Information Administration's *Energy in Brief: How Dependent Are We on Foreign Oil?* available at: [http://tonto.eia.doe.gov/energy\\_in\\_brief/foreign\\_oil\\_dependence.cfm](http://tonto.eia.doe.gov/energy_in_brief/foreign_oil_dependence.cfm)

<sup>6</sup> See, US Energy Information Administration's *Energy in Brief: What Role Does Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) Play as an Energy Source for the United States?* available at:

[http://tonto.eia.doe.gov/energy\\_in\\_brief/liquefied\\_natural\\_gas\\_lng.cfm](http://tonto.eia.doe.gov/energy_in_brief/liquefied_natural_gas_lng.cfm) Approximately 15 percent of US natural gas needs are imported, primarily through pipelines from Canada.

<sup>7</sup> See, G. RIVERA, *THE GREAT PROGRESSION: HOW HISPANICS WILL LEAD AMERICA TO A NEW ERA OF PROSPERITY* (2009) at 80-88. Rivera notes that relatively youthful immigrants and the new wave of U.S.-born Hispanics are increasing the size of the working population in proportion to the retired population. Rivera cites a 2005 Pew Hispanic Center report entitled *Hispanics and the Social Security Debate* that notes "[t]he role that Hispanics play as contributors to Social Security will increase substantially in the next several decades. While the white labor force is projected to fall from 100 million in 2005 to about 94 million in 2050, the Hispanic labor force is projected to more than double, increasing from 19 million in 2005 to about 46 million in 2050. While fewer white workers will be contributing, many more Hispanics will be paying Social Security taxes by the middle of the century." In addition, illegal immigrants (primarily from Latin America and the Caribbean) who work with falsified or improper Social Security numbers in effect donate some US\$ 6 to US\$ 7 billion in Social Security tax revenue to the Social Security Fund every year!

<sup>8</sup> A press release put out by the White House on April 19, 2009 noted only that "President Obama invited countries of the region to participate in an Energy and Climate Partnership of the Americas; a voluntary and flexible framework for advancing energy security and combating climate change."

<sup>9</sup> Since the Lima meeting, a regional Renewable Energy Center has been proposed to be placed in Chile, an Energy Efficiency Center in Costa Rica in conjunction with the Natural Resources Defense Council, a Biomass Center in Brazil, and a Geothermal Center in El Salvador with support of the Inter-American Development Bank and the US Department of Energy. Brazil has also agreed to lead an initiative to promote sustainable urban development and planning.

<sup>10</sup> See, June 16, 2009 Department of Energy Press Release found at:

<http://www.energy.gov/news/7468.htm>

<sup>11</sup> In 1995, the Clean Cities International Program began sharing information on reducing emissions through the use of natural gas fueled vehicles with the City of Santiago in Chile. It eventually led to the creation of a public-private partnership in corporation with the U.S. Department of Energy and the conversion of 500 taxis to natural gas, the deployment of 12 natural gas buses, and the construction of 6 natural gas refueling stations. The total cost was US\$ 1.6 million dollars, of which only \$200,000.00 came from the private sector in the form of a subsidy for light-conversion kits provided by METROGAS, the monopoly distributor of natural gas in Santiago. The Chilean National Development Corporation or CORFO supplied the bulk of the funding at US\$ 1.3 million, while the U.S. Energy Department Clean Cities International Program chipped in a mere US\$ 127,000.

<sup>12</sup> Insulza, *Energy and Development in South America*, in ENERGY AND DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH AMERICA: CONFLICT AND COOPERATION 9 (C. Arnson, C. Fuentes, & F.J. Aravena, eds., 2008).

<sup>13</sup> D.KOPLow, BIOFUELS-AT WHAT COST?: GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FOR ETHANOL AND BIODIESEL IN THE UNITED STATES 1 (OCTOBER 2007).

<sup>14</sup> A liter of Brazilian ethanol made from sugar cane currently costs almost half the "real" cost to produce a liter of corn-based ethanol. In addition, corn-based ethanol yields a little more than the same amount of energy as the fossil fuel needed to produce it. By contrast, the input-to-output ratio in the case of ethanol made from sugar is about one to nine. Finally, it takes almost twice as much land to grow corn to obtain the equivalent ethanol produced from sugar, and corn requires extensive use of pesticides and petrochemical-based fertilizers not required for sugar production. National Bank of Economic and Social Development (BNDES) & the Center for Strategic Studies and Management (CGEE), SUGARCANE-BASED BIOETHANOL: ENERGY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT 67, 70, 81, 89, 92 & 96 (2008). A copy of the full report is available at: <http://www.sugarcanebioethanol.org/>

<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., *Political Pressure Keeps Cash Flowing into Ethanol's Tanks*, Fin. Times, Oct. 23, 2008, at 6, noting the enormous political and corporate weight behind the corn based ethanol industry in the United States that allows it to survive against all rational odds. The article highlights that in one of his early speeches after he was elected to the US Senate in 2004, then Senator Barack Obama from Illinois---one of the biggest corn-producing states in the country---called "on fellow legislators in Washington to do more to help the struggling ethanol industry, not only for the future of farmers but for the good of the environment, and for energy independence". See, also, Marianne Lavelle & J. Okay, *Brazil Ethanol Looks to Sweeten More Gas Tanks*, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC DAILY NEWS (Nov. 18, 2010), <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/energy/2010/11/101118/brazil-ethanol-gas-exports/>

and Joe Kamalick, *US Ethanol Sector Hails House Final Vote on Subsidy*, ICIS News (December 17, 2010), <http://www.icis.com/Articles/2010/12/17/9420631/us-ethanol-sector-hails-final-house-vote-on-subsidy.html>

<sup>16</sup> See, e.g., Elizabeth Kolbert, *Uncomfortable Climate*, THE NEW YORKER, (November 22, 2010) at 53-4; and *The Environment: Heated But Hollow*, THE ECONOMIST (February 12, 2011) at 36.

<sup>17</sup> Research conducted by two Stanford University law professors in 2008 found that a large fraction of the credits generated under the CDM did not represent genuine reductions in greenhouse gas emissions as many projects that "reduce" emissions would have been built anyway and at a far lower cost as well. Even worse, the CDM creates perverse incentives for developing countries to increase carbon emissions as a way of generating CDM credits that can then be offered to developed nations desperate to find offsets for their own pollution inducing activities. See, Michael Wara & David G. Victor, "A Realistic Policy on International Carbon Offsets" (Program on Energy and Sustainable Development Working Paper # 74, Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, Stanford University, April 2008). Available at:

[http://fsi.stanford.edu/publications/a\\_realistic\\_policy\\_on\\_international\\_carbon\\_offsets/](http://fsi.stanford.edu/publications/a_realistic_policy_on_international_carbon_offsets/)

<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., UN Commission on Latin America and the Caribbean, LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN IN THE WORLD ECONOMY 2008-2009 (2009). Between 2006 and 2009 the United States was responsible for an average of only 37 percent of Latin America and the Caribbean's total global trade flows. *Id.* at 56.

<sup>19</sup> See, e.g., Inter-American Development Bank (Institute for the Integration of Latin America and the Caribbean), MERCOSUR REPORT NO. 14 (2010). In 2008, the European Union was the largest recipient of exports from the four core MERCOSUR countries (*i.e.*, Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay) at 21.9 percent, followed very closely by Asia, while the NAFTA countries (including the

United States) lagged well behind at 7.9 percent. In terms of imports into the MERCOSUR countries, Asia is now the most important source of imported goods (28.2 percent), followed closely by the European Union. The NAFTA countries come in far behind at 8.2 percent. *Id.* at 28.

<sup>20</sup> See, UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN 2008 (2009). In a recent Op-Ed piece in the *Financial Times*, Luis Alberto Moreno, president of the Inter-American Bank noted that from 2001 to 2009 China's total investments in Brazil were estimated to total a mere US\$ 215 million. Yet in 2010 Chinese energy and chemical groups quietly spent more than US\$ 20 billion acquiring assets in Argentina and Brazil alone. See, Moreno, *Look for New Links Across the Global South*, *Fin. Times*, Jan. 28, 2011, at 12. The piece also notes that the Indian companies Infosys and Tata now have 17,000 employees in Latin America and the Caribbean.

<sup>21</sup> C. Arnson & P. Sotero, eds., BRAZIL AS A REGIONAL POWER: VIEWS FROM THE HEMISPHERE (2010) at 14. France's Dassault Aviation will supply the Brazilian Air Force with 36 jet fighter planes and France's DCNS that is helping the Brazilian Navy build nuclear submarines.

<sup>22</sup> Wheatley, *Brazil to Supply Oil to China in Return for Loans*, *Fin. Times*, Feb. 20, 2009, at 5. The agreement for China to lend US\$ 10 billion to Petrobras was not formally signed until President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva visited China in May 2009. Under the deal, Brazil will provide 200,000 barrels of oil a day to Sinopec, China's state oil company for 10 years. Wheatley & Hille, *China Deals Bolster Brazil Trade Ties*, *Fin. Times*, May 20, 2009, at 3.

<sup>23</sup> Molinski, *Chavez, Shunning IMF, Gushes About China Oil-for-Credit Deal*, *Wall St. J.*, March 4, 2010, at A14.

<sup>24</sup> A. Armony, *The China-Latin American Relationship: Convergences and Divergences* (unpublished manuscript, 2009) at 16. Forthcoming in CHINA ENGAGES LATIN AMERICA: TRACING THE TRAJECTORY (Hearn & León, eds).

<sup>25</sup> Webber, *China and Argentina in Currency Swap*, *Fin. Times*, March 31, 2009, at 5. In fairness, it should be pointed out that the United States also provided Brazil with a US\$ 30 billion currency swap deal at the end of 2008 in response to the global liquidity crisis.

<sup>26</sup> Wheatley, *Brazil and China in Plan to Axe Dollar*, *Fin. Times*, May 19, 2009, at 6.

<sup>27</sup> See, e.g., Barrionuevo, *At Meeting in Brazil, Washington is Scorned*, *N.Y. Times*, Dec. 17, 2008, at A10.

<sup>28</sup> See, e.g., Dombay & Wheatley, *Brazil Rebuff for Iran Sanctions Drive*, *Fin. Times*, March 4, 2010, at 4.

<sup>29</sup> For a more complete analysis of the growing relationship between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Latin America, see Arnson, Esfandiari, & Stubits, eds., IRAN IN LATIN AMERICA: THREAT OR AXIS OF ANNOYANCE? (2010). As noted in the report, the relationship is complicated. Despite being Iran's second most important trading partner in Latin America, Argentina's diplomatic relations with Iran remain strained by accusations that Iranian operatives were involved in the bombing of the Israeli Embassy and a Jewish social welfare agency in Buenos Aires in the early 1990's that killed dozens of people.

<sup>30</sup> IIRSA promotes the implementation of some 510 communication, energy, and transportation infrastructure projects that are regional in vision and scope. The projects are funded by the South American governments working closely with the CAF, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the River Plate Basin Development Financial Fund (FONPLATA) as well as with the private sector through public-private partnerships. By the end of 2009 some US\$ 6.2 billion dollars had already been expended and a number of projects completed such as a bridge over the Acre River linking Brazil and Peru as well as another over the Takutu River connecting Brazil with Guyana. See, <http://www.iirsa.org>

<sup>31</sup> Sotero & Armijo, *Brazil: To Be or Not to Be a BRIC?*, 31 ASIAN PERSPECTIVE 43, 54 (2007).

<sup>32</sup> *Id.* at 54.

<sup>33</sup> See, e.g., Schipani & Dombey, *Morales Expels 'Divisionist' US Ambassador*, *Fin. Times*, Sept. 11, 2008, at 4.

<sup>34</sup> Sotero & Armijo, *supra* note 32 at 55.

<sup>35</sup> *Id.* at 58. The ALBA bloc currently includes Antigua and Barbuda, Bolivia, Cuba, Dominica, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Venezuela. See, <http://www.alianzabolivariana.org>

<sup>36</sup> See, e.g. Anderlini, *China Urges Reserve Currency Switch*, *Fin. Times*, March 24, 2009, at 1. See, also, *Strength in Reserves*, *Fin. Times*, Feb. 9, 2011, at 7.

<sup>37</sup> Solomon & Lyons, *New Hurdle to Iran Sanctions*, Wall St. J., March 4, 2010, at A1.

<sup>38</sup> The value of all Brazilian development aid broadly defined could reach U.S.\$ 4 billion a year; less than China but similar to generous donors such as Sweden and Canada---and unlike theirs, Brazil's contributions are soaring. *Brazil's Foreign-Aid Programme: Speak Softly and Carry a Blank Cheque*, THE ECONOMIST (July 17, 2010) at 46.

<sup>39</sup> Leahy, *Technocrat Rousseff Makes Her Mark on Brazil*, Fin. Times, Feb. 4, 2011, at 6.

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## JUAN RUIZ de ALARCÓN: WRITING HOME BETWEEN THE LINES

Gloria B. Clark

The Pennsylvania State University, Harrisburg Campus

In 1600, Ruiz de Alarcón chose to leave his home in the New World, at about the age of twenty. He was to spend better than half of his life in Spain, until his death in 1639. In all, he spent approximately twenty-five years in the New World and thirty-four years in Spain. In Spain, he became one of the great writers of the Spanish Golden Age, producing *comedias* of fine artistic quality and delicate sensitivity. Readers of his work notice that, although he was a native of New Spain, his writing does not overtly reveal his origins. As a matter of fact, some readers never realize that he was not a native Spaniard. However, a close reading of one of his popular *comedias*, *La verdad sospechosa*, reveals the cultural stamp of his birthplace in subtle ways. This cultural stance of Ruiz de Alarcón's literary work will be contrasted with that of one of his contemporaries and native-born Spaniard, Lope de Vega, in his *comedia*, *El caballero de Olmedo*.

Ruiz de Alarcón's birth and early years in New Spain cannot be discounted when reading his work closely; they formed the basis for his view of the world throughout all of his life. Lev Vygotsky, the Russian psychologist, writer, and thinker recognized the intimate connection between culture and human development. In his essay "The Development of the Child," he discusses the role of culture in the development of the individual, "This development is conditioned by outward influences. It can be defined as outer rather than as inner growth. It is the function of the social-cultural experience of the child. At the same time, it is not a simple accumulation of experiences. . . ." (64). According to Barbara Rogoff in *The Cultural Nature of Human Development*, this cultural-historical approach "assumes that individual development must be understood in, and cannot be separated from, its social and cultural-historical context" (50). In other words, the individual and society are completely interdependent, each influencing the other. Rogoff summarizes Vygotsky's position by saying that, "Cultural tools thus are both inherited and transformed by successive generations" (51). Although Ruiz de Alarcón spent over half of his life in Spain, his important developmental years were spent interacting with a culture and lifestyle that many of his readers could only imagine. He was a witness to and a participant in a new culture, while others could only rely on hearsay. His years in New Spain afforded him a different worldview from many of his contemporaries in Spain.

Ruiz de Alarcón's cultural milieu was complicated. He was born during a difficult time for New Spain. There had been a series of plagues that devastated the indigenous population, which in turn had affected the food supply, due to a serious lack of farmworkers (Lee 647-8). Living in the New World so early on in the colonial years presented the family with not only the stress of personal survival, but also the strains of living within an "alien" culture, while at the same time maintaining Spanish traditions. On the other hand, the conquest was still very real. Ruiz de Alarcón was born about 1580, just sixty years after the conquest of Mexico by Cortés and his soldiers. Certainly there were many people alive in Mexico at the time of Ruiz de Alarcón's childhood who remembered the conquest. And, of course, the evidence was all around him. The Metropolitan Cathedral of Mexico, which borders the *Zócalo* in Mexico City today, had been under construction since 1563. During Ruiz de Alarcón's lifetime, it would have been in the very early stages of the construction that would take some 250 years to complete. The Aztec temples that had dominated the *Zócalo* had been torn down and a new city was being built on the rubble. The Spanish had subdued most of the indigenous population and had established the infrastructure needed to sustain their control by 1590. By 1600 Mexico City covered 5.5 kilometers and had a population of 58,000 people.<sup>1</sup> The *criollos*, sons of native Spaniards born in New Spain, were exercising their birthrights by moving into positions of power, which had previously only been held by native Spaniards. Dorothy Schons, Ruiz de Alarcón scholar, pointed out that, although the *criollos* were in power in New Spain, Ruiz de Alarcón and his family would have been greatly outnumbered by the native population. In 1585, when Ruiz de Alarcón was about five years old, the native population of Central Mexico was 1.9 million, a decrease of 23.1 million from the total in 1519 (Borah 180).<sup>2</sup> The Spanish population of Mexico City was about 1,500, in contrast to 3,000 native people (Schons 89). Ruiz de Alarcón grew up in a time when his parents were, in essence, pioneers who had come to the New World with a commission to oversee silver mining operations in the remote rural village of Taxco. As pioneers in their new land and being native Spaniards, it is logical that they taught their son to look to Spain as the seat of power and

culture. However, as Schons warns, we should not underestimate the indigenous influence on Ruiz de Alarcón during his formative years.

Consider the cultural impact of early Spain on Ruiz de Alarcón's development; he spent the first twenty years of his life among New Spain's population, which was a dizzying mixture of people from many racial backgrounds as well as differing cultural practices and beliefs. This was a society that quickly became something new. According to Susan Kellogg's study of ethnorace and gender in Colonial Mexico, intermarriage was encouraged from the beginning of the Conquest:

Early on, before Spanish explorers "discovered" Mexico, Crown policy encouraged intermarriage as a tool to promote peaceful cultural interaction in the Caribbean. Early royal language referred to marriages between Spanish men or women and natives, going so far as to suggest that Spanish women could marry indigenous men. (6)

Those marriages fostered the emergence of a new culture, not indigenous and not Spanish, which called on both traditions, a culture that Ruiz de Alarcón witnessed in his daily interactions. Javier Vargas de Luna in *Las dos ciudades de Juan Ruiz de Alarcón* points out that Alarcón's work is a testimony to the way the two cultures became intertwined, . . . el testimonio de lo que fue el enlazamiento de las maneras indígenas y europeas de transitar, de asimilar, de asumir, y, en resumidas cuentas, de construir y de significar moralmente los ámbitos físicos en los que se desarrolló el *mestizaje espacial* de las ciudades novohispanas. (113) Ruiz de Alarcón grew up in that discursive space which was nourished by two widely divergent traditions, indigenous and European.

As it was common for the noble class in New Spain to send their sons to Spain to be educated, young Ruiz de Alarcón pursued his academic studies at the University of Salamanca, in Canon and Civil Law. By contrast to raw and primitive New Spain, Spain represented established institutional stability. Ruiz de Alarcón found a deep history and long Spanish tradition wherever he went. The University of Salamanca, the first Spanish university, for instance, had enjoyed a fine reputation and deeply honored traditions for nearly 350 years when Ruiz de Alarcón matriculated as a student in 1600. Ruiz de Alarcón also lived for a time in Seville, a city that bustled with trade and commerce with the New World, as fleets made twice a year voyages to and from the port of Vera Cruz.<sup>3</sup> Like Salamanca, Seville had an ancient tradition, having been a center of population from the ninth century A.D. In Spain, Ruiz de Alarcón was steeped in customs and mores that he could only hear about secondhand in New Spain. In addition, there was a thriving artistic and intellectual community in Madrid, which had become the capital of Spain in 1561, just thirty-nine years prior to Ruiz de Alarcón's first trip to Spain.

He must have felt caught between the life he was making for himself in Spain and his family and connections in New Spain, because he returned to his homeland in 1608, deciding to pursue a career first as a lawyer and then as a professor at the University of Mexico. After his failure to win a faculty seat at the university, Ruiz de Alarcón returned to his adopted land in 1613, at the age of thirty-three and settled in Madrid. The next twenty-six years of his life would be spent in Spain.<sup>4</sup>

In Spain, besides the cultural and intellectual life that awaited him, Ruiz de Alarcón would conduct family business on behalf of his brother Pedro, would do legal work as contracted, and would pursue an appointive position in the government. As a *criollo*, Ruiz de Alarcón demonstrated his desire for acceptance in Spain by changing the way he wrote his name. When he arrived in Spain, he was Juan Ruiz de Alarcón; before 1622 he had added Don to his name, much to the amusement of his fellow writers, becoming Don Juan Ruiz de Alarcón.<sup>5</sup> In 1622 he signed an *Elogio descriptivo*: The licentiate Don Juan Ruiz de Alarcón y Mendoza (Poesse 29). This way of advertising his Spanish background was obviously a plea for recognition by the closed social structure he encountered. In addition, Margarita Peña notes that according to the archives of the University of Salamanca, Ruiz de Alarcón matriculated as " a 17 de octubre de 1600 Juan Ruiz de Alarcón *natural* de la ciudad de Megico . . . . (215)."<sup>6</sup> She also makes the point that he avoided mention of the indigenous name of Tetelcingo (Taxco), generally recognized as his birthplace. His avoidance of the indigenous name may have been an attempt to eliminate association with the indigenous culture of New Spain and also, according to Peña, to give as his birth city a name that would at least be recognized by those he met in Spain (220). In contrast, a study of other student records reveals that students were generally listed by city of birth. For example, Ruiz de Alarcón's friend, "a 12 de noviembre 1604. Bricián Diez

Cruzate natural de /Ejea de C. de Zaragoza.1o" lists his native city in this entry from the Biblioteca de la Universidad de Salamanca (218).

Overall, Ruiz de Alarcón's relationship to his homeland was seemingly ambivalent; he finally chose to stay in Spain and pursue his intellectual, professional and creative goals. However, records in the Biblioteca del Museo Británico do show that he pursued a position in New Spain on July 1, 1625. The fragment below was taken from the official reply to his petition for a position:

Indias *Contenido*.—1 de Julio 1625/ Remitióssse en memorial del Licenciado/Don Juan Ruiz de Alarcón, en que pedía/ *que* el *Presidente* de Indias y el *Consejo* Informa/ sen de sus partes y en las cosas del servicio/ de *Vuestra Majestad* en *que* podía ser ocupado. / . . Pero *que* [tendrá qual/quier cosa, assí de prebendas e de viajar / en las Indias, si las quisiere, como de una de las Relatorias de los Consejos. . . . [En el margen izquierdo]: "E ssabrán tabién y quan/do aya ocaasión, / Vos, el *Presidente* le dariéis una / Relatoría. /" ( Peña 229)

Ruiz de Alarcón lived for fourteen more years, until 1639, but the occasion to which he refers never occurred. Although he did make a final attempt to return to New Spain, the reader today questions his attachment to his birthplace. It is somewhat curious that his writing does not heavily invoke the culture that he left. The reader does not sense a longing for his native soil.

Even though Ruiz de Alarcón pursued peninsular Spanish life, and pursued writing with peninsular themes and characters, his works, when viewed between the lines, expose a writer who is not truly Spanish by origin. His New World background is not revealed by direct description, or by obvious and constant references, but can be found in more subtle places. As Willard King points out, the fact that he was a *criollo* put him in the position of being able to see the peculiarities of Spanish society in ways that native-born Spaniards could not (225). As a child of New Spain and as a long-time resident of peninsular Spain, his view of Spanish society was naturally twofold and parsed cultures on both sides of the Atlantic.

Ruiz de Alarcón's *comedia*, *La verdad sospechosa*, a work that has been dated 1619-1620, is representative of his style and themes. *La verdad sospechosa* was written when Ruiz de Alarcón was about forty years old, and had been back in Spain for about seven years. When he wrote this play, which became one of his most famous, he had already seen two of his *comedias* produced on stage. We will examine the plot and characters for vestiges of "home" in text and allusion. I will also consider, for contrast, *El caballero de Olmedo* written by Ruiz de Alarcón's contemporary, Lope Félix de Vega Carpio. *El caballero de Olmedo* was written at more or less the same time as *La verdad sospechosa*, also in the 1620s.

Lope de Vega, in contrast to Ruiz de Alarcón, was born of poor but honorable parents who had recently settled in Madrid. Sáinz de Robles, in the introduction to *Lope de Vega, Obras escogidas*, describes Félix de Vega and Francisca Hernández (or Francisca del Carpio) as ". . . *nada de hidalgos. Ninguno de los dos tenía derecho al Dor'*" (33). Lope was educated in Spain, studying at various institutions, including the University of Alcalá. Lope de Vega was about eighteen years older than Ruiz de Alarcón, having been born in 1562, and died four years before him, in 1635. He was a prolific and very popular writer, who wrote at least 800 plays. Lope led the literary circles of the time and set the standard for the *comedia* with the rules canonized in his *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias*, rules that Ruiz de Alarcón himself followed in his own *comedias*. Lope de Vega could be called the quintessential Spaniard, an aspect both externally and internally obvious in his works. We will find his *comedia*, *El caballero de Olmedo*, very different from *La verdad sospechosa* of Ruiz de Alarcón.

*La verdad sospechosa*, a *comedia*, features a young man, Don García, who cannot seem to tell the truth in love. He concocts such tall tales to win his love that he loses in the end. The action of the play is compounded by the fact that his Father, Don Beltrán, hates lying above all faults. Don García passes himself off as an *indiano*, trading on exoticism to get the girl he loves, Doña Jacinta. He tells Jacinta when they first meet that he has loved her for more than a year, when he actually had arrived at his father's house fresh from the University of Salamanca the day before. He tells Jacinta his background this way:

Cuando del indiano suelo  
por mi dicha llegué aquí,  
la primera cosa que vi,

fue la gloria de ese cielo. (53)

He refers to the New World as *indiano* soil, an interesting expression. The word *indiano* can refer to a native or resident of America or the West Indies, an Indian, East Indian, or someone who has returned rich from the Indies. Ruiz de Alarcón chose the more ambiguous word *indiano*, rather than saying New Spain. Although this was a popular way to refer to people who had come to Spain from the New World, Ruiz de Alarcón's own use of the term nevertheless must have conjured up for him images of the New Spain that he knew so well, with *indianos* and Spanish both in conflict and cooperation. When Jacinta questions him further, are you *indiano*? He replies,

Y tales son mis riquezas, pues os vi,  
que al minado Potosí,  
le quito la presunción. (53)

Don García makes reference here to the mines of Potosí, Bolivia, which were discovered in 1545 and exported large quantities of silver ingots to Spain. He is telling Jacinta that the richness he gained just by seeing her put the mines of Potosí to shame. This reference to the seemingly inexhaustible silver mines of the New World, although here of course it means Bolivia, also brings to the reader's mind the fact that Ruiz de Alarcón's parents were the superintendents of a silver mine as representatives of the Spanish Crown in what is now Taxco, in the state of Guerrero, Mexico. Even though they may have moved on to Mexico City by the time he was born, he must have been raised with tales of the silver mine at Taxco. This reference to the silver mine also indicates that Ruiz de Alarcón recognized the New World as a source of wealth for the aristocracy.

Living in Seville during the colonial era also gave Ruiz de Alarcón a real understanding of the wealth that poured in from the colonies. Defourneaux quotes from *Historia de Sevilla* by Morgado:

'It is an admirable sight and one which you would not see at any other port,' says a contemporary writer, 'to watch carts drawn by four oxen transporting immense quantities of gold and silver bullion from the Guadalquivir to the royal chamber of the Contratación for the Indies. (79)

Envisioning the wealth of silver that flowed from the colonies, sometimes described as "mountains of silver" (Defourneaux 79), we sense the grandeur of the comparison between Jacinta's beauty and the silver mine at Potosí. The word "Potosí" functioned as a symbol for all of the wealth in New Spain. What a compliment Jacinta received, then, to have put all of the wealth of the New World to shame by her beauty.

Jacinta goes on to ask if he is as stingy as they say *indianos* are? Don García does not deny that, but says, "Al que más avaro nace, hace el amor dadivoso" (53). Ruiz de Alarcón himself suffered from a lack of wealth. Penury is a constant complaint in his works. Although his family had a noble name, and had a royal commission to be in the New World, they were never adequately compensated for their labors. Part of the family business that Ruiz de Alarcón was doing in Spain was petitioning the King to pay money owed to the family for their work in New Spain. Maybe *indianos* had the fame of being stingy with their newfound wealth, but Ruiz de Alarcón knew only too well that there are many sides to the question of wealth in the New World. Don García then makes a show of offering Jacinta jewelry in the shop window. Jacinta now calls him an *indiano liberal*, but turns down his offer.

This scene is interesting from a cultural perspective. Ruiz de Alarcón is an *indiano*, if you use it to mean a "person born in the New World," and has spent most of his time in Spain trying to prove the validity of his "Spanish-ness." Yet, here is his character using that same term to impress and attract Jacinta. Don García, a recent graduate of the University of Salamanca and son of a wealthy nobleman, does not try to impress Jacinta with his own heritage, the very heritage that Ruiz de Alarcón has been working so hard to prove, but relies on a lie that emphasizes his "otherness." Of course, this interchange also reflects the way Ruiz de Alarcón must have been treated by others in Spain when they first met him, an exotic person from a distant, romanticized land. The reader wonders whether Ruiz de Alarcón was inclined to use his exoticism when it profited him.

In scene 7 of Act 1, Don García's servant, Tristán, questions his lie about being *indiano*. He doesn't understand why Don García has chosen to tell Jacinta that he is a *perulero*, a man from Peru.

Of course, Don García replies that he wants to be considered a rich man from the New World, and that the name "Peru" represents riches. The truth is that in Spain at that time, there were a lot of impoverished nobles who pretended that they had fortunes in order to marry well. Don García thought his fictive background would both attract the ladies and assure them that he did indeed have a fortune. Besides, foreigners had more luck with women, in his estimation, especially *indianos*:

Cosa es cierta,  
Tristán, que los forasteros  
tienen más dicha con ellas,  
y mas si son de las Indias,  
información de riqueza.(66)

Don García imagines that by the time they figure out who he really is, he will have won Jacinta's heart and she won't care that he lied to her.

As the play continues, Isabel, the servant of Jacinta constantly refers to Don García as the *indiano* or the *perulero*,<sup>7</sup> she is the one who sees through Don García's reasoning, and tells her mistress that because he was courting, he was just trying to prove that he had money, and at the same time implicitly telling Jacinta that he considered having money a bigger advantage than being handsome. Isabel uses an allusion to the legends of King Midas and Narcissus to make her point:

Los que intentan siempre dan  
gran presunción al dinero,  
y con ese medio hallar  
entrado en tu pecho quiso,  
que debió de imaginar  
que aquí le ha de aprovechar  
más ser Midas que Narciso. (87)

*El caballero de Olmedo*, is also a play about love and deceit. Doña Inés loves Don Alonso, but her father has chosen another suitor for her to marry, Don Rodrigo. Don Alonso also loves Doña Inés, and together they try to arrange their own marriage by manipulating Inés's father. In an attempt to force Don Pedro to change his mind, Doña Inés announces that she will go into a convent rather than marry Don Rodrigo. She professes to have found a vocation and desires to be tutored in Latin. Fabia, a local sorceress and friend of Tello, disguises herself as a nun and pretends to be Doña Inés's spiritual advisor. Tello, actually Don Alonso's servant, becomes Doña Inés's Latin tutor. Of course, these characters pass messages back and forth between Inés and Don Alonso. All ends badly, however, when Don Alonso is attacked and murdered on the way to his parents' home in Olmedo. The overall tragedy comes at the end when Don Pedro says that he would have given Doña Inés's hand in marriage to Don Alonso if he had known. João Sedycias, in "Dying for Love: Eros and Violence in the Lopean Drama," notes that the play ends with a certain confusion, because all the deceit was for nothing:

The obstacle, therefore, never really existed, and the predicament was totally arbitrary. The crisis was the product of a desire that transfixes and prompts the lover to act against the dictates of reason at the cost of his happiness and ultimately of his own life. (4)

*El caballero de Olmedo* and *La verdad sospechosa* have the same moral lesson, that deceit backfires in the end. Don Alonso loses Doña Inés and his life, Don García loses Doña Jacinta has to marry Doña Lucrecia.

Lope de Vega, in contrast to Ruiz de Alarcón, was a native of Spain. His life was spent in service to the crown, in education at the University of Alcalá, and writing and producing numerous plays. He fought in the Armada against England, serving on the flagship *San Juan*,<sup>8</sup> for example, and served as secretary to the Marquis of Las Navas.

In comparison to *La verdad sospechosa*, *El caballero de Olmedo* seems grounded in Spain, with a more narrow view of the world. The characters are completely absorbed by their allegiance to Juan II, the king of Spain in the play, their excitement about his visit to Medina del Campo, and their

love lives. Also important is the local festival, which includes bullfighting and swordplay. Gerald Brenan, in his overview of "Lope de Vega and the New Comedy," sums up Lope de Vega's *comedias* by saying, ". . . they constitute a vast panegyric in praise of Spain and the Spanish way of life, and in particular of the principal occupation of Spaniards at that time—love" (208). There is one reference to the Indies in *El caballero de Olmedo*, in Act 2, scene 13. Don Alonso is alone in his house in Olmedo, reflecting on Inés's beauty and comparing it to the sun:

que el mismo sol la envidia,  
pues no la ve tan bella  
por su dorada cinta,  
ni cuando viene a España  
ni cuando va a las Indias. (811)

Using the term *Indias* opens this passage up to several interpretations. Lope shows here that his character, Alonso, views the "Indies" as being so far away that the sun sets there, after visiting Spain. The New World has become, for Spain, the distant horizon. Lope could have had the sun set in the western sea, or other place he desired. That it set in the "Indies" situates the horizon in a political sense, as the endpoint of the Spanish Empire. The path of the sun itself, described as a "golden ribbon" can symbolize the relationship between Spain and the "Indies" as being connected by a virtual golden ribbon. Spain and the "Indies" were indeed connected by a flow of gold, silver and other goods, another type of golden pathway. Finally, the reference to the "Indies" demonstrates the romanticized place it held in the language of the day and displays a certain general cultural understanding of Spain's relationship to New Spain.

Ruiz de Alarcón's play, on the other hand, has a larger worldview. Not only does Ruiz de Alarcón constantly reference Greek and Roman mythology, his characters refer to Peru, Japan, Italy and Turkey. In the instance of Peru, Japan and Turkey, the characters find these geographical designations exotic and sometimes unreachable. The women in *La verdad sospechosa* weave their own web of deception for Don García. Don García loves Jacinta by sight, not knowing that she and Lucrecia have changed places. Don García tells Jacinta in Act 2, scene 16 (113), that he would be married in Turkey rather than be married to Lucrecia. His mention of Turkey represents a place that is both remote and seemingly dangerous. The characters make other references to the marriage in Turkey on pages 130 and 135. Japan is mentioned in Act 3, scene 7 when Tristán notes that proof of Don García's bachelorhood could be gotten from Salamanca, and notes that ". . .no está Salamanca en el Japón (136). Here again, the geographical reference is to a very remote place. The reference in Act 2, Scene 4 to Italy, is not geographical, but rather to an Italian game similar to billiards, called *trucos*, when Don García says,

Aquí a los trucos me llevo  
De nuestro vecino el Conde. (82)

The effect of these references to places and customs outside of Spain is to give Ruiz de Alarcón's characters a wider vision of the world. They see their lives, not entirely within a Spanish framework, but as connected to the larger world. Their understanding even goes beyond the political relationship of Spain to the New World. It is important to note that their cultural information is not necessarily correct, but depends on the general cultural understanding of the day. In other words, the name "Turkey" has an exotic and dangerous feel, not a broad cultural understanding, but more of a stereotype. Even allowing for stereotypes and incorrect cultural information, Alarcón's characters are still less consumed by Spanish traditions and customs than the characters of Lope de Vega.

In addition, Ruiz de Alarcón's use of Greek and Roman mythology gives his plays a more educated and less provincial aspect. For example, in Act 2, scene 9, in a long speech by Don García addressed to Don Beltrán, he uses three mythological allusions:

A ésta, pues, saliendo al río,  
la vi una tarde un su coche,  
que juzgara el de Faetón,  
si fuese Erídano el Tormes.

No sé quien los atributos  
del fuego en Cupido pone,  
que yo de un súbito hielo  
me sentí ocupar entonces. (94)

The first is to Phaeton, the son of Helios and Clymene, who drives the chariot of the sun for one day. The second allusion is to the River Eridanus, which flowed through the underworld and is associated with the River Po. The final reference is to Cupid, the god of love and son of Venus. Don García, of course, had just returned from the University of Salamanca and his speech has the freshness of a recent university graduate who wants to show off his new knowledge. Ruiz de Alarcón, having been a student at the University of Salamanca himself, would have readily accessed this discourse from his own experience.

Rodolfo Usigli and Dorothy Schons also argue that Ruiz de Alarcón implicitly revealed his Mexican background in his works in several different ways. Dorothy Schons discusses the moral climate in Mexico during Ruiz de Alarcón's formative years (89-93), pointing out constant censorship and the repressive moral code that is reflected in his *comedias*<sup>9</sup> Usigli also points to three facts that reveal Ruiz de Alarcón's *criollismo*: his intense love for Madrid, a city like no other in New Spain; his love for his title, as he quickly added *Don* to his name when he arrived in Spain; and the almost complete lack of references to New Spain in his works (47-56). You can read *criollismo* in the spaces between the words in his works, rather like viewing the negative of a photograph that reveals details and images not seen in the positive print. His love of Madrid is beyond the love of someone born in Madrid, Lope de Vega, for example; it is the obsessive love of a newcomer. Overall, Ruiz de Alarcón's goal of being more Spanish than the Spanish and more noble than the noble delineates for us, hundreds of years later, a man who overcompensated for his societal and geographical inferiority. But, through the very act of overcompensation, he revealed more than he intended to his readers and to his audiences.

Ruiz de Alarcón's point of view differed from his fellow Golden Age writers. For instance, when he saw the sun set in the West, he didn't romanticize its path, but had real knowledge of its course. He was very well aware of the "Indies" and the truth behind the myths and legends that were passed around from person to person in Spain. His language was, by nature, culturally charged. When he used the word *indiano*, for instance, he simply could not use it in the same way that Lope de Vega would have. It was not an exotic term for him. As a *criollo* child, he was surrounded by *indianos*, rich and poor. He knew the struggles, successes and failures of the "Indies." Going to the university and working in New Spain, he witnessed the best and worst of the Spanish character as it built an empire on foreign soil. He also knew the situation of the indigenous community. His family must have had indigenous servants. He must have traveled the streets of Mexico City as a young man and seen indigenous worker/slaves toiling away on construction projects. He was well aware that his capital city was being built on the rubble of another civilization. At the same time, he understood that Spanish audiences would consider mention of the Indies as exotic and unknown, and chose to hide his experience of home between the lines, among the geographical references. Vargas de Luna locates Ruiz de Alarcón's new vision of the world in his native land, New Spain:

Los orígenes de esta nueva visión del mundo-y de las formas de imaginarlo que le fueron inherentes-deben buscarse, sin duda alguna, en las nociones y vivencias del espacio urbano que nuestro autor había asimilado durante las primeras décadas de su vida en la capital de la Nueva España. (179)

He did not take the opportunity to be didactic about the New World in a direct way, but made his characters citizens of a now larger world. He presented his homeland to his audiences, through his plays, as a hidden treasure for them to discover.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The population density of Mexico City in 1600 was 10,584 per square kilometer. By 1700, the city had grown to 6.6 square kilometers, 105,000 people with a density of 15,885 people per square kilometer see Kasperson.

<sup>2</sup> For an excellent discussion of the impact of the Spanish conquest on the population of Mexico, see Borah and Cook.

<sup>3</sup> Defourneaux makes the point that there were only certain ports in the New world that had authorization to trade with Spain at that time, such as Vera Cruz, Cartagena, Porto Bello, Callao and Acapulco (76).

<sup>4</sup> The dates for the events in Ruiz de Alarcón's life were taken from Walter Poesse, *Juan Ruiz de Alarcón*.

<sup>5</sup> Poesse states that members of the literary circles of Madrid attacked Ruiz de Alarcón. However, the attacks could have been a measure of his stature because "[a]n obscure or insignificant man would not have been a suitable target for such verbal assaults as he received" (27).

<sup>6</sup> Margarita Peña notes that the quotations from archival documents were modernized to some extent by adding punctuation, accents and putting text in italics that fills in gaps in the original, or where the print was not clear (221).

<sup>7</sup> Other references to *indiano* and *Perulero* can be found on pages 73, 87, 107, and 110.

<sup>8</sup> The armada left from the port of Lisboa on May 29, 1588. It consisted of 130 ships, 2,400 pieces of artillery and 30,000 men. Lope de Vega and his brother, Juan served on the same ship, the *San Juan*, which saw action with seven English ships. The *San Juan* was diverted to Ireland and returned to La Coruña. *Lope de Vega Carpio: Obras Escogidas*

<sup>9</sup> See Dorothy Schons for an interesting discussion of the moral plays that were very popular in New Spain when Ruiz de Alarcón was growing up. She posits that those plays influenced Ruiz de Alarcón's writings.

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## *Golpe de gracia (Coupe de Grâce): A search for Justice and Independence*

Perla Sassón-Henry  
United States Naval Academy  
Hermeneia

*Golpe de gracia*, by Colombian writer Jaime Alejandro Rodríguez Ruiz, is a landmark of Latin American electronic literature. In it, Rodríguez Ruiz integrates the latest developments in technology and electronic literature without losing sight of the use of language, plot and themes. In contrast with other Latin American digital narratives which were originally written texts, *Golpe de gracia* is built on the premise that this narrative *is* digital and as such should take advantage of all the available tools to bring this type of narrative to life. To accomplish this goal, Rodríguez Ruiz has incorporated games, animation, a wiki, a blog and a sophisticated layer of narratives that challenge the reader's interpretation of the various stories and metaphors within them.

*Golpe de gracia* was awarded the *Literatures in Spanish from Text to Hypermedia* prize by the Universidad Complutense de Madrid and Microsoft in 2007. In February 2011 the Electronic Literature Organization announced the publication of The Electronic Literature Collection Vol.2 which includes *golpe de gracia* in this digital anthology.<sup>1</sup> An innovative digital literary work, *Golpe de gracia* presents a variety of cultural perspectives from pre-Columbian to contemporary times through the eyes of a priest in his deathbed. The story develops and it can be interpreted in a variety of ways as the reader moves through a series of scenarios to unravel and interpret the plot. The reader can also take part in a number of video games that allow her to play different roles and thus gain a broader view of the situation.

In spite of its literary value and its unique use of media, a thorough search in scholarly databases and the Internet reveal there have been very few critical essays on *Golpe de gracia* since it was first published on line in 2006. One of the most illuminating analyses was in fact published by the author himself for the Online Congress Observatory for Cibersociety in 2006. In the essay "Narrative, Game and Knowledge in *Golpe de gracia*," Rodríguez Ruiz lays out the "powerful motive" that led him as a writer to the development of his hypermedia novel. According to him it was the "animadversion" to an important character, specifically a cleric that triggered the various stories presented in *Golpe de gracia*.<sup>2</sup> In his essay Rodríguez Ruiz also provides an in-depth description of the digital tools used in his novel as well as of the pedagogical implications behind them. One of his main points is that *Golpe de gracia* offers the reader a variety of strategies to move beyond the "interface paradigm."<sup>3</sup> Other relevant work on *Golpe de gracia* can also be found in Lluís Villa's blog *Tecnologías Literarias* which provides a thorough introduction to Jaime Alejandro Rodríguez Ruiz's career and to *Golpe de gracia* from a perspective that emphasizes the main themes of the novel, as well as its navigational challenges.

Nevertheless, the complexity of this hyperfiction composed of audio, video, video games, a wiki and a blog, calls for a detailed analysis and criticism, not only of the value of its narrative, but of its larger role in the literary community, in the society from which it emerged and its impact in a global community. In this essay I will refer to the main social, historical and cultural themes developed in this hypermedia novel as well as to the metaphors of power, authoritarianism, decadence and decay elaborated by Jaime Alejandro Rodríguez Ruiz throughout his work. Special emphasis will be given to Amaury, the main character of this hypernovel and to Maldonado, a character that in the end emerges in the novel as a key figure to reveal Amaury's fate. This analysis will be framed within the concepts presented by the French theorists Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their seminal work *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987), with special attention to the theme of authority and oppression. Whereas Deleuze and Guattari's theory will help illuminate Rodríguez Ruiz's treatment of these topics, in *Golpe de gracia*, Rodríguez Ruiz's narrative and use of digital technology will help us see more clearly what Deleuze and Guattari have in mind in their analysis of the dynamics of authority.<sup>4</sup>

### Three Worlds and Four Rooms

The introductory page of *Golpe de gracia* presents the image of a man, Amaury Gutiérrez, lying in a hospital bed, an acute noise of a respirator and a message inviting the reader to a near death experience as she plunges into the mystery of solving this man's impending death: Estás a punto de vivir una experiencia cercana a la muerte ... Harás parte del drama del cura Amaury desde su lecho de enfermo hasta el descubrimiento de la verdad ... pasando por su experiencia de contacto con la muerte. Recogerás con él sus pasos por la Costa de la Muerte ... serás testigo de su purificación en la Pirámide de Teotihuacán y sufrirás a la par con su difícil retorno al mundo de los vivos ... Finalmente, en el papel de periodista, averiguarás quién intentó matarlo, por qué y cómo lo hizo. ... Es hora de empezar .... " (*Golpe de gracia, Introducción*) As the reader/player starts her literary journey, she is given a multiplicity of entry points to start the piecing together of this narrative. The three doors on the bottom of the page lead to three different worlds: *Cadáver exquisito*, *Línea mortal* and *Muerte digital*. On the right side of the screen the reader is given the possibility of starting her reading experience by going to a blog which in turn leads to four rooms: *Sala de juegos*, *Sala de lectura*, *Sala de estudio* and *Sala de construcción*. As it will be seen below, each of these worlds and rooms provides the reader with relevant information to unravel the gist of the story, a story which is grounded in the sufferings of a man as a consequence of his search for power and authority.

#### Mundo 1: *Cadáver exquisito*

In this section we see Amaury in his role as boss, priest, teacher and father. In all of these roles he has exercised supreme power over each of the persons who visit him in the intensive care unit at the hospital. Amaury lies in bed in a coma. His former employees, members of his congregation, students and his own children visit him. All of them express a feeling of disgust for the man who treated each of them cruelly and without compassion. This feeling of reproach seems to be emphasized by the fact that the reader also hears the voices of Amaury's visitors. The reader is free to choose the order, in which he views, listens and reads each characters' testimony. This is just one instance where the reader interacting with the text and retrieving the testimonies of those who knew Amaury well, gets a sense of the deep motive for justice and independence that this hypernovel tries to convey. In one scene the reader hears the testimony of Amaury's own daughter who testifies to his abuse: "Si pudieras ver mis brazos, las verías miles de ampollas que se riegan por toda la piel. Sí, sólo una vez sucedió. Sólo una vez te atreviste por quemarme el brazo con el cigarrillo encendido por negarme a tus deseos perversos" (*Cadáver exquisito, visitante 2*).

#### Mundo 2: *Línea mortal*

In this section, which is comprised of 3D virtual games, the reader/player is challenged to piece together Amaury's life, a life that took him to Galicia, Spain and its mysterious legends as well as to the world of the Aztecs and their purifying rituals. This life journey concludes with scenes of a trip to Amaury's after-life where free from sins he tries to repair all the harm he has done throughout his life.

There are three levels to approach the games in this section. On the first level the reader engages in role play that alludes to Amaury's frequent dreams. This section includes detailed instructions on the different icons and how to play the game. Each reader has eighteen minutes to accomplish this section, but the time might be reduced if the player receives assistance from the game itself. The reader/player is taken to the Costa da morte in Galicia, Spain. Here the landscape abounds in medieval castles, humble peasants and sailors who endure the ravages of the sea and the strong flow of rivers. In this videogame the reader/player stops at a number of ports on the Costa da morte to gather clues which will help her create a picture of Amaury's early life. At each port a sailor tells a story with a clue that directs the reader to the next port destination. The sailors also hand in a fragment of an image to be completed as the reader/player moves through the game. The completed image, resembling a jigsaw puzzle, refers to an event that took place in Amaury's life which in turn will help the reader/player to give meaning to the protagonist's life.

The second level takes the player to the Aztec ruins of Teotihuacan, Mexico where she must climb one of the pyramids. To accomplish her goal the player carries a light bag filled with weaknesses she will have to unload as she makes her trip to the top of the pyramid. Throughout the ascent the player will face adversaries and obstacles that will try to prevent her from getting to the top and facing Quetzalcoatl, the patron of priesthood and wisdom.

On the third level the reader/player has to go through seven zones to reach the borderline with the real world. In each zone she will face a demon that she must defeat in order to acquire virtues. If the search takes too long the player will face dark regions and her heartbeat will increase denoting that time is coming to an end. If the player overcomes the obstacles she will reach an area where she must choose the right answer in order to move to the next zone.

### **Mundo 3: *Muerte digital***

In spite of all the information the reader gathers throughout the different sections of this hypernovel, it is in *Muerte digital* where all the enigmas are solved. Now as a player, the reader plays the role of a journalist who investigates the death of Father Amaury Gutiérrez. In this scenario the player finds and interviews suspects in his murder. In the end the reader/player finds out who killed Father Amaury and the reasons for that crime. As stated earlier *Golpe de gracia* comprises four different rooms with a specific theme to pursue in the unraveling of Amaury's life and fate. In *Sala de juego*, which resembles a small casino with roulette, a game table and a slot machine, the reader/player is immersed in a variety of roles ranging from a detective to a surrealist writer. The roulette in the room leads the reader/player to the same game mentioned in the above section Mundo 3: *Muerte digital*, whereas the game table challenges the reader/player to become a writer in a surrealist fashion.

According to the narrator in the introduction to this section "[t]he Surrealist movement invented a literary technique called *cadáver exquisito*. It consists of a collaborative creation that is continued without the authors' knowing the piece that precedes theirs" (*Golpe de gracia, Cadáver exquisito*).<sup>5</sup> In the case of *Golpe de gracia*, the creative process faces some constraints since the writer must abide by certain topics, genres and a word limit. Each section that a reader/player composes is called a *cadáver*. For example, one of the rules for the creation of the first *cadáver* is that it should take the form of a letter of reproach to Amaury in his role as a priest. The second *cadáver* invites the reader/player to write a humorous ironic piece in the style of the medieval exemplars. The third *cadáver* challenges the reader/writer to write a dialogue between two characters who know Amaury in his role as father. Its purpose is to use a humoristic tone to highlight Amaury's life as father and head of his family.

### ***Sala de estudios***

*Sala de estudios* is an area where Jaime Alejandro Rodríguez Ruiz elaborates on the tenets of his work. Within this section Rodríguez Ruiz has created a multiblog system with three blogs each pertaining to one of the three different worlds mentioned above. According to Marc Marino in his article "Golpe de gracia: A coup for Rodríguez Ruiz," "Jaime Alejandro is one of those rare internet artist [*sic*] who offers us not only his piece but also extensive reflections on them that also, ultimately, become part of the piece" (2006). This integration of the author's reflections on his work allows readers to become more familiar with the issues developed throughout the piece and thus provoking a better understanding of the work.<sup>6</sup>

In *Golpe de gracia* old age is presented as a metaphor. According to Rodríguez in his blog "La vejez como metáfora en *Golpe de gracia*," "the image of an old man has been a rich literary trope" (Rodríguez Ruiz 2006). In the same blog Rodríguez Ruiz makes reference to Gabriel García Márquez's novel *Memoria de mis putas tristes* (2004) and the novel *Viejo* by Venezuelan writer Adriano González León which describes the suffering and solitude of an old man (Rodríguez Ruiz 2006). Rodríguez Ruiz also refers readers to classic works such as Hemmingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* and to Margarite Yourcenar's *Memorias de Adriano*. Rodríguez Ruiz provides an in depth analysis of the topics of his work and he also provides readers with a space to leave their own comments.<sup>7</sup> One of the most relevant comments that the author makes in his blog is his elaboration on the concept of old age and the consequences the protagonist has to face due to his actions. In the case of Amaury, who, according to Rodríguez Ruiz, "behaves as if he were 40 but he is 70" (2006), Rodríguez Ruiz highlights that Amaury's reckless authoritarian attitude "stems from two special circumstances: on the one hand his connections with systems of power (...) and a special physical and psychological condition" that originates from his life as a priest (Rodríguez Ruiz 2006). These two circumstances allow Amaury to abuse his power. In Rodríguez Ruiz's words Amaury "is an independent man, relatively healthy and

with high responsibilities yet he is incapable of carrying them out efficiently" (Rodríguez Ruiz 2006). He needs an "event" that can make him aware of what he has done. According to Rodríguez Ruiz this event is "the crime of which he is a victim" (Rodríguez Ruiz 2006).

### **Deleuze and Guattari's theory: Colombia and Latin America as seen through Amaury's life and fate**

The second theme analyzed in Rodríguez Ruiz's blog is illness. It is here, as it will be shown later in this essay, that Rodríguez Ruiz's analysis of the topic paves the way to my analysis of this work from a perspective that takes into account Deleuze and Guattari's theory by alluding to issues related to the abuse of power and its consequences. In his blog section entitled "Enfermedad y deterioro como metáfora en *Golpe de gracia*," Rodríguez Ruiz alludes to Susan Sontag's book *La enfermedad y sus metáforas* (Rodríguez Ruiz 2006). According to Rodríguez Ruiz, "Amaury has created the conditions to cause his own death" (Rodríguez Ruiz 2006). Rodríguez Ruiz states that "Amaury is a victim of the world (of his aggressor), but above all he is a victim of what he has made of the world (an arbitrary game of power) and of himself (with his innocent attitude, rigidity, negligence, and denial)" (Rodríguez Ruiz 2006).

The last topic discussed in this blog is authoritarianism. In his deathbed, Amaury can be seen as someone who almost designed his own demise. Once the reader/player pieces together all the narratives, voices and images, she arrives, not coincidentally, at the discussion of authoritarianism. It is this topic that I would like to illustrate in the next paragraphs taking into account the theory of Deleuze and Guattari which develops the notion of segmentation in a human being and society as well as According to Rodríguez Ruiz old age, authority and illness are related. In his own words he states that "there is no doubt that the three topics are intrinsically connected". Rodríguez Ruiz asserts that "authoritarianism is the key figure in *Golpe de gracia*. It acts as a dramatic engine that triggers the action in this work" (Rodríguez Ruiz 2006). Amaury's circumstances as well as the ones of those around him recall many events that took place during dictatorship in Latin America.

Like many Latin American dictators, Amaury represents the old regime unwilling to admit his sinful acts. He dies a victim of his own cruelty and avarice. On the other hand, the people who surround him, almost to his last breath, represent all the voices who are finally able to openly express all the oppression they felt a long time ago. Even if they may be speaking to a man who is in a coma, their voices express an outcry for justice and independence from the ties to the old regime. In their chapter "Micropolitics and Segmentarity," Deleuze and Guattari assert that "[w]e are segmented from all around and in every direction. The human being is a segmented animal" (Deleuze and Guattari 208). In Father Amaury's case his existence has been segmented in at least four different realms as described in *Golpe de gracia*: priest, boss, teacher and father. The main trait of his behavior is that he has embedded within him, incarnated, some of the features prevalent in an authoritarian State.

According to Deleuze and Guattari "[not] only does the State exercise power over the segments it sustains or permits to survive, but it possesses and imposes, its own segmentarity" (210). This is reflected in all the different roles Amaury played throughout his life. Deleuze and Guattari claim that "modern life has not done away with segmentarity but on the contrary made it exceptionally rigid" (210). In his role as priest, boss, teacher and father, Amaury has remained attached to his own obsession to exercise his power.

Deleuze and Guattari describe two types of segmentarity, "one 'primitive' and supple, the other 'modern' and rigid. The supple segmentarity allows for the presence of many eyes and voices dispersed in 'many knots' or 'black holes' whereas the 'modern' segmentarity concentrates on one point (Deleuze and Guattari 212). Furthermore, in the State "[t]he segmentarity becomes rigid, to the extent that all centers resonate in, and all black holes fall on, a single point of accumulation that is like a point of intersection somewhere behind the eyes" (211). In Deleuze and Guattari's words, "[t]he face of the father, teacher, colonel, boss, enter into redundancy, refer back to a center of significance that moves across various circles and passes back over all the segments" (211). As if in a subtle Borgesian allusion to the library of Babel, Deleuze and Guattari claim that there is a "macroface whose center is every where and circumference nowhere" (211). Thus, "the centers of power in State societies behave as apparatus of resonance, they organize resonance where the supple segmentarity inhibits it" (211). In *Golpe de gracia*, resonance is embedded in the institutions or social groups that Amaury has been a part of. Due to his power as cleric he has been able to impose his will and the

laws of the Church regardless of the tools he has used to achieve his goals. He represents the Church yet he does not behave as the caring and leading figure he is supposed to be. This can be inferred from the words of a member of his congregation who reproaches the comatose Amaury for his words and actions during a visit to the intensive care unit:

"Su vida, cura, ha estado llena de falsedades y mentiras. Su vida no ha sido sino un gran pecado. Sé que ahora vive en su infierno, que los caminos que se despliegan en su mente están inundados de mierda y que cada vez que intenta avanzar resbala y cae sobre ella." (*Golpe de gracia, Cadáver exquisito*) As a boss, Amaury thought he was God. Those employees who visit him at the hospital represent what Deleuze and Guattari call "the supple fabric without which [the] rigid segments would not hold. Both segments supple and rigid are entangled and inseparable" (213). According to Deleuze and Guattari "everything is political, but every politics is simultaneously a macropolitics and a micropolitics ... Micropolitics are represented by the multiple voices where the macropolitics propagates one voice" (213).

In his role as a teacher, Amaury is recriminated by some of his students because he imposed on them a world of death, meaning a world where there were no illusions, only cynicism, corruption and lies. In one instance the reader is informed that a student is not so much against Amaury but against what he represents. In reference to the topic the student says: "Qué curioso. Ahora que lo tengo al frente, así de indefenso, y de frágil, no siento ningún odio por usted. No es a usted a quien odiamos, sino a lo que hace o lo que representa" (*Golpe de gracia, Cadáver exquisito*). Amaury represents power, a power base on fear and oppression. It is this concept of oppression that has also been elaborated by Deleuze and Guattari. In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari state that [t]he microtextures -not masochism- are what explain how the oppressed can take an active role in oppression: the workers of the rich nations tha] actively participate in the exploitation of the Third World" (225). In *Golpe de gracia*, Amaury is portrayed as someone who feels alienated from society and finally turns to his abusive power. His victims have also felt their own alienation and in their last visit to a comatose Amaury verbally torment him at his deathbed for all the pain he inflicted upon them. In his role as father Amaury listens to his children's accounts of their suffering. His daughter wishes his death since she was a victim of his sexual abuse. Her burns are an everyday reminder of her father's atrocities. Another visitor in this section makes Amaury aware of what type of values he has instilled in his children. His children want him dead just to receive their father's inheritance: "Basta que mires a tu alrededor, viejo: estás sólo. Tus hijos anhelan el deceso para abalanzarse sobre la herencia, es lo único que aguardan, lo único que puede esperarse de ellos" (*Golpe de gracia, Cadáver exquisito*). In the end Amaury is still in the solitude of his hospital bed where he unsuccessfully tries to get rid of all the memories of pain and alone for the suffering he has inflicted upon his children and those close to him.

### ***Muerte anunciada***

As stated earlier, Amaury paves the way to his own destruction which in turn opens up a space of freedom and independence for all of those who are victims of his authoritarianism. Maldonado, who is not a main character throughout the novel but a key figure in Amaury's demise, has attempted to declare his freedom and independence from what Deleuze and Guattari call a rigid structure. In a twenty-first century style Ángel Maldonado, a young computer aficionado and *hikikomori* plans his old teacher's death. As the novel within this hypermedia novel informs us, there is no doubt that Maldonado is "an authentic hikikomori, expression that in Japanese means 'withdrawn and isolated'" (*Golpe de gracia, El infierno de Amaury*). As any *hikikomori* of his generation, Maldonado lives in almost complete isolation from the rest of the real world yet he is "connected" to the Net, becoming a "verdadero ermitaño del Siglo XXI" (*Golpe de gracia, El infierno de Amaury*). "Maldonado, un antiguo alumno del Padre Gutiérrez, mantenía una vida extraña. Aislado por decisión propia había cortado toda relación social con su entorno, incluida la familia. Casi sin contacto con el mundo existente más allá de su habitación, pasó varios meses sin ver a sus padres y hermanos, quienes le dejaban los alimentos en la puerta de su alcoba" (*Golpe de gracia, El infierno de Amaury*). It is from his own bedroom that this *ciber-ermitaño* plans his old teacher's death. In his mind his plan must meet certain requirements: The executioner must be a person close to Amaury. Amaury's death must be induced via a toxic plant substance which will be administered to Amaury while in hospital. Last but not least the victim must suffer his sentence by being in a coma that will allow him to understand everything that goes on around him without being able to act (Rodríguez Ruiz 2006).

As Maldonado plans this golpe de gracia he also plans to give the final blow to a world which is in decay. According to Rodríguez Ruiz in the blog entitled "*Golpe de gracia: ¿un golpe anarquista?*," "Maldonado gives el golpe de gracia to a world he considers decadent and which has caused all his frustrations" (2006). All this is represented by the figure of the old priest. This idea is elaborated in one of the video games as well as in the novel *El infierno de Amaury* which is within the hypermedia novel.

In summary, in *Golpe de gracia* Maldonado acts from the margins of the text which helps to set him free from the old regime of his parents, teachers, and society. He is sure that the time has come to put an end to the ancien régime. Rodríguez Ruiz blogs "Maldonado es un hikikomori a la colombiana." He has taken the law into his own hands, hoping thus to contribute to the creation of a society that is more democratic and inclusive. As a twenty-first century hikikomori he deeply believes he represents a collective voice in search of justice and freedom. This is parallel to the outcry for justice and independence linked to the rejection of any type of hierarchical institution that is characteristic of large sectors of Latin American society ever since the nineteenth century. Throughout *Golpe de gracia* Rodríguez Ruiz develops the theme of abusive power and the search for freedom and independence via interactive sections of the novel that allow readers to hear and witness Amaury's victims' desperate search for justice for all the mental and physical abuses they underwent. Perhaps the blog that Rodríguez Ruiz includes as part of this hyper novel is one of the most interactive tools in *Golpe de gracia*. The blog is an open forum for those digital readers who wish to comment and reflect on Amaury's authoritarian figures of boss, teacher, priest and father as well as on the role of technology as a means to open up a virtual forum on topics such as authority and search for freedom.

These issues are also underscored in the novel *El infierno del padre Amaury* which is interpolated in *Golpe de gracia*. Thus, the digital tools that Rodríguez Ruiz has incorporated in his novel contribute to reinforce in different ways the outcry for freedom and justice coming from societies that have been silenced by authoritarian regimes. Freedom and independence do not come without a fight, and *Golpe de gracia* brings this fact to life by discussing this issue and actively engaging the reader, not only to read about it but to express herself and draw her own conclusion. As in Latin America, in *Golpe de gracia* the search for justice and independence still continues thanks in large part to the technological tools that this literary piece offers to its readers.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> [The Electronic Literature Collection, Volume 2](#) includes 63 works, three of which are in Spanish.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted all translations are mine.

<sup>3</sup> In reference to the term 'interface paradigm,' Rodríguez Ruiz notes that various authors have warned against the superficiality inherent in the digital medium.

<sup>4</sup> I would like to thank the peer reviewers of this journal for their insightful comments and recommendations.

<sup>5</sup> In English this technique is known as "exquisite corpse."

<sup>6</sup> The fact that Rodríguez Ruiz has integrated the blogs with his comments in *Golpe de gracia* is really important since it helps readers to get a thorough understanding of the social, philosophical and technological issues behind this hypernovel. At the same time it defies the concept of "interface paradigm" by providing provoking material for analysis.

<sup>7</sup> It is crucial to note that *Golpe de gracia* provides several spaces for the readers to leave their comments. In the case of Rodríguez Ruiz's blog, throughout the years many readers have left their comments and reactions to the author's detailed theoretical essays on *Golpe de gracia*.

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## EL INMIGRANTE COMO SUJETO POLIDIMENSIONAL EN *VIAJE A LA TIERRA DEL ABUELO* DE BENCASTRO

Consuelo Hernández  
American University  
Washington DC.

*Soñé que me había convertido en el abuelo;  
era como si él hubiera regresado a la juventud.*

Mario Bencaastro (*Viaje 64*)

La conmoción nacional que vivió El Salvador durante los años de la Guerra Civil y la deprimente situación económica afectaron todas sus estructuras sociales. Una de las más afectadas fue la familia que sufrió rupturas debido al desplazamiento forzado y a la emigración masiva hacia los Estados Unidos. Sin embargo los que viajaron no lograron escapar de las secuelas de la guerra y sus consiguientes traumas.

Dentro de la diáspora centroamericana, el escritor salvadoreño Mario Bencaastro se ha dedicado a documentar esta historia, precisamente, desde el punto de vista del inmigrante. Desde sus primeras obras: *Disparo en la catedral* (1996) y *Odisea del norte* (2000) se ha ocupado primero de la Guerra Civil y, luego, de la situación de los trabajadores inmigrantes. Más recientemente, en su tercera novela, *Viaje a la tierra del abuelo* (2004), se concentra en la realidad que viven en los Estados Unidos los adolescentes que emigraron con sus padres por causa de la guerra y por la carencia de un empleo que les permitiera sobrevivir en su país. En la perspectiva de autor de la diáspora, el tipo de personajes que enfocan sus novelas –los inmigrantes–, Bencaastro se diferencia de otros excelentes autores de los países centroamericanos como Manlio Argueta, Gaspar González, Omar Cabezas, y de testimonios como el de Rigoberta Menchú, quienes también han denunciado en sus obras, la violencia en Centroamérica y sus efectos pero, en contraste con Bencaastro, lo hacen desde su propia región donde han permanecido, y por ello tienen una visión distinta a los autores que emigraron a Estados Unidos.

Aunque para los efectos de la tesis que me propongo demostrar aquí, no es fundamental este punto, quisiera mencionar a modo informativo que Mario Bencaastro se puede ubicar más apropiadamente en la misma esfera de los escritores que pertenecen a las comunidades de origen latinoamericano en Estados Unidos, tales como: Esmeralda del Valle de Puerto Rico, Julia Álvarez y Junot Díaz de origen dominicano, Arturo Arias de Guatemala, Roberto Quesada de Honduras y Daniel Alarcón peruano-estadounidense. Todos ellos comparten con Bencaastro una temática relacionada con la comunidad latina en Estados Unidos, el drama de los inmigrantes, la descolocación de los jóvenes, las fracturas culturales que surgen como consecuencia de la inmigración y la pervivencia de un substrato heredado de sus ascendientes que constituye la base de sus creaciones literarias. A su vez Bencaastro es particular en su persistencia y coherencia con las que se ha dedicado a escribir sobre la comunidad salvadoreña y centroamericana en Estados Unidos.

La obra de Bencaastro, *Viaje a la tierra del abuelo*, es una "novela breve"<sup>1</sup> y a la vez épica; se caracteriza por su técnica simple, estructura lineal, lenguaje estándar y un obvio propósito didáctico que impone límites al narrador. Estos límites, según la novela misma, los impone el personaje de la trabajadora social quien le pide a Sergio, personaje principal, que narre su historia a los estudiantes y profesores de Belmont High School, de Los Ángeles, California, a condición de que dicha narración muestre las condiciones en que vive mucha gente en otros países y ayude a la comunidad estadounidense a comprender la realidad de los inmigrantes, en especial la de los jóvenes en su lucha por integrarse a otra cultura y por lograr sus sueños. Otro propósito debía ser contribuir a esclarecer los conflictos de identidad y mejorar la autoestima de los jóvenes que sienten vergüenza de sus raíces, de su lengua o de su condición de inmigrantes. Pero sobre todo en esta historia "se captarían los aspectos positivos de esta comunidad" (136-137).

Estos límites que se imponen al narrador trascienden también a Bencaastro-autor; como ha indicado Lydia Gil, "parte de su éxito es que Bencaastro buscó la ayuda de estudiantes latinos de las escuelas Belmont High y On Ramp Arts de Los Ángeles, quienes sugirieron temas y opiniones para

integrar la trama" (Gil). Mas los mismos estudiantes de la escuela le pidieron al autor en sus respuestas a una entrevista que realizara previa a la novela: "Favor de no escribir otra novela denigrante sobre los latinos."<sup>2</sup> Estas condiciones imponen una cierta asepsia al relato, pues debe ignorar lo negativo, lo cual de alguna manera conlleva a mutilar la realidad. Se explica así la exclusión de escenas gráficas de violencia, pero de todos modos se alude al tema frecuentemente sobre todo en los capítulos 13 y 14 que se refieren viaje de los indocumentados centroamericanos a Estados Unidos y, además, caracterizan el ghetto donde viven los inmigrantes.

En la obra el narrador y personaje central es Sergio de dieciséis años, quien emigró de El Salvador con sus padres a los seis. Desgarrado entre dos mundos y anfibio de dos culturas, comparte su vida entre la escuela en un ambiente extranjero, y la casa, el trabajo y la nostalgia por el abuelo, la figura más determinante en su formación. La obra se compone de dos macrorrelatos. Al primero lo mueve el deseo del abuelo, quien quería ser sepultado en su tierra, y Sergio cuenta las aventuras que afronta hasta que logra cumplir su voluntad. La situación se le complica porque sus padres ya lo han enterrado en Estados Unidos. Al segundo macrorrelato lo mueve el deseo de Sergio quien, una vez que viaja a la tierra del abuelo, se enamora y decide llevar a Estados Unidos a Flor de Ángel, adolescente de una familia destrozada por la guerra civil. Como ella no tiene visa, Sergio, a pesar de ser residente documentado en Estados Unidos, la acompaña para protegerla y, de esa manera, revive a su lado la peligrosa odisea que afrontan todos los que se arriesgan a pasar clandestinamente la frontera.

Este trabajo analiza en *Viaje a la tierra del abuelo* las múltiples dimensiones del personaje central, y su proceso de construcción identitaria en medio de opciones contradictorias, a veces hostiles e inescapables. Se verá cómo dicho personaje en lugar de desarrollarse y vivir en un ambiente cohesivo y más orgánico considerado "normal," tiene que navegar por mundos heterogéneos y en algunos casos contrapuestos —la cultura estadounidense y la de su tierra— y entre otras subculturas y microculturas —maras, ghettos, la escuela, el trabajo y la subcultura del inmigrante. Todo ello resultante del desplazamiento forzado por la guerra y las condiciones restrictivas y de desigualdad económica en su país de origen. La novela se analizará con base en delineamientos psicológicos, dando especial atención a los cambios de la adolescencia acompañados por la lucha en busca de identidad y asimilación, que tan fuertemente ocurren dentro del proceso de inmigración.

En concepto de sujeto polidimensional y todo lo relacionado con la identidad cultural —etnicidad, edad, clase y género— y la comunidad son importantes en este trabajo, así como la creatividad que es crucial en la manera como el personaje y la comunidad responden y solucionan sus conflictos. Nos apoyamos en Johan Fornäs, quien afirma que "convertirse en sujeto resulta un proceso difícil de separación y conexión" (222). Con base en su teoría psicoanalítica para su interpretación de los sujetos, recurriremos a los conceptos de regresión, etnicidad, clase y género como elementos de definición identitaria.<sup>3</sup>

El concepto de sujeto polidimensional se define por oposición a la idea de un sujeto simple de identidad singular. La polidimensión implica un sujeto de identidad "dividida, fragmentada," es decir con múltiples capas que se interrelacionan y se superponen. Estas múltiples dimensiones del sujeto resultan de cruzar y ser atravesado (corporal y mentalmente) por aspectos de identidad asociados con categorías biológicas, sociales y culturales (Fornas 222).

Las dificultades del este proceso de definición de identidad son obvias al analizar a Sergio y sus compañeros quienes tienen que convivir con múltiples rupturas y fragmentaciones individuales y colectivas. Como hijo de inmigrantes pertenece al grupo enorme de gente que en los últimos años a través del mundo se han trasladado del sur al norte debido a las circunstancias políticas y en busca de mejores condiciones de vida, separándose de su cultura y de su país natal. La identidad de Sergio, que lo conecta fluidamente con los otros hijos de inmigrantes, es más polivalente y conflictiva que la de los no inmigrantes. Sergio, al darse cuenta de su "estatus ambiguo en la sociedad americana" (Gutiérrez 423) lo expresa en palabras simples: "yo no sé ni de dónde soy. No sé si soy de aquí o de allá. Si soy latino o si soy gringo" (21).<sup>4</sup> Sus dudas lo siguen a la escuela y le obligan a cuestionar la historia colectiva porque ahora, en su clase favorita, aprende que en 1848 hubo una guerra entre Estados Unidos y México en la cual éste perdió las tierras al norte del Río Grande (Arizona, Nevada, California, Nuevo México y Texas). Con la escasa formación que posee, sin éxito busca aclarar estas dudas, interrogando a su maestro: "Si esa gente ya vivía en esas tierras cuando los Estados Unidos se apoderó de ellas, ¿quiénes son los inmigrantes? ¿Quiénes son los indocumentados, ellos o nosotros?" (51). Su pregunta queda sin solución; tendrá que esperar para comprender cómo funcionan los

mecanismos geopolíticos. Mientras tanto se conforma recordando que el abuelo le solía decir: "La historia demuestra que los seres humanos cometemos los mismos errores del pasado, y nunca aprendemos nada de ellos" (51).

Las preguntas sobre su identidad se recrudecen cuando advierte que su presente no es la continuación armónica de su pasado, que hay fracturas imposibles de soldar. "¿Cuál es mi patria?" le pregunta un día al abuelo, al darse cuenta de que se siente marginado y que no hay en él un sentido de pertenencia al lugar donde vive (33). El pasado tiene un peso enorme y de hecho todo el relato épico de las aventuras de los jóvenes inmigrantes y de los que cruzan la frontera sin visa se basa en la regresión. El relato comienza con el recuerdo de la muerte del abuelo quien representa su pasado, su historia y la plataforma que lo sostiene cuando afronta el miedo y la duda. El abuelo fue quien le enseñó que "éste [EE.UU.] es un país libre y se puede hablar con libertad" (48); le explicó que sus padres aquí, con el mismo trabajo que hacían en la tierra, son mejor remunerados, y que aquí "ningún trabajo es denigrante como allá" (36). Estas afirmaciones del abuelo, resultan verdades parciales, cuando las confronta con la realidad. Pues, como afirma David Gutiérrez: "los mexicanos han sido culpados injustamente por acontecimientos sobre los cuales no tienen ningún control. Despreciados y envilecidos después de gastar diez, quince o más años productivos como fuertes trabajadores permanecen aislados de la clase trabajadora americana" (421).<sup>5</sup> La presencia del abuelo en su nieto se manifiesta también en sus refranes que vienen en auxilio de Sergio cuando su español se torna insuficiente, por ejemplo, para explicar sintéticamente la adicción de sus padres y otros inmigrantes al dinero y al consumismo, cita las palabras de su abuelo: "El que no tiene y llega a tener, loco de gozo se puede volver" (11).

Esta regresión al pasado y su peso en el presente ha sido detectada por otros escritores de origen latinoamericano en Estados Unidos. Por ejemplo Junot Díaz en la entrevista "In Darkness We Meet," afirma que "la sombra de la historia no desaparece...Puedes pretender que es tu sombra, pero realmente es una sombra del pasado que es muy vieja y muy larga" (Celayo et al 18).<sup>6</sup> Para Sergio, el abuelo es la formalización de esa sombra del pasado, que viene a complejizar las capas que están construyendo su identidad polidimensional y policultural.

La omnipresencia del pasado le otorga la seguridad de lo conocido, sin embargo no excluye los momentos de progreso, de avance plenos de inseguridad, riesgo, duda e interrogantes frente a lo desconocido. Simultáneamente es un mundo abierto a nuevas posibilidades: su novia centroamericana, la expectativa de darle otro tipo de vida, los planes de futuro en Estados Unidos, de estudiar en la universidad. De este modo, Sergio sin saberlo se ubica en una zona donde está naciendo una cultura creativa, enriquecida por múltiples puntos de vista que provienen de sus conexiones y participación tanto en las comunidades inmigrantes como en las comunidades autóctonas. Sergio y los jóvenes inmigrantes se transforman por la recepción de los diferentes textos que generan las personas que le rodean tanto estadounidenses como latinoamericanas, a través del proceso de aprendizaje en la escuela, por su identificación con el abuelo y su familia, y mediante su propia reflexión de lo cual deja testimonio en el texto.

Si es cierto que "el sujeto nace y la identidad se construye" (Fornäs 233), para entender la construcción identitaria de Sergio, sólo contamos con su relato, un texto cultural, simbólico que revela un Sergio y unos amigos en proceso de definirse. Sergio no es igual a sus compañeros, ni al muchacho del inicio de la narración; sufre un proceso de transformación donde intervienen múltiples factores: la conexión con otros grupos más allá de la familia, la escuela, el contacto con la gente de la tierra del abuelo: su tía, Moisés, el traficante de indocumentados y Flor de Ángel. El reencuentro con su tierra y sus características culturales (alegría, solidaridad, compañía, el colorido, la naturaleza, el clima y también la precariedad, el desempleo, la corrupción, la violencia y el egoísmo presente en los centros de poder), le cambian su subjetividad. Biológicamente sufre otro proceso: empieza a sentir la necesidad de realización erótica y de su propio reconocimiento a través de la pareja. Por otra parte, las esferas en las que se ha tenido que mover en Los Ángeles para conocer el otro país, aprender un idioma, compartir en la escuela con pandilleros, moverse entre inmigrantes, trabajar como adulto e incursionar en otra cultura, lo han cambiado psicológicamente. Todos estos factores son fundamentales en su compleja construcción identitaria que sin duda lo diferenciarán del nativo de los Estados Unidos.

A diferencia de los jóvenes que crecen en la tierra donde nacieron, en este relato, Sergio se percibe viviendo entre varias disyuntivas, debido a su situación de inmigrante. Por una parte, cree que se ha acostumbrado al nuevo país, pero sus críticas en el texto revelan la desadaptación en la cultura

adoptada. Por ejemplo ante la forma como velan a su abuelo se acuerda que "Allá hasta para enterrar a los muertos la gente tiene gusto... No como aquí que todo lo hacen con frialdad" (4). La situación no es mejor en la relación con su familia, pues habitado por varias identidades que se interconectan de forma conflictiva Sergio se podía comunicar fácilmente con su abuelo, pero no con sus padres, es estudiante adolescente pero trabaja como adulto, crítica a sus compañeros que tienen relaciones y embarazan a sus amigas y, paradójicamente, él mismo decide llevarse una adolescente indocumentada desde su país a Los Ángeles, y ama a sus padres pero no puede dialogar con ellos porque el silencio los separa como una muralla infranqueable. "[A] veces quisiera ser como mis padres y mantener su cultura, pero entonces me doy cuenta de que el resto del mundo es de otra manera, pienso que soy [yo] el problema porque quiero ir contra la corriente" (33).

En lo que se refiere a la institución educativa, Sergio y los otros muchachos están en una escuela más represiva y discriminativa que formativa, lo cual contribuye a complicar su identidad y, aunque el narrador no es muy obvio, sutilmente, como señala Lydia Gil, Bencastro-autor inserta situaciones que resonarán en sus lectores como las escuelas sucias y abarrotadas –la propia Belmont High donde estudia el personaje– jóvenes pandilleros, adolescentes embarazadas, estudiantes que se duermen en las clases porque tienen que trabajar de noche para ayudar a sus familias (Gil).<sup>7</sup>

La escuela que debería estar para desarrollar sus capacidades individuales, es cuestionada por su fracaso en su intento de educar. Sus profesores son incapaces de entender que los alumnos como Sergio se duermen en las clases o faltan con las tareas porque sus padres los obligan a trabajar de noche y la respuesta es el castigo, la represión, el maltrato verbal y la alienación.<sup>8</sup> La escuela llega a ser un espacio similar a la frontera de Gloria Anzaldúa: "Este lugar de contradicciones no es un territorio cómodo para vivir. El odio, la ira y la explotación son características prominentes de este paisaje" (627).<sup>9</sup> Los muchachos terminan víctimas de acciones injustas tanto en la escuela como en la casa y el proceso de formación identitaria que debía ser labor de padres, profesores y amigos resulta muy doloroso y desprovisto de apoyo. A. O. Scott refiriéndose a la literatura sobre los desafíos que confrontan los muchachos inmigrantes anota: "Esta es, casi a pesar de sí misma, una novela de asimilación, una crónica fracturada del movimiento inexorable de los hijos de inmigrantes hacia la clase media americana, donde las historias terribles e increíbles de los abuelos que perviven en el viejo país han llegado a ser un género por derecho propio" (1).<sup>10</sup>

La ambivalencia lingüística también complica la identidad de Sergio quien es bilingüe pero los lugares y circunstancias donde usa cada uno de los dos idiomas están desconectados. En la escuela y fuera de la casa habla inglés, y con sus padres y el abuelo habla en español. Esta dualidad determina una cierta falta de dominio y fluidez en la lengua materna que se manifiesta en su relato. Como narrador se limita a repetir los textos del abuelo, los padres, los amigos o de la trabajadora social en un español casi arcaico, carente de la espontaneidad propia de los adolescentes, lo cual le da la ventaja de poder ser comprendido por los jóvenes que hablen español, pero por otro lado lo desconecta de las marcas culturales de la jerga moderna y urbana. Sergio está perdiendo su lengua y él lo sabe. "Hablabas mejor cuando tenías seis años –le dice el abuelo– y ahora que sos adolescente hablás mitad español y mitad inglés" (3). El chico vive en dos mundos que no son "mundos paralelos, ni balanceados o en armonía" (Ricoeur 228). Y la asimetría se aprecia en la lengua que se forma por un proceso de participación colectiva y es uno de los aspectos más importantes del nivel simbólico del sujeto. La lengua adoptada poco a poco se está imponiendo y la interacción de Sergio con su amigo Luis, otro inmigrante, se da en ambas lenguas: "él lo hacía en inglés aunque yo le hablara en español. Así también lo hacía con sus padres, aunque para ellos era más difícil entender..." (39); esta es una realidad común con muchos padres inmigrantes que tampoco pueden ayudar a sus hijos en las tareas "porque no hablan inglés" (46) y evitan acudir a la citaciones de la escuela por miedo a que descubran su condición de indocumentados en el país donde viven. Es admirable, no obstante, que Sergio mantenga activo el español con sus amigos, especialmente si se tiene en cuenta que "la historia de la jerarquía social ha sido una donde la lengua del poder social refuerza el poder silenciando las otras lenguas" (Espinoza 19). En efecto, la asimilación lingüística ha sido usada a través de la historia como un medio para suprimir y borrar la otra cultura; los ejemplos saltan a la vista. Sin embargo, la lengua por sí misma no lo es todo, pues no existe sino en la interacción con los otros. Por eso la trabajadora social le pide a Sergio que narre su historia con el fin de que sirva de ejemplo y de medio de aprendizaje para otros, otorgándole así, un sentido a su experiencia y al propio acto de narrar. Pues, *Viaje a la tierra del abuelo* es una novela de y para jóvenes inmigrantes más recientes, a diferencia, por ejemplo de la novela de Junot Díaz, donde los jóvenes son de segunda generación con más

trcho recorrido en el camino de la asimilación. De hecho *La maravillosa vida breve de Óscar Wao*<sup>11</sup> de Díaz ha sido considerada: "un melodrama de adultos jóvenes tapizado sobre la crónica de múltiples generaciones de una familia inmigrante que se salpica en el realismo mágico tropical, el feminismo rock-punk, el machismo hip-hop, las pirotécnicas posmodernistas y suficiente multiculturalismo polimorfo para llenar un programa de introducción a los estudios culturales." (*New York Times Book Review I*).<sup>12</sup>

Al contrario, el Sergio de Bencastro todavía se debate porque, aunque no ha logrado afiliarse a la subcultura del hip hop o cualquier otra de los jóvenes estadounidenses, no puede relacionarse tampoco con la música de su tierra. No sabe disfrutar las cumbias que siempre suenan en la casa, es un tipo de música que no lo conecta al grupo de jóvenes con el que también tiene un sentido de pertenencia: "había algo en esa música que no me inspiraba a bailar" (75).

De acuerdo con Fornäs, "[a]demás de las amistades y los compañeros de grupo, la familia es la más importante institución social y la más informal y asistemática" (248). No obstante, la convivencia de Sergio y sus compañeros inmigrantes con la familia no se dan en un marco estable y de apoyo organizado en el que reciban una sólida formación ética y estética que le permita relacionarse con las instituciones sociales; si no fuera por el abuelo y la trabajadora social el muchacho estaría a la deriva. Sergio no recibe la debida atención de sus padres porque están excesivamente ocupados en trabajar y hacer dinero, valores que quieren transmitirle a su hijo, sin el mediano entendimiento de otras manifestaciones de la cultura anglosajona donde el muchacho se desenvuelve allá afuera. La relación de Sergio con los miembros de la familia es ambigua: de comunicación abierta con el abuelo, cariñosa aunque distante con su madre y tensa casi hostil con el padre. Para intensificar sus inseguridades, tampoco encuentra en su casa un modelo incuestionable de actitud hacia su tierra natal, su madre habla de ella con cariño pero su padre no: "Mi padre habla pestes de su tierra. Dice que lo trataron muy mal y que nunca le dieron ninguna oportunidad de progresar" (32). Si bien los problemas de Sergio son comunes a los jóvenes que inmigran con sus padres, comparado con los hijos de inmigrantes en segunda generación Sergio afronta un conflicto más severo porque tiene menos elementos que los otros para anticipar las dificultades. Esta es otra diferencia entre la novela de Bencastro y otras obras representativas del género como *La casa de Mango Street* de Sandra Cisneros que se enfoca en la experiencia de una chicana nacida en Chicago. Lo que sí es común al orden identitario de las distintas generaciones de inmigrantes es la multiplicidad de dimensiones en la construcción de su identidad como consecuencia de las fuerzas de presión a las que están sometidos, lo cual, con el tiempo y en última instancia repercutirá, desde un ángulo más positivo, creando las conexiones y la participación que una identidad monolítica y separatista negaría.

Veamos ahora, algunos aspectos relativos al género en la construcción identitaria del joven inmigrante. El género es una construcción social al cual se le asignan características que se esperan, social, cultural y biológicamente, de una persona. Fornäs sostiene que el género es simultáneamente biológico pero modificable y a la vez institucionalizado por un sistema de reglas que socialmente codifican cómo se relacionan el hombre y la mujer, y cómo se distribuyen los deberes de cada día (252). En *Viaje* las asimetrías de género no han desaparecido y carecen de cuestionamiento explícito. Se puede observar que aunque en el dominio del trabajo, la madre aprovecha la experiencia del marido limpiando edificios, en la casa las mujeres continúan cargando solas con el peso de las tareas domésticas. Esto se hace más obvio cuando una compañera de escuela explica: "debo levantarme de madrugada a echar tortillas. Mi padre come tortillas todos los días. Y las quiere frescas" (20). La estudiante, además, tiene que trabajar porque el salario de sus padres indocumentados no alcanza. Silvia dice no hacer las tareas porque: "yo soy como la madre en mi casa" (22). Esta joven debe cuidar a sus hermanitos, cocinar, lavar y limpiar. Su madre se fue de la casa, se casó con un amigo de su padre por cinco mil dólares para que éste les dé la residencia pero la golpea y abusa sexualmente de ella. Su padre sabe lo que está pasando, pero no puede impedirlo porque "entonces nadie consigue la residencia" (24). Esto demuestra cómo se reproducen las relaciones tradicionales de género entre los jóvenes inmigrantes en Estados Unidos, en las que la mujer está en una situación de servidumbre con respecto al hombre. Por otra parte, debido a la desestructuración familiar por el desplazamiento forzado, la violencia, las carencias económicas o la necesidad de documentos, las niñas inmigrantes o huérfanas de la guerra se ven convertidas en adultas ejerciendo repentinamente y sin preparación el rol de madres. A su vez, los muchachos a pesar del privilegio que les da su masculinidad saben que tendrán grandes obstáculos para alcanzar sueños que sí son posibles para los jóvenes anglosajones de su edad tales como viajar, tener una buena educación, una

carrera próspera, una familia y una casa. Sergio dice: "Muchos querían ir a la universidad y no lo hacían por falta de dinero, porque no tenían papeles legales, o por las pocas oportunidades que había para los jóvenes latinos" (49). En contraste, los jóvenes de clase media anglosajona primero van a la universidad, luego consiguen un trabajo y de esa manera evitan regresar a vivir con sus familias, lo cual sería un fracaso; más tarde se casarán, después de obtener su independencia económica. Sergio, por el contrario, se lleva de la tierra del abuelo a una adolescente sin visa a la casa de sus padres, lo que sin duda agregará otra dimensión a los conflictos para su definición identitaria y complicará aún más "las luchas de este versátil grupo por la identidad, el reconocimiento y la legitimidad" (Stefancic XVII).

Este libro ejemplifica también la situación de los adolescentes miembros de familias fracturadas por la guerra y que más tarde emigraron a los Estados Unidos. Flor de Ángel, la adolescente de la cual se enamora Sergio, pierde a su padre cuando es asesinado durante la guerra civil y la madre se va a trabajar a la capital, para alimentar a sus tres hijos que deja con la abuela, quien a pesar de su intento, no logra sustituir a los padres. El resultado es que el hermano deja la escuela y se convierte en vago, y su hermana mayor de dieciocho años ya tiene dos hijos de diferentes padres. Para Flor de Ángel sólo queda la opción de trabajar en las maquiladoras la que ella rechaza porque, según el narrador, son centros de abuso de los derechos humanos. Flor de Ángel dice: "eso sería permitir que me abusen... sólo permiten tres minutos al día para ir al baño, y cuando uno se pasa le descuentan el tiempo del salario. Aunque trabaja duro seis días a la semana, no tiene ningún derecho ni beneficio laboral, y la pueden despedir bajo cualquier excusa" (81). Por esas razones, esta jovencita encuentra en Sergio su esperanza de afecto, de protección y de escape a su encrucijada familiar y económica. "Si te vas me voy con vos" (71), dice a dos días de conocer al muchacho.

Expuestos a circunstancias atípicas para la edad, los jóvenes inmigrantes en medio de un sentimiento de frustración e insuficiencia, ven su juventud interrumpida por el trabajo forzado que les impide rendir en la escuela, por la falta de atención o abandono de sus padres, por la ausencia de apoyo que se espera en un ambiente más orgánico y homogéneo de las instituciones sociales (escuela, red de amistades, grupos religiosos o ideológicos y claro la familia). Todo ello se convierte en fuerzas de presión que hacen que los jóvenes, en algunas ocasiones, busquen salidas creativas y beneficiosas para su crecimiento personal, pero en otras las salidas son completamente inapropiadas e inconvenientes para ellos y la sociedad. Por ejemplo inmigrantes como el pandillero, otro personaje de la novela, llegan a la rebeldía y se adhieren a microculturas transgresoras como las bandas, las maras con sus signos distintivos como la música, los modos de vestirse, la jerga propia; una serie de aspectos que finalmente contribuye a marginarlos aun más.

La clase es otro aspecto que se debe considerar en esta definición identitaria del joven inmigrante. La clase está determinada por la "diferencia entre el yo y los otros, entre el sujeto y objeto" que se da después de romper "la diada con la madre lo cual crea la base para otras diferencias sociales" (Fornäs 241). En *Viaje*, la clase de Sergio y los otros chicos está determinada por su precaria posición económica, la escuela Belmont "de latinos y pandilleros" a la que asisten; por su modesta casa en el ghetto donde viven (bullicioso, poblado de gente trabajadora, niños y pandilleros, signado por la violencia); por la marginalidad con respecto a la centralidad de otros grupos sociales, y por su escasa asociación con otros grupos. En la sociedad de Estados Unidos hay dos grandes "minorías" étnicas sobre las cuales se ha discutido más: la afroamericana y la llamada latina o hispánica. El discurso sobre los hispanos o latinos idealiza y simultáneamente estigmatiza a los de origen latinoamericano. Con estos comodines conceptuales, se ignoran las diferencias entre las regiones geográficas y características culturales (lenguas, razas, etnicidades) de cada nacionalidad. Para muchos estadounidenses, todavía, latino es sinónimo de mexicano. El resultado es una maniqueísmo estereotipado que está asociado con otras categorías que no se verbalizan pero se suponen tales como: "bueno/ malo o moderno / tradicional" para usar los términos de Said (Fornäs 256). De acuerdo con la estratificación social tampoco hay una clara distinción de clase para personas como Sergio. No es de clase alta cercana al poder, no es de clase media por su situación económica y tampoco pertenece a una clase simétrica a la clase baja anglosajona que tiene una cultura más cohesiva y orgánica. Sergio tendrá que aprender a nadar entre aguas heterogéneas hasta encontrar su posición y reconocerse como un muchacho con una identidad polidimensional.

"En la formación de las identidades colectivas y sociales, la etnicidad entonces llega a ser de la mayor importancia" (Fornäs 243). Pero, Sergio, este joven inmigrante, pertenece a una etnia

todavía sin una clasificación apropiada. Para fines didácticos diremos que es hispano porque habla español, o latino con el permiso de los europeos que inequívocamente hablan lenguas derivadas del latín (español, francés, italiano, portugués y rumano). Como inmigrante de origen latinoamericano, se da cuenta de que en Estados Unidos las diferencias étnicas son rígidas y están congeladas, y por eso para destacar que otros estudiantes de la escuela son extraños dice que son "de raza y cultura diferente" (38). Sin embargo, igual extrañeza siente con respecto a algunas marcas identitarias de sus padres como lo manifiesta durante la fiesta del Día de Acción de Gracias o el día del pavo como lo llaman popularmente. "Yo –dice Sergio- me encerraba en el dormitorio. Tal vez los invitados creían que yo era un muchacho extraño, pero la verdad era que por más que tratara de participar en la fiesta se me hacía bastante difícil. Los temas de conversación me parecían ajenos, la situación política y social del país de origen, el dinero que mandaban a sus familiares, historias de su pueblo y muchos otros temas de los que yo no sabía nada y me importaban muy poco" (74).

Esta fusión de realismo urbano y folclor coexisten mientras viven en otro país y en otra cultura, Sergio y sus padres no pueden organizar su vida social sin estar inmersos en el pasado y sus tradiciones, los cuales se refuerzan en el muchacho después de visitar su tierra. Sergio es acertado al decir que vive en dos mundos: "Uno el de mis padres y todo lo que se relacionaba con sus raíces, su lengua española y su cultura. Otro, el mundo en que yo me desarrollaba: la escuela, los amigos, el idioma inglés, la televisión, la música, los deportes, es decir, la cultura estadounidense" (74).

Estos dos mundos, la cultura latinoamericana y la cultura estadounidense, chocan y a la vez se complementan en niveles pertenecientes al subconsciente colectivo. Por ejemplo, lo que en la cultura anglosajona se considera mito o realismo mágico, para los inmigrantes latinoamericanos es parte de su tradición y de su vida diaria. La comunicación con el abuelo muerto, la creencia en el respeto a la voluntad del difunto, la ceremonia de los muertos, el carnaval no son magia sino expresiones de su cultura que poco a poco descubre este joven con el abuelo y en el viaje a su tierra. Citémoslo: "En el desfile llevaban al menos cien ataúdes, unos con muertos y otros vacíos, que las familias cargaban con respeto" y "los rodeaban individuos disfrazados de muertos y de personajes de ultratumba soplando y sonando tambores. Varias bandas tocaban música movida y estridente" (69). El propósito era crear un ambiente alegre capaz de despertar a los muertos para que se dieran cuenta que no habían sido olvidados.<sup>13</sup>

Esta escena común en su tierra es una realidad fantástica y maravillosa para otros; se podría creer que se trata del realismo mágico tan asociado con la literatura del boom de los años sesenta y setenta. Pero en verdad se trata de una característica de cualquiera de las historias nacionales latinoamericanas. Tiene que ver con las tradiciones, versiones y correcciones comunitarias que pasan entre distintas generaciones y de esa manera eslabonan los sujetos de una comunidad.

Tal vez la observación del apego apasionado a las costumbres tradicionales y a las marcas identitarias de los inmigrantes latinoamericanos, que en última instancia es una forma de resistencia a la asimilación total, es lo que hace temer a Samuel P. Huntington y a sus seguidores de que llegue un día cuando dicha cultura se imponga sobre la anglosajona. Si así fuera, Ilan Stavans tendría razón al afirmar que "al dilatar la adaptación total, nuestro objetivo es lentamente asimilar los anglos a nosotros mismos" (13). Pensamos que la afirmación de Stavans es utópica, más bien se trata de un intercambio paulatino de valores culturales que se realiza permanentemente y que continuarán enriqueciendo ambas culturas la anglosajona y la latinoamericana. Prefiero pensar que ninguna de las dos desaparecería.

En conclusión, podemos decir que Sergio, en su momento actual, no se identifica completamente con ninguna de las dos culturas; en todas partes es un sujeto desgarrado, parcialmente descolocado y ambivalente. Está entre dos mundos que no logra hacer suyos y en los que sin embargo desenvuelve su vida diaria en condiciones muy difíciles para un adolescente porque "la identidad múltiple no es un concepto aceptado en el discurso dominante" (Espinoza 17). Pero el conflicto es un motor para el cambio y la transformación. El viaje a la tierra del abuelo le permite conocer el amor y la tía abuela, lo pone en contacto con sus raíces, las costumbres de sus padres y la tierra de su infancia. Por otro lado, la travesía con los indocumentados por el desierto le da la noción exacta de la experiencia que sus padres y muchos otros latinoamericanos han vivido al atravesar la enorme frontera entre Estados Unidos y México, "fuertemente armada y patrullada, con mucha gente pobre y desesperada tratando de cruzarla para llegar a una tierra de mejores oportunidades" (Stefancic xviii). Esta "herida abierta" como la llaman varios autores entre ellos Carlos Fuentes, es

navegada por Sergio en las más desventuradas circunstancias, constituyéndose así en un símbolo de la experiencia de millones de inmigrantes latinoamericanos y dándole a su relato un carácter épico.

En *Viaje a la tierra del abuelo* los aspectos identitarios \_lengua, estructura familiar, género, clase, etnicidad, relaciones eróticas, normas, leyes\_ están en cuestión. Sergio y los otros jóvenes se esfuerzan por flotar en este torbellino de diferencias y contradicciones para satisfacer sus necesidades y desarrollar sus potenciales respondiendo creativamente a tantas presiones. Se percibe la gestación de un tipo diferente de subjetividad en Estados Unidos por la paulatina asimilación del inmigrante a la cultura anglosajona y por la decisión de conservar muchos rasgos de su cultura; esto le otorga una movilidad mayor. Gloria Anzaldúa ha dicho que "en unas pocas centurias, el futuro pertenecerá a la mestiza [o]. Porque el futuro depende del rompimiento de paradigmas, depende de ir a caballo sobre dos o más culturas" (630).<sup>14</sup> Los muchachos bilingües tienen la capacidad de asimilarse, pero no están contentos porque aunque emigraron cuando eran niños y pueden mezclarse, siguen descolocados y de allí su conflicto entre el afecto por la tierra adoptiva y la idealización de la tierra de sus padres. Pero estos inmigrantes de primera generación, apenas entrevén que son expresión de una crisis creada por los adultos (una guerra civil, la precariedad económica, la corrupción y la migración forzada de sus padres quienes además lo han hecho sin documentos); pero no son completamente conscientes de ello y tampoco se ve que hayan logrado la cohesión necesaria para formular una solución o siquiera una propuesta utópica. Todavía ante la desigualdad de géneros, la violencia del ghetto y las drogas, ante las injusticias en la escuela no se percibe una crítica fuerte y explícita, se limita a presentar las situaciones con una cierta actitud conciliatoria. Por el momento para los inmigrantes de primera generación "the Anglocization of Hispanics" seguirá tomando tiempo y quizás como dice Stavans más tiempo que "the Hispanization of the United States" (33).

Sergio, al construirse en su historia, reconstruye su pasado y puede entender mejor las múltiples dimensiones de su propia identidad; al mismo tiempo nos da otra idea de los otros, lo cual le permitirá continuar su vida sin que la ignorancia de la memoria histórica le impida caminar hacia el futuro. Quizás, como lo propone el texto, Sergio pueda vivir ahora su vida con Flor de Ángel y realizar el sueño de ir a la universidad.

La importancia de obras como la de Bencastro y otros que escriben sobre la comunidad de origen latinoamericano en Estados Unidos es creciente como la población misma. Para el censo de año 2007, se contaron más de 45 millones, número superior al de la población afroamericana. Como escritor inmigrante, Bencastro ha dejado su marca al traer a la literatura de Estados Unidos "los fantasmas de la realidad latinoamericana" que más allá de sus límites vienen a inocularse en la cultura estadounidense. (Ramírez, *Diario Libre*, octubre 9, 2008). Sus novelas consistentemente enfocan un sector de la comunidad inmigrante de origen centroamericano y convocan la participación de los que teniendo una voz no se les ha escuchado, de los que son rechazados y sin embargo siguen contribuyendo a la construcción del país a donde han inmigrado. A diferencia de otros escritores latinos, Bencastro noveliza los personajes del pueblo, los más desamparados y expuestos, los jóvenes de clase baja y de la primera generación de inmigrantes, los trabajadores indocumentados, los más desposeídos y vulnerables del planeta. En esto contrasta con los personajes de clase media, los artistas e intelectuales de Roberto Quesada y con los personajes de segunda o tercera generación de inmigrantes de Junot Díaz. Al colocar en primer plano este grupo de personajes que vive en proceso de pauperización constante, Bencastro obliga al lector a incursionar en el estudio y entendimiento de este sector poblacional de Estados Unidos para quizás encontrar un punto donde la integración sea posible. Su obra si se quiere es pre-modernista, plena de vidas que se desenvuelven con un ritmo errático en proceso de formación porque su pasado es todavía un presente y el futuro aún es incierto. Su obra muestra la asimetría de un grupo social con respecto a los valores de libertad, democracia, bienestar dominantes en el país. Esto se manifiesta claramente en *Viaje a la tierra del abuelo* donde el héroe no logra realizarse, el final queda abierto a la violencia que permea abierta o soterradamente todas las circunstancias de la vida, y aunque ésta como otras de sus novelas terminan con esperanza, carecen sin embargo de un final climático que resuelva las situaciones de conflicto.

## NOTAS

<sup>1</sup> En una entrevista que realicé, el autor, Mario Bencastro expresó: “Es una novela para jóvenes lectores. Esta clase de novelas tienen un estilo particular; usualmente deben ser breves, no muy complicadas, y entretenidas... pensé aprovechar este medio y escribir una novela de aventuras pero que incluyera las circunstancias y los problemas de identidad que viven muchos jóvenes biculturales en este país.” Febrero 16, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> En su presentación de esta obra en Busboys Poetry, septiembre 30 del 2008, el autor comentó sobre la petición de uno de los participantes. Luego en febrero 16 del 2009 me escribié “Tomé muy en serio la advertencia... pues pienso que la literatura también tiene que contener un componente de esperanza y redención humana. Puede destruir pero también debe construir. Y en este caso estamos hablando de los jóvenes, los futuros ciudadanos del mundo.”

<sup>3</sup> Los conceptos regresión, cultura, subcultura, identidad, género, etnicidad y clase de Fornäs, basados en la teoría psicoanalítica sirven de base en el desarrollo de este trabajo.

<sup>4</sup> Todas las citas que no remiten a otra fuente pertenecen a *Viaje a la tierra del abuelo*.

<sup>5</sup> Traducción mía de: “Mexicans have been unfairly blamed for events over which they have no control. Despised and vilified after spending ten, fifteen, or even twenty or more productive years as hard-working, [remain] isolated, members of the American working class...” (Gutierrez 421).

<sup>6</sup> Traducción mía: “the shadow of history doesn’t go away (...) You pretend that it’s your shadow, but it’s actually a shadow from the past that’s very old and very long” (Celayo 18).

<sup>7</sup> Se refiere a la escuela donde Bencastro realizó las entrevistas con estudiantes y en la cual estudia el personaje principal, Sergio.

<sup>8</sup> Cuando los muchachos explicaban las causas por las cuales no traían las tareas eran tratados de “haraganes,” es decir flojos, perezosos e irresponsables.

<sup>9</sup> Traducción mía de: “It’s not a comfortable territory to live in, this place of contradictions. Hatred, anger, and exploitation are the prominent features of this landscape” (627).

<sup>10</sup> Traducción mía de: This is, almost in spite of itself, a novel of assimilation, a fractured chronicle of the ambivalent, inexorable movement of the children of immigrants toward the American middle class, where the terrible, incredible stories of what parents and grandparents endured in the old country have become a genre in their own right” Scott, “Dreaming in Spanglish.” [www.nytimes.com/2007/09/30/books/review/Scott-t.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/30/books/review/Scott-t.html)

<sup>11</sup> *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, originalmente en inglés, fue traducida al español por Achy Obejas y publicada en el 2008.

<sup>12</sup> Traducción mía: “a young-adult melodrama draped over a multigenerational immigrant family chronicle that dabbles in tropical magic realism, punk-rock feminism, hip-hop machismo, post-postmodern pyrotechnics and enough polymorphous multiculturalism to fill up an Introduction to Cultural Studies syllabus.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Esta ceremonia es particular de El Salvador y de algunas áreas de Centroamérica y México pero es completamente extraña en otros países como Colombia.

<sup>14</sup> Mestizo ha sido tradicionalmente entendido como el resultado de la mezcla racial entre indígena y europeo. Aquí se entiende en el contexto de la mezcla de culturas y razas en general. “the future will belong to the mestiza [o]. Because the future depends on the breaking down of paradigms, it depends on the straddling of two or more cultures” (630).

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## LA CELEBRACIÓN DE LA HIBRIDEZ EN SANDRA CISNEROS Y MIA COUTO. REFLEXIONES SOBRE LA IDENTIDAD EN LOS MÁRGENES

Silvia Peart  
United States Naval Academy

Sandra Cisneros y Mia Couto son dos autores muy diversos entre sí que desarrollan su producción literaria en contextos muy diferentes: Cisneros, en el marco de la literatura Chicana, cuyo eje son los personajes femeninos oprimidos en una sociedad patriarcal que las mantiene silenciadas y confinadas al ostracismo y a la violencia de sus hogares.

Por otro lado Couto, es un autor mozambiqueño; que tematiza problemas de identidad en el marco de la relación colonizador-colonizado que han experimentado Mozambique y Portugal. Couto no hace de sus personajes femeninos un eje, aunque los frecuenta en muchas de sus obras; sino que más bien sus personajes favoritos son los débiles y silenciados en la historia de Mozambique, sean estos hombres o mujeres, siendo especialmente de su preferencia los mulatos o mestizos. Cisneros y Couto tienen amplios aspectos en los que divergen; sin embargo ambos presentan en sus relatos la identidad híbrida como aquello que posibilita pensar la subjetividad de una manera diferente, rompiendo con binarismos que clausuran y silencian a amplios sectores sociales. Ambos autores abogan por sujetos mezclados, flexibles, cambiantes que pueden re-escribirse en sus propios términos, con su propia voz, sin esperar que otros les den voz. En este sentido ambos buscan transgredir fronteras, borrando los límites claros y distintos para presentar identidades borrosas, fluidas, cuestionando la idea misma de identidad en sentido esencial. Es el objetivo de este trabajo mostrar cómo Couto y Cisneros presentan identidades híbridas en sus personajes y cómo estos a través de su hibridez logran construirse a sí mismos auto-definiéndose.

En el caso de Cisneros, ella explora la identidad femenina como una identidad híbrida, mezclada, mutante, en constante movimiento. Este concepto se aleja completamente "from the traditional humanist notions of identity as unified and stable" (Mujčinović 3). Para Cisneros, la mezcla y la fluidez no constituyen una desventaja; sino por el contrario este mestizaje dota a la identidad de la necesaria flexibilidad para sobrevivir en un mundo adverso. Para Cisneros, la identidad no es una esencia, es más bien una construcción que está sujeta a cambios, es un proceso mediado por factores históricos, lingüísticos, culturales, étnicos, y sociales. En esta misma línea, Couto cuestiona la idea de que existen identidades puras y distintas. Las identidades son mezclas curiosas, traspasadas por variables históricas, sociales, culturales y étnicas. Si bien Couto no se enfoca en identidades particularmente femeninas "[he] destabilizes the patriarchal model of colonialism" (Rothwell 17), cuestión que Cisneros también hace desenmascarando el poder patriarcal y colonial que la sociedad ha ejercido históricamente sobre la mujer, en particular sobre la mujer pobre y mestiza. Couto tiende un puente entre la tradición europea -particularmente la portuguesa- y la mozambiqueña mostrando la construcción de una identidad híbrida en movimiento. "In this 'Third place' which Hommi Baba suggests is not representable, Mia Couto succeeds in bridging the gap between generations, cultures and even languages in a very original way" (Afolabi 160). También de esta misma manera, Cisneros pone en movimiento presente y pasado al recrear mitos tales como el de la Malinche o la Llorona, dotándolos de nuevo sentido y fuerza renovadora, llenando el vacío entre generaciones sin desconocer el pasado; pero resignificándolo en un nuevo presente. En consonancia con lo expuesto, en este artículo se mostrará cómo Cisneros y Couto re-configuran y dotan de sentido al concepto de identidad híbrida a través de la crítica y del uso de los espacios públicos y la resignificación de la memoria e historia. Para ello se abordarán algunos de los relatos que estos autores presentan en *Woman Hollering Creek* y *Cada Homem É Uma Raça* respectivamente. Seguidamente, se explora el concepto de hibridez y su impacto en la constitución de nuevos significados identitarios.

### **Hibridez e identidad: un juego en constante movimiento**

El término hibridez ha ido tomado gran importancia en los últimos años y ha sido presentado por diferentes teóricos como sinónimo de mestizaje o sincretismo. Originalmente el término se tomó de la filología y la biología. En el primer caso, los híbridos se referían a palabras que se originaban de la mezcla de prefijos o sufijos de un lenguaje con la raíz de otro. En el segundo, este término se usó muy tempranamente para referirse a la mezcla a veces forzada o artificial en algunos seres vivos. En este contexto el término híbrido "adds the dimension of an artificial or forced union, a coercive or

violent contact as in the case of colonization and conquest a connotation which makes it particularly appropriate to the study of postcolonialism, and more specifically Latin America." (Mabardi 2)

Posteriormente el término fue incorporado como un aspecto vital de las teorías post-estructuralistas, post-modernistas y post-colonialistas, asociando el término hibridez con otros tales como multiculturalismo, asimilación, aculturación, mestizaje, transculturación, e (in)migración, entre otros. En este sentido, Néstor García-Canclini nos dice: "I understand for hybridization sociocultural processes in which discrete structures or practices, previously existing in separate form, are combined to generate new structures, objects and practices" (XXV). En su libro *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, García Canclini analiza la dicotomía y tensión en la que se debate América Latina entre la democracia liberal de los años noventa y el tradicional clientelismo y autoritarismo que ha fundado y sostenido sus instituciones. Es en este contexto, en el que el término hibridez le ayuda a describir los fenómenos socio-antropológicos que se tiene lugar en este ámbito. En un sentido menos ambicioso, en este trabajo, se hace uso del concepto en tanto prácticas sociales y culturales que distintos sujetos ponen en juego para redescibirse y generar nuevos significados identitarios. Los sujetos y sus prácticas se encuentran en constante fluidez, de modo que no pueden identificarse estructuras originales y puras que los definan de manera profunda. El modo en que se empleará el término hibridez en este trabajo, se refiere fundamentalmente a la mezcla de culturas; pero también hace referencia a otros aspectos interconectados con la cultura tales como la lengua, la raza y la etnicidad.

Siguiendo esta misma línea, pero ya dentro de la literatura Chicana, Fatima Mujčinović en su análisis de la construcción de la subjetividad femenina, utiliza el concepto de identidad híbrida como sinónimo de identidad mestiza afirmando que las escritoras chicanas estudian el concepto de identidad y critican las versiones positivistas y homogéneas de identidad que han proliferado en la academia. Según Mujčinović, las escritoras chicanas ponen al descubierto en sus narrativas la marginalidad social de las mujeres así como la marginalidad de sectores sociales que se han mantenido silenciados a lo largo de la historia oficial, sugiriendo nuevas formas de resistencia política y social, usando la crisis de la subjetividad postmoderna como un intersticio que permite construir nuevas y creativas formas subjetivas que pueden reinventarse y no son puras, claras y distintas; sino que por el contrario son hijas de la hibridez, el mestizaje, la mezcla y la ruptura con binarismos tradicionales. Refiriéndose a autoras chicanas Mujčinović dice: "their text reveal the possibilities of survival and transformation in postmodern conditions of objectification, displacement and political oppression by presenting subjectivities based on hybrid, transnational notions rather than homogeneous, nationalistic paradigms" (4). Mujčinović en este sentido hace notar cómo las escritoras chicanas relacionan la crisis de la subjetividad en el marco de la postmodernidad, con el concepto de hibridez. En esta misma línea teórica, Cristina Beltrán se concentra en la relación que existe entre la crisis de la subjetividad, postmodernidad e hibridez, mostrando cómo la literatura Chicana, se ha apropiado del término hibridez porque le permite recrear el concepto de identidad con nuevas y potentes metáforas que escapan a los esencialismos tradicionales. En este sentido, la literatura Chicana no ha sido la única que ha rescatado el término hibridez para sí, sino que -como antes ya mencionamos- teóricos de otros campos han hecho uso del mismo para dar voz a sujetos subalternos, marginales dentro de la sociología, la antropología la literatura, lingüística y la filosofía. Sujetos en los cuales la hibridez o el mestizaje no se convierten en un estigma sino más bien en una posibilidad, una ventaja. Beltrán, parafraseando a Ilan Stavans, a Rafael Perez-Torres y Gloria Anzaldúa, nos dice: "For all of these theorists, hybridity and mestizaje represent a form of identity production and performance that challenges essentialism and the belief in a stable and unified subjectivity" (596).

El concepto de hibridez ha sido empleado en diversos contextos: estudios dentro y fuera de la literatura, pero es dentro de ella donde se hará uso de este concepto, siguiendo las líneas teóricas trazadas por Canclini, Mujčinović y Beltrán.

### **Políticas del uso de los espacios públicos**

En "One Holy Night" Cisneros presenta la historia de una niña-adolescente de trece años que vende frutas por la calle en un carrito. Ella es víctima del abuso sexual de un hombre de treinta y siete años. En este relato Cisneros nos muestra cómo la calle es presentada socialmente como un espacio masculino que no debe ser violado por las mujeres, ya que si esto ocurre, ellas quedan a merced de quien quiera hacer uso de ellas como si fueran propiedad pública. Si una mujer viola este espacio masculino, se expone a sí misma porque las niñas buenas o las mujeres de buena vida, recatadas, no

se exponen a andar solas por la calle. En esta historia-testimonio, Cisneros pone al descubierto la lógica binaria público/privado que oprime a la mujer y la confina al encierro. Si ella lo abandona es culpable de todo cuanto ocurra como consecuencia de ello.

La protagonista, quien narra la historia, pone de manifiesto al comienzo mismo del relato cómo ella ha internalizado esta lógica binaria del dentro y fuera y cómo ella reconoce su funcionamiento aunque no puede hacerlo de manera crítica: "I don't know how many girls have gone bad from selling cucumbers. I know I'm not the first" (27-28). Como trabajadora, quien narra, es consciente de que trabajar en la calle la pone en riesgo y hace dudosa su dignidad, ella se siente culpable y en su propio relato nunca presenta su iniciación sexual como una violación. En este mismo sentido, Mary Brady nos dice: "One Holy Night' illustrates ...one of the most interesting means of obscuring this use of spatiality, is the discursive refusal to characterize the narrator's sexual encounter as rape, even though it involves a young, vulnerable, clearly naïve girl and a much older man" (138). Es la economía del uso del espacio que culpabiliza a la adolescente por su embarazo y la expone públicamente como una mujer deshonrada, por ser una callejera, por no saber darse su lugar es que esta niña-adolescente ha perdido la honra y ahora está embarazada y es por esto que deberá marchar al exilio, para que nadie sepa, para que nadie vea su embarazo, por eso debe recluirse en el encierro de la casa de su abuelita. En este prolífico relato, Cisneros muestra cómo ciertos espacios están únicamente reservados a los hombres, estos son espacios que las mujeres no pueden traspasar. Si lo hacen, quedan expuestas siendo como dijimos antes, propiedad pública.

En un sentido similar, Couto presenta en "O embondeiro que sonhava pássaros" a un hombre negro - João - cuya presencia en un barrio de blancos desata la ira del poder policial. João no es un personaje femenino, pero es un sujeto subalterno, marginal que al igual que la niña-adolescente, encarna a los marginados sociales, a aquellos que no tienen voz propia. Aquellos para los que el espacio que deben ocupar ya ha sido diseñado por otros. Para la sociedad mozambiqueña João representa la escoria, aquello que debe ocultarse, al igual que el embarazo de la niña-adolescente en el relato de Cisneros. Ambos personajes son culpabilizados, en ellos yace la falta y la razón por la que deben ocultarse, encerrarse. En uno es el hecho de ser una mujer deshonrada, en el otro su negritud. En el relato de Couto se nos dice de João:

O culpado seria aquele negro, socana, que se arragava a existir, ignorante dos seus deveres de raça. O comerciante devia saber que seus passos descalços não cabiam naquelas ruas. Os brancos se inquietavam com aquela desobediência... Até os meninos, por graça de sua sedução, se esqueciam do comportamento. Eles se tornavam mais filhos da rua que da casa. (64)

Couto en este relato nos presenta a un personaje que funciona como subalterno y que como la niña-adolescente de trece años transgrede un espacio público, que ha sido validado y creado sólo para unos pocos. João se adentra a un barrio de blancos siendo él negro. Los blancos se preguntan cómo este negro se atreve a existir, cómo se atreve a ignorar los deberes de su raza, como si en el hecho de ser negro ya estuviera implícito el lugar social que le corresponde y por tanto los espacios que le serán posibles frecuentar. La transgresión de João le vale la cárcel, ya que el orden establecido no puede tolerar tal transgresión. Tal y como en el relato de Cisneros, João debe ser encerrado, debe salir del espacio público, porque ambos -de diferente manera- son víctimas de los mecanismos formales e informales que reproducen el control social. Tanto João como la niña-adolescente son sujetos subalternos que deben saber cuál es su lugar, ambos al violar ciertos códigos socialmente establecidos quedan expuestos a la violencia masculina en un caso y a la policial en el otro.

João es apresado porque su música y su color se encuentran en la geografía equivocada, João con su instrumento musical atrae a los niños y a los pájaros a sí mismo, por esta razón es encarcelado; pero Tiago un niño blanco lo libera de la prisión. Su música envuelve la prisión y el barrio, una especie de encantamiento se cierne a su alrededor lo que le permite escapar. Tiago asustado se oculta dentro de un árbol, de un embondeiro, la policía sigue a Tiago pensando que es João, y seguros de que se encuentra escondido dentro del árbol deciden incendiarlo. Dentro del embondeiro, Tiago siente un tierno calor que lo envuelve y puede oír la música de João, lentamente Tiago y el embondeiro se van haciendo uno e indivisible. Hacia el final del relato, Couto presenta una fusión, Tiago se funde indivisiblemente con el embondeiro, se consumen, se amalgaman, se mixturán. El embondeiro simbolizaría a Mozambique y su extensa mitología, sus tradiciones ancestrales y Tiago -

un niño blanco- simbolizaría lo nuevo en Mozambique, el presente europeo, colonizador que se mixtura con el pasado y el presente africano y sus tradiciones ancestrales. Ambos se mixturan de manera indivisibles, sin luchar entre sí, abandonándose uno al otro. Couto en su relato retoma el pasado mítico Mozambiqueño en uno de sus símbolos: el embondeiro y lo mixtura en la figura de un niño, que simboliza el futuro: una nación joven, que no puede sólo cimentarse en su tradición europea sino mezclarse con las raíces mozambiqueñas reconstruyéndolas y resignificándolas. En esta transfiguración que experimenta Tiago hay una celebración por un nuevo futuro que se aproxima, un futuro que acepta y acarrea el pasado, no lo ignora, lo asume y resignifica. Según Couto, las identidades mozambiqueñas no pueden edificarse con un monismo identitario portugués, sino con una mezcla de pasado y el presente de negros y blancos, de tradiciones africanas y europeas. Sólo esta mezcla puede dar a luz a una nueva construcción identitaria para Mozambique.

### **Construcción de la identidad por medio de la recuperación de la memoria y la tradición**

Así como Couto intenta incorporar tradiciones europeas y africanas en su construcciones la identidad mozambiqueña, Cisneros re-construye la identidad de sus personajes a partir de la recuperación de las tradiciones y las memorias de estos sujetos. En este entido Cisneros presenta el personaje de Rosario en el relato "Little Miracles, Kept Promises" donde la autora recrea la imagen de la Virgen de Guadalupe, para -desde la tradición mexicana- volver a re-construir su significado y no asumirlo pasivamente. Al comienzo del relato se recapitulan toda una serie de ex-votos. Dentro de la tradición mexicana y católica en general, los ex-votos conmemoran una gracia recibida, un milagro o un pedido que se hace. Son expresiones públicas del pedido que una comunidad hace. A este respecto, Mary Brady dice:

People have appropriated the walls of churches in this manner to tell the stories of their profoundest concerns. It's significant that Rosario's reconsideration of Tepeyac comes after a series of ex-votos, since ex-votos contributed to the mythology that developed around the Virgin of Guadalupe and were the source from which the first two published texts on the site drew their material. (133).

La misma historia de Rosario es un ex-voto, que pone al descubierto las necesidades de un grupo dentro de la comunidad: las mujeres. En su reflexión, Rosario describe su rechazo a la Virgen de Guadalupe como ícono que ha subyugado a las mujeres durante siglos. Rosario rechaza a la Virgen de Guadalupe en tanto madre sufrida, en tanto madre dolorosa porque este modelo es justamente el que ha subyugado a su madre y a su abuela y las ha sumido en una vida llena de dolor y tristeza. Rosario cuenta cómo por mucho tiempo la figura de la Virgen de Guadalupe fue para ella el símbolo de la subyugación y la postergación de las mujeres, el símbolo de la sumisión y la aceptación del dolor de una vida no escogida, de un destino común que la mujeres debían aceptar. Pero en su oración-reflexión, Rosario vuelve sobre la figura de la Virgen de Guadalupe y dice:

I don't know how it fell in place. How I finally understood who you are. No longer Mary the mild, but our mother Tonantzín. Your church at Tepeyac built on the site of her temple. Sacred ground no matter whose goddess claims it. That you could have the power to rally a people when a country was born, and again during the civil war, and during a farmworkers' strike in California made me think maybe there is power in my mother's patience, strength in my grandmother's endurance." (Cisneros 128)

Rosario resucita la historia del Tepeyac y transfigura la imagen de la Virgen de Guadalupe, Guadalupe ya no es la Virgen buena y paciente, es también Tonantzín, el símbolo de la fortaleza y la resistencia. Cisneros en este relato reconstruye la mitología cultural mexicana, la mezcla construyendo una nueva simbología que puede servir de modelo identificadorio para las mujeres. Rosario finalmente dejará que la Virgen de Guadalupe entre en su casa pero no sin antes re-escribir su significado para ella, no sin antes transformar el significado de Guadalupe para ella. Hay una parte de la Virgen de Guadalupe que ha muerto para Rosario, pero hay otra parte que ella rescata y recupera, en nombre de sus ancestros, de su madre y de su abuela, pero que resignifica para sí misma y para su vida.

Esto mismo hace Mia Couto en el relato "O embondeiro que sonhaba pássaros", en él Couto quiere presentar la idea de mezcla que recupera el pasado y las tradiciones junto a las nuevas

influencias colonizadoras. La tradición mozambiqueña se fusiona con el presente blanco y colonizador en el cuerpo de un niño que simboliza el futuro, la promesa de un mundo mejor, y como dijimos antes en una unidad que no es guerra y lucha sino paz. Tiago se transfigura, se metamorfosea con el embondeiro, se vuelven uno e inseparables. En el caso de Rosario, ella también mixtura sus creencias que se vuelven una y a través de esta fusión, estos personajes dan sentido a su pasado y a su presente. La mezcla es prolífica y posibilita un comienzo nuevo cargado de sentido. En estos relatos tanto Cisneros como Couto rescatan las tradiciones que han formado parte de la identidad de sus pueblos y que han contribuido en la constitución de las identidades de distintos grupos sociales a las que estos relatos representan. Ambos autores se oponen a la colonización de la memoria a través de la incorporación de historias cotidianas y de la cultura popular. En este proceso, ambos enfatizan la re-escritura como parte de la memoria colectiva que nos constituye como sujetos pertenecientes a un pueblo. La memoria y la re-construcción de la memoria a través de la crítica a la historia oficial es un elemento clave tanto en Cisneros como en Couto que muestran la imposibilidad de una identidad inmaculada y pura.

Es justamente esta re-construcción, esta re-visión que Cisneros presenta en su relato "Woman Hollering Creek". En él, Cisneros incorpora el personaje de Cleófilas, una mujer simple que vive su vida como si fuera una telenovela y que abruptamente despierta del sueño cuando felizmente casada se vuelve una víctima del terrible círculo de la violencia doméstica. En este relato, Cisneros yuxtapone a las heroínas contemporáneas de las telenovelas mexicanas con la figura de la Llorona, para mostrar cómo tradicionalmente y actualmente el modelo de la feminidad para la mujer mexicana ha sido el dolor y el sufrimiento. La autora hábilmente presenta a una mujer cuyo modelo femenino son los personajes sufrientes y etéreos de las telenovelas. Su ilusión es ser como estos personajes, ella se identifica con ellos, y ellos la preparan para soportar la violencia de su marido, porque: "to suffer for love is good. The pain is all sweet somehow. In the end" (Cisneros 45). Ante el primer golpe que su marido le propina; Cleófilas se queda sin palabras, en silencio y así permanecerá por mucho tiempo porque no hay adónde ir ni con quién hablar. En un lugar extraño, donde no habla la lengua, Cleófilas es víctima del silencio de una comunidad que sabe de la violencia doméstica pero que calla y consiente. El arroyo que corre cerca de la casa es testigo de sus pesares y la acompaña en su lamento, o al menos así ella lo interpreta. En este marco, Cisneros incorpora una figura que cambiará la vida de Cleófilas; este personaje es Félíce quien transformará la vida de Cleófilas y el modo en que ella percibe el mundo. El relato no provee mucha información sobre Félíce, pero dice lo suficiente para que el lector pueda hacerse una imagen de ella y a su vez percibir el impacto que esta mujer causa en la vida de Cleófilas. Juntas en la camioneta de Félíce:

When they drove across the *arroyo*, the driver opened her mouth and let a yell as loud as any mariachi...  
Every time I cross that bridge I do that. Because of the name, you know. Woman Hollering. *Pues*, I holler ... Did you ever notice, Félíce continued, how nothing around here is named after a woman? Really. Unless she's the Virgin. I guess you're only famous if you're virgin. She was laughing again. That's why I like the name of that *arroyo*. Makes you want to holler like Tarzan, right? (Cisneros 55)

Félíce presenta una nueva interpretación del arroyo y su nombre. El murmullo del arroyo y el nombre que se le ha dado no hace referencia al llanto y al sufrimiento sino que es un grito de libertad de alegría de gozo. Esta visión del mundo deja perpleja a Cleófilas que siempre sintió al arroyo como un acompañante en su sufrimiento, ahora mismo puede verlo como un acompañante en su camino de liberación.

El "grito de Tarzán" que Félíce interpreta en el nombre del arroyo, es un grito masculino que ella apropia para sí sin ningún tipo de culpabilidad. Es un grito de libertad y un "grito de guerra" que llama a todas las mujeres a ser solidarias entre sí, para romper el círculo de la violencia y la opresión. La biculturalidad de Félíce le permite mirar al mundo de una manera diferente sin atarse a una única cultura, sino que le permite mirar a ambas culturas de las que forma parte de una manera crítica y escoger aquello que quiere conservar para sí misma. Nuevamente Cisneros presenta la hibridez cultural como una ventaja, como aquello que brinda mayores posibilidades para escoger y que hace libre a esta mujer y puede hacer libre a todos aquellos -que como Félíce- asumen su biculturalidad. En este mismo sentido Jean Wyatt afirma: "Chicanas's bicultural -and cross-gender -flexibility opens a

new range of female possibilities" (258). La identidad cultural de Félice que se construye "en el entre" -entre dos culturas- también le permite definirse como mujer desde sí misma, abriéndole todo un mundo de nuevas posibilidades, posibilidades que no sólo se proyectan en ella sino también en Cleófilas quien queda profundamente impactada por Félice, esta mujer independiente que es dueña de una camioneta. No maneja la camioneta de su padre o de su hermano sino la propia, lo que le da la libertad de conducirse sola, de ir y venir a donde quiera y con quien quiera sin tener que pedir permiso a nadie. En el personaje de Félice, Cisneros no sólo pone en juego la identidad híbrida de una mujer que "en el entre" de dos culturas puede escoger con mayor libertad, sino que también deconstruye el binarismo masculino/femenino. Según Jean Wyatt "Crossing the gender border and combining signifiers from both sides throws into question not Felice's (or Cisneros) womanliness, but the gendered logic that assigns objects and gestures exclusively to one side or the other of a gender divide" (261). Félice cruza fronteras no sólo culturales o del lenguaje, ya que es mejicana y americana, sino que también cruza las fronteras del género, es mujer pero a veces actúa como un hombre y es por eso que deja tan perpleja a Cleófilas. Pero es este actuar como hombre, lo que le posibilita a Félice ayudar a Cleófilas y salvarla del círculo de violencia que seguro la conducirá a la muerte.

En un sentido similar, Couto traspasa ambas fronteras en el relato "A Princesa Rusa". En él Couto relata la historia de una mujer rusa llamada Nadia y la de su sirviente negro, Fortin. Quien narra la historia en este caso es Fortin mientras se confiesa con un sacerdote. Fortin es presentado como un asimilado quien ha incorporado la cultura de los blancos y no siente compasión por los de su raza. Él mismo nos dice en la historia: "Eu, assimilado como era, fiquei chefe dos criados. Sabe como me chamavam? Encarregado-geral. Era minha categoria, eu era um alguém. Não trabalhava: mandava trabalhar. Eu me sentia quase-quase patrão" (Couto74). Fortin se sentía *alguem* porque podía mandar como sus patrones, sólo así podía llegar a ser *alguem*. Este personaje va cambiando a lo largo de la historia mientras entabla una amistad con Nadia. Pasan juntos muchas horas, la vida de Fortin y su forma de ver el mundo van cambiando conforme conoce más a Nadia. Ella para Fortin es como Félice para Cleófilas. Nadia en su diálogo con Fortin desenmascara aspectos del mundo en los que Fortin nunca había pensado antes: "Perguntei se na terra dela havia pretos e ela fartou de rir: ó Fortin, você faz cada perguntas! Amirei: se não havia pretos quem fazia os trabalhos pesados lá na terra dela? São brancos, respondeu. Brancos? Mentira dela, pensei. Afinal, quantas leis existem nesse mundo? Ou será que a desgraça não foi distribuída conforme as raças?" (Couto 76). Fortin inocentemente no puede creer que en el país de Nadia no sean negros los que hacen el trabajo de sirvientes sino blancos y Couto muy sarcásticamente se pregunta en boca de Fortin si es que la desgracia no ha sido distribuida conforme a las razas. Fortin ha internalizando tan profundamente la división de las razas y roles que no puede creerle a Nadia cuando ella le presenta otra realidad que cuestiona lo que él asume como una ley natural del mundo. Fortin no comprende que los blancos hagan el trabajo de sirvientes, porque de acuerdo a su construcción del mundo, ese es el lugar de los negros, que por naturaleza han nacido para servir. Nadia cuestiona esta idea y comienza poco a poco a transformar el mundo de Fortin. Ambos se hacen amigos y Fortin en un punto se siente muy atraído hacia ella, aunque él mismo encuentra imposible la idea de amarla. Fortin mismo reprime sus sentimientos hacia Nadia. Él negro y ella blanca, él deforme y ella bellísima, para él es un imposible. Finalmente en el relato Nadia muere, pero en su muerte hay una mutación y Fortin y Nadia se mezclan: "Senti que ela já não tinha o seu próprio corpo: usava o meu... Era como se fosse uma alma distribuída em dois corpos contrários: um macho, outro fêmea; um preto, outro branco" (Couto 85). La amistad de ambos es tan profunda que los dos se encuentran unidos de una manera inexplicable. Ambos cruzaron la frontera de sus propios prejuicios, transformándose mutuamente. Pero Couto no quiere transmitir sólo esta idea, sino presentar nuevamente una identidad construida, fluida en constante transformación. Así como Cleófilas transforma su modo de ver el mundo a través de Felice, Fortin transforma su visión del mundo a través de Nadia.

La vida y la muerte de Nadia transforman a Fortin, él tiene una huella de Nadia en su cuerpo, una huella física que muestra su mezcla interior. Esta composición mixta externa señala no sólo su mezcla interior sino el traspaso de fronteras culturales, de género y fronteras sociales. Tiago y Nadia mueren para dar vida nueva, una vida que recoge el pasado y lo transforma en un nuevo presente. En este relato como en el de "Woman Hollering Creek" es una mujer quien es motor del cambio. Fortin es blanco y negro, hombre y mujer, todo a la vez. Como sirviente negro ha internalizado las obligaciones de su raza aunque después de conocer a Nadia, comprende que tal vez el mundo no sea como lo había pensado antes. Al igual que Cleófilas el mundo cambia y las posibilidades que se abren son

mayores y mejores frente a esta nueva manera de mirar desde "el entre," desde la frontera. En las dos historias que presenta Couto hay una mutación, una transformación que simboliza las múltiples transformaciones y mutaciones por las que ha atravesado la sociedad mozambiqueña, cuyo futuro sólo podrá abrirse en tanto las múltiples tradiciones que conforman a Mozambique puedan ser aceptadas. En el caso de Cisneros, dos de sus personajes: Rosario y Cleófilas también se transfiguran y re-significan su propia herencia cultural y por tanto su identidad. En esta mixtura ambas son más libres y pueden finalmente estar en paz consigo mismas.

### Conclusiones finales

En sus relatos tanto Mia Couto como Sandra Cisneros se oponen a binarismos tales como público/privado, negro/blanco, hombre/mujer. Ellos dibujan nuevas fronteras resignificando el pasado y transformando el presente. Ambos subvierten la idea tradicional de una identidad esencial, presentando identidades mezcladas, fluidas, cambiantes híbridas como modelos de identidades que permiten construir nuevas y creativas formas subjetivas que pueden reinventarse y no son puras, claras y distintas; sino que por el contrario, son hijas de la hibridez y el mestizaje. En este sentido, tanto Couto como Cisneros pretenden legitimar y dar voz a sectores silenciados y contar nuevas historias que los incluyan como protagonistas. Ambos autores abogan por sujetos mezclados, flexibles, cambiantes que pueden re-escribirse en sus propios términos, con su propia voz, sin esperar que otros les den voz. Ambos autores de manera diferente y con propósitos diferentes buscan transgredir los límites del pensamiento y las fronteras claramente delineadas para presentar identidades borrosas, fluidas, capaces de crear sujetos flexibles que se determinan a sí mismos asumiendo su pasado y su presente de manera creativa y metafórica.

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## LA CONQUISTA MAYA DE ESPAÑA: REINVENTANDO LA HISTORIA CON CARLOS FUENTES

Sheila K. Rodríguez  
Messiah College

¿Cómo sería diferente el mundo hoy si un ejército de soldados mayas hubiera invadido y conquistado a España? De esta índole son las interrogantes que plantea Carlos Fuentes en la obra "Las dos orillas" publicada en 1993, momento propicio para reexaminar la Conquista española de México. No existe otro evento histórico más formativo para la identidad latinoamericana actual; la Conquista ha dejado su huella en la composición étnica, lengua, religión, gastronomía, arquitectura, y la economía que existe hoy en día. Para conmemorar el quinto centenario de este evento, Fuentes elige un acercamiento singular y sorprendente que resulta en una versión histórica alternativa. Apoderándose de una curiosa mezcla de historia y ficción, Fuentes abandona la versión tradicional de los eventos y propone una nueva dirección para una historia muy conocida. El análisis que aquí emprenderé tiene como su finalidad principal examinar esta versión alternativa, recurriendo a la teoría sobre la nueva novela histórica. En particular se va a enfocar en la línea entre ficción e historia, lo dialógico, la perspectiva narrativa, y el tono subjetivo.

Una nueva perspectiva

La nueva novela histórica frecuentemente borra las líneas entre la historia y la ficción; en esta obra efectivamente Fuentes combina hechos históricos con pura imaginación literaria. Muchos de los personajes y eventos en "Las dos orillas" siguen fielmente los hechos narrados en la crónica de Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*. Aparecen las figuras históricas de Hernán Cortés, el emperador azteca Moctezuma, Pedro de Alvarado, La Malinche (o Doña Marina) y otros. El narrador, Jerónimo de Aguilar, recuerda momentos claves durante la Conquista: la llegada de Cortés a la Península de Yucatán, la Batalla de Cholula y la caída de Tenochtitlán. Pero mucho cuidado-- esta versión de los eventos no sirve para aprender la historia oficial de la Conquista: el lector tiene que entrar ya informado sobre la versión tradicional de la Historia para poder reconocer todas las distorsiones, las críticas y los inventos contenidos en esta versión alternativa. Es decir, en vez de una función didáctica, la información histórica aquí sirve como base para cuestionar los eventos o imaginar nuevas alternativas en el curso de la historia.

Resalta en esta versión el enfoque en las reacciones personales del narrador, Jerónimo de Aguilar, y la sorprendente falta de interés en objetividad científica. Las emociones de la envidia, el amor no correspondido y la frustración expresadas por parte del narrador dominan la obra, prestándole un tono melodramático. Además se nota que aquí la verdad poética tiene más valor que detalles específicos o datos históricos. Por ejemplo, el último emperador de los aztecas, la trágica figura Guatemuz, no puede ver bien a causa de una nube de oro y plata que le cubre los ojos y cuando llora, caen gotas de oro y plata (18). Esta representación poética de Guatemuz subraya el papel de las fuerzas económicas en la Conquista y la obsesión con oro en ambas orillas del mar. La sorpresa más grande viene al final cuando Jerónimo de Aguilar revela que él y su compañero Gonzalo Guerrero formularon un complot para conquistar a España, organizaron un ejército de soldados mayas y llevaron a cabo una conquista exitosa de España.

Esta inversión completa de los eventos verdaderos señala que aquí no hay límites con la imaginación. No hay interés en establecer lo que sucedió sino en reflexionar sobre asuntos como el destino, el futuro, la naturaleza de las guerras, y el deseo humano de tener contacto con diversas culturas. Para el lector que dude del valor de una historia llena de tantos inventos sorprendentes, el propio narrador, Jerónimo de Aguilar, le recuerda que, "Pero cuando palabra, imaginación y mentira se confunden, su producto es la verdad..." (29).

La historia como ficción

Si consideramos a toda crónica histórica como obra narrativa que emplea técnicas de ficción, podemos decir que no sólo esta obra pero toda relación histórica contiene elementos de ficción. Hayden White en *Tropics of Discourse* reconoce esta tendencia, "But in general there has been a reluctance to consider historical narratives as what they most manifestly are: verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much *invented* as *found* and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences" (82). Otros comparten la actitud de White. Michel De Certeau en *The Writing of History*, señala que, "What we initially call

history is nothing more than a narrative" (287). Al examinar cuidadosamente el proceso de transformar un evento histórico en narración literaria, De Certeau identifica en las narraciones históricas varios elementos de obras de ficción; por ejemplo una trama, una cronología, personajes y una interpretación del pasado. Dependiendo de los deseos del historiógrafo, se puede pintar el mismo evento como un fracaso total o un triunfo jubilante, un evento clave o un evento de menor importancia, el acto culminante de un proceso o sólo el comienzo. En las numerosas versiones de La Conquista de México esto puede ser comprobado; podemos ver una gran variedad de enfoques, intereses, y propósitos que influyen cómo se presenta la información.

¿Podemos decir entonces que una narración histórica contiene la verdad? ¿Debemos descartar esta obra de Fuentes como pura ficción o inventos que no fomentan una comprensión profunda de la realidad? Al contrario planteo que la solución es establecer una nueva definición de la verdad. Paul Michael Lützel propone una visión distinta de la verdad en su artículo "Fictionality in historiography and the novel" en el libro *Neverending Stories*: "The intent to provide the truth does exist in both literature and historical writing but it is aimed in different directions. Historiographers attempt to achieve the most exact comprehension and representation of actual historical events; novelists have no such ambition. On the contrary, their strength lies not in the realm of facts but in that of possibilities" (36). El escritor de la nueva novela histórica, entonces, ya ha estudiado los datos históricos, y ahora le interesa reflexionar sobre los hechos, añadir posibilidades creativas, y nos pide utilizar el esfuerzo de la imaginación para ir más allá de lo que realmente ocurrió a lo que *hubiera podido ocurrir*.

### **Una voz del margen**

La nueva novela histórica demuestra una preferencia por narrar eventos históricos desde una perspectiva marginal. María Cristina Pons se refiere a la técnica de elegir a un narrador de un grupo marginado como "narrar desde abajo" (o desde una posición sin poder) en vez de "narrar desde arriba" (o desde una posición de poder) (22). Es una voz nueva que da una perspectiva singular, permite otra manera de ver la realidad y con frecuencia refuta la historia oficial u ofrece una interpretación alternativa. El narrador de "Las dos orillas," Jerónimo de Aguilar, proporciona una voz del margen. No es la voz de un conquistador jubilante que intenta impresionar, ni la voz oficial de la Iglesia Católica de España.

Aquí cabe resumir lo que la historia tradicional nos informa sobre Jerónimo de Aguilar. Según las crónicas de Bernal Díaz del Castillo, Jerónimo de Aguilar es un religioso español que viaja a Panamá con una expedición antes de la llegada de Cortés. En 1511 sale de Panamá para lo que hoy se llama la República Dominicana pero al sufrir un naufragio es tomado preso por los mayas de la Península de Yucatán en México. Sólo Jerónimo de Aguilar y su compañero Gonzalo Guerrero sobreviven, después de ser testigos de sacrificios humanos y experimentar el duro trabajo de la esclavitud. Viven por ocho años con los mayas y aprenden la lengua maya. Al llegar Hernán Cortés a la costa, Jerónimo de Aguilar decide acompañarlo como intérprete (interpretando de la lengua maya al español para Cortés) pero su compañero se queda. Su historia termina con la breve mención de su muerte de bubas en el año 1531.

"Las dos orillas" constituye un ejemplo por excelencia de la técnica de narrar desde abajo. Escuchamos la voz de un personaje menor en la historia quien no ha sido escuchado, alguien que no habla desde una posición de poder: un esclavo desterrado. En "Las dos orillas," Jerónimo de Aguilar le revela al lector que se considera un fracaso y comparte con nosotros sus momentos más difíciles y sus desilusiones más grandes. El narrador confiesa que a pesar de su influyente papel de intérprete, no ha logrado su meta de detener al ejército de Cortés, no ha logrado el amor de La Malinche que tanto desea, y para el colmo, en el momento de su muerte parece que no ha tenido mayor efecto en la historia. A causa de su nueva identidad cultural, su afinidad con el pueblo maya, su traición a España y sus singulares habilidades lingüísticas también se puede considerar como voz marginada.

Este originario de España también conoce al fondo la cultura y lengua maya. Conoce las dos orillas del mar: dos lenguas, dos estilos de vida, y dos perspectivas. Opta por defender a su nueva cultura adoptada, traicionando (en la versión de Fuentes) a Cortés y su patria. Irónicamente después de vivir como los indígenas y sufrir con ellos, Jerónimo de Aguilar muere como muchos de ellos a causa de las nuevas enfermedades traídas al Nuevo Mundo por los españoles. Este traidor rechaza totalmente la versión aceptada de la Conquista y nos informa que "Siempre pudo ocurrir exactamente lo contrario de lo que la crónica consigna" (13). Aquí cabe notar que la perspectiva marginada viene

en este caso de un sólo personaje (Jerónimo de Aguilar) en esta obra y no de una variedad de voces. Las distintas perspectivas sobre la Revolución Sandinista, por ejemplo, presentadas en la novela *Sombras nada más* del nicaragüense Sergio Ramírez, ofrecen una visión aun más amplia. En su libro sobre la nueva novela histórica, Seymour Menton señala este uso de la heteroglosia al estilo baktiniano como un rasgo principal de la nueva novela histórica (24).

Reflexiones desde la tumba

En la primera página el narrador nos informa que, "Yo acabo de morir de bubas. Una muerte atroz, dolorosa, sin remedio" (11). Como ya sabe el lector de *Pedro Páramo* de Juan Rulfo o *El arpa y la sombra* de Alejo Carpentier o *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* del propio Carlos Fuentes, el acto de narrar desde la tumba o lecho de muerte permite una perspectiva distinta. Jerónimo de Aguilar comenta directamente sobre su punto de vista especial: "Aunque desde esta perspectiva olímpica que me da la muerte, en verdad veo todo lo que ha ocurrido como el encuentro de dos viejos mundos, ambos milenarios..." (12). Además de su perspectiva olímpica, tiene tiempo adicional para reflexionar, cuestionar y confesar sobre su papel en la Conquista. Tiene la ventaja de observar lo que pasó después de su muerte y cuenta con poderes mágicos que incluyen convertirse en estrella para acompañar a su amigo Guerrero en su misión de conquistar a España. La selección de un narrador muerto no es un simple truco para agarrar la atención del lector, sino que le da una perspectiva más amplia, libre de los límites humanos de espacio y tiempo. Su condición de muerto fomenta la imagen de un personaje fracasado, olvidado, y de menor importancia en la historia. A pesar de su muerte, Jerónimo de Aguilar no pierde las habilidades más importantes. Todavía puede comunicarse con nosotros y dejar su testimonio, es decir, le queda el poder de la palabra.

### **Tono subjetivo**

Tradicionalmente, la crónica histórica intenta establecer un tono neutral e impersonal con el fin de comprobar su objetividad científica: se dedica a descubrir la verdad sin meterse en asuntos personales. En cambio, la nueva novela histórica rechaza el valor de la objetividad. Sostiene que la apariencia de neutralidad siempre es una farsa, una imposibilidad ya que el ser humano siempre tiene fuertes intereses, preferencias y emociones. Dado esa realidad, es mejor reconocer abiertamente el papel de la subjetividad en la historia. Juan José Barrientos, en *Ficción-historia*, comenta que la distancia épica y el tono objetivo que saturan la novela histórica *tradicional* se transforman en la nueva novela histórica en una cercanía a los eventos y una perspectiva subjetiva creando un tono más íntimo y personal en la narrativa (14).

Frecuentemente en la nueva novela histórica encontramos a personajes quienes discutan su deseo de contar la historia desde una perspectiva neutral pero reconocen, a la vez, su imposibilidad total. Esto ocurre, por ejemplo en *Sombras nada más* de Sergio Ramírez. En "Las dos orillas" Jerónimo de Aguilar es un testigo directo de los eventos que describe pero sus recuerdos destacan el lado humano y subjetivo. Fuentes bien hubiera podido elegir un título como "La Conquista: ¿Tragedia o triunfo? Un testimonio intrigante de tesoro, trampas, traición, travesuras, y triángulos de amor entre traductores" para esta obra con su tono dramático y personal.

Por ejemplo, cuando Jerónimo de Aguilar se enamora de la Malinche a primera vista confiesa que, "Imaginé que podríamos cambiar el curso de las cosas" (42). Es una decepción cruel entonces cuando Cortés escoge a la Malinche como su concubina e intérprete. Jerónimo de Aguilar reflexiona sobre el papel del rencor, la envidia, el celo, y la vanidad en el curso de la historia y en su propia vida, comentando, "¿Me rebajo demasiado a mí mismo? La muerte me autoriza a decir que me parece poco frente a la humillación y el fracaso que entonces sentí. Privado de la hembra deseada, la sustituí por el poder de la lengua" (44). Lejos de ser neutral o impersonal, esta obra implica que, a fin de cuentas, son las emociones humanas y preferencias personales que dirigen las decisiones importantes en el curso de la historia.

### **Pensamiento Dialógico**

Según Seymour Menton, uno de los rasgos principales de la nueva novela histórica es el uso de ideas dialógicas o contrarias (24). Mientras un documento histórico sólo presenta un tema de manera cohesiva, la nueva novela histórica suele presentar varias opciones o posibilidades y no trata de resolver la tensión entre las posibilidades ni establecer una verdad absoluta. En "Las dos orillas," por ejemplo, el narrador Jerónimo de Aguilar nos informa que la Conquista era a la vez la gloria y la abyección. Jerónimo de Aguilar no siente la necesidad de limitar el significado de la Conquista a un

sólo resultado, sino que reconoce diversos resultados. Destaca la gran diversidad de las personas involucradas en la Conquista con sus distintos papeles y destinos, y describe una mezcla complicada de emociones y resultados finales. La identidad de Jerónimo de Aguilar, ya comentada aquí, constituye otra fuente de lo dialógico dado que es de España pero se identifica con y defiende la cultura maya.

Sus palabras también tienen un significado dialógico. En su trabajo como intérprete para Hernán Cortés, las palabras de Jerónimo de Aguilar representan la verdad pero también la mentira. El ejemplo más impactante de esto ocurre entre Hernán Cortés, Jerónimo de Aguilar, (quien sirve de intérprete) y Guatemuz (el último emperador azteca, sucesor de Moctezuma y prisionero de los españoles). Cortés le ofrece libertad y tierras a Guatemuz por su valiente comportamiento pero Jerónimo de Aguilar sabe que esta oferta es mentira y no quiere ser responsable por el engaño del emperador azteca. Entonces el narrador toma las riendas de la historia en sus propias manos y decide comunicarle algo más cercano a la verdad. Jerónimo de Aguilar le informa a Guatemuz que Cortés piensa torturarlo, humillarlo y hacer de él un ejemplo. Pensando en su decisión y su traición a Cortés, Jerónimo de Aguilar comenta, "Traduje, traicioné, inventé. Añadí, inventando por mi cuenta y burlándome de Cortés. ¿No tuve razón en traducir al revés al capitán y decirle con mis mentiras, la verdad al azteca?" (18). Este episodio destaca de nuevo el gran poder de la palabra tanto como la imposibilidad de distinguir entre verdad y mentira. En sus comentarios sobre "Las dos orillas" Isabel Anievas Gamallo menciona "el reiterado énfasis que Fuentes pone en el poder del lenguaje, en la omnipresencia de la palabra, y en el uso de la lengua como instrumento de poder y de aculturación," señalando el poder de la palabra como tema recurrente (122).

El final sorpresivo constituye otro ejemplo de lo dialógico. En la versión de Fuentes los vencidos se transforman en vencedores cuando Jerónimo de Aguilar y su compañero Gonzalo Guerrero cruzan el mar con su ejército de indios mayas, conquistan a España y establecen un reino maya. El final inesperado invierte las definiciones tradicionales en la historia y produce conquistadores en las dos orillas.

¿Qué significa esta nueva perspectiva hacia la historia?

Hemos visto la importancia en esta obra de la perspectiva marginada, lo dialógico, la mezcla de ficción e historia, y el tono subjetivo; todos rasgos típicos de la nueva novela histórica. ¿Qué revela esta perspectiva sobre la Conquista o sobre el contacto entre culturas en general? ¿Debemos aceptar la ficticia conquista maya de España solamente como un invento juguetón-- o rinde una interpretación alternativa de la realidad latinoamericana?

Algunos factores en la ficticia conquista maya de España indican nada más que una repetición cíclica de la historia al estilo borgeano. Al explorar las causas detrás del auge y la caída de la dinastía maya, Fuentes sugiere un proceso cíclico que rige los cambios en poder, las interminables guerras, y el vaivén de conquistar y ser conquistado. Jerónimo de Aguilar reflexiona sobre el eterno deseo humano de explorar, conquistar nuevas orillas, y crear algo mejor. El lenguaje que describe las conquistas apoya la idea de constante repetición en la historia universal. Al principio, al hablar de la Conquista española de México, el narrador nos informa, "Yo vi todo esto. La caída de la gran ciudad azteca, en medio del rumor de atabales, el choque del acero contra el pedernal y el fuego de los cañones castellanos. Vi el agua quemada de la laguna sobre la cual se asentó esta Gran Tenochtitlan..." (11). El lenguaje utilizado al final para describir el ataque de los mayas es casi idéntico: "Yo vi todo esto. La caída de la gran ciudad *andaluza*, en medio del rumor de atabales, el choque del acero contra el pedernal y el fuego de *los lanzallamas mayas*. Vi el agua quemada del *Guadalquivir*..." (55). Si aceptamos que la historia se repite continuamente, entonces no existe nada nuevo ni imaginario en la historia alternativa del ataque maya--es simplemente la misma vieja historia de un pueblo que conquista a otro.

Por otro lado, Jerónimo de Aguilar mantiene una actitud muy crítica sobre la Conquista española y parece poco probable que desea repetir el proceso. Durante toda la obra, él cuestiona los motivos y resultados de la Conquista española con preguntas como, "¿Quién gana, quién pierde en una conquista?" (14) y "¿Hay justicia en todo ello?" (17). El es consciente del gran costo humano de la guerra y advierte, "No nos engañemos; nadie salió ileso de estas empresas de descubrimiento y conquista, ni los vencidos... ni los vencedores" (12). Al dominar a España, entonces, su meta es llevar a cabo la creación de algo radicalmente diferente y más justo que mejora el mundo: "Cuantos contribuimos a la conquista india de España sentimos de inmediato que un universo a la vez nuevo y recuperado, permeable, complejo, fecundo, nació del contacto entre las culturas, frustrando el fatal designio purificador de los Reyes Católicos" (56). Jerónimo de Aguilar y Gonzalo Guerrero mencionan

muchos valores mayas que desean introducir o restaurar en España. El resultado de la conquista ficticia es un reino exitoso que logra restaurar valores perdidos, corrige errores, fomenta la diversidad étnica, y establece un ambiente de tolerancia religiosa. En este nuevo mundo los judíos, musulmanes, indígenas y cristianos se abrazan, y hay más respeto para la fragilidad de la Tierra.

En esta versión de la Conquista, Fuentes subraya la importancia de las relaciones humanas entre diversas culturas. Además de hablar de las batallas, las estrategias y la ambición que implica la Conquista, Fuentes también incorpora reflexiones sobre el amor, la vida diaria, la lengua y la identidad en una nueva cultura. Jerónimo de Aguilar vive entre dos mundos y lo acompañamos en su búsqueda interior, su adaptación cultural, y su reflexión crítica sobre los papeles de conquistador y conquistado. En acorde con la teoría poscolonial, Fuentes utiliza palabras para romper categorías que oprimen o restringen y para crear una nueva realidad. Esta versión alternativa convierte al conquistador español al conquistado, invierte las relaciones de poder entre España y América Latina, y hace girar el concepto de la identidad latinoamericana. En vez de considerar únicamente las contribuciones de los españoles a la cultura latinoamericana, aquí Fuentes nos invita a imaginar lo que las civilizaciones indígenas hubieran podido contribuir a España dado otras circunstancias.

¿Cuál es el mensaje para nosotros mientras luchamos para comprender los eventos históricos del pasado y contemplamos sus implicaciones para el contacto entre diversas culturas, las complicadas identidades culturales, o los efectos tangibles y dolorosos de la colonización? Tal vez nos conviene reconocer que las distinciones claras que la historia oficial establece entre verdad y mentira, lo real y lo imaginario, éxito y fracaso, el conquistador y el vencido son, al pasar por una revisión más auténtica, no tan distintas sino borrosas e inciertas. Fuentes recurre a una variedad de voces, examina diversas experiencias, considera numerosas posibilidades y presenta múltiples verdades para explorar la Conquista. Con esta visión más amplia, podemos percibir la Conquista como éxito y también fracaso, creación y también destrucción, algo real y también imaginado. En su libro *El espejo enterrado* sobre la historia de América Latina y la relación con España, Fuentes subraya la naturaleza dialógica de la Conquista: "La hazaña de Cristobal Colón abrió el telón sobre un inmenso choque de civilizaciones, una gran epopeya, compasiva a veces, sangrienta otras, pero siempre conflictiva: la destrucción y creación simultáneas de la cultura del Nuevo Mundo" (129). La ardua tarea de entender el pasado y preparar para el futuro, requiere el poder de la imaginación y de la palabra para vislumbrar nuevas posibilidades e imaginar nuevos mundos. Fuentes nos pide considerar el grave peligro de repetir antiguos ciclos de violencia, colonización y avaricia versus la esperanza de crear un mundo más justo donde se protege el mundo natural y se fomenta la diversidad y la tolerancia.

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**BETWEEN MYTH AND UTOPIA:  
THE HUMAN SEARCH WITHIN CARLOS FUENTES' THE CRYSTAL FRONTIER**

Aggie Schwayder  
University of Montana

Carlos Fuentes's *The Crystal Frontier* weaves through nine stories, each of which represents an allegorical version of Mexican (non-) identity. Underlying each tale is a landscape of economic prowess created and controlled by a Mexican entrepreneur: Leonardo Barroso (also known as the Godfather). Barroso's powerful image is built on his ability to operate within the same framework as a wealthy American citizen. Though this offers him a unique level of superficial freedom, Fuentes demonstrates that this does not necessarily mean he is free to choose an authentic identity. Ultimately, as Barroso upholds the image that his economic power provides, the hollowness of his identity is exposed. At the same time, Barroso's relationships and interactions with individuals on both sides of the Mexamerican (northern Mexican) border also reveal the invisible barriers surrounding the marginalized voices of Mexico (Van Delden 174). As a nation trapped by the strong presence of America's economy, Mexico remains passive and paralyzed in a cyclical pattern of mythical appropriation. Fuentes shows that in Mexico's contemporary relationship with the United States, Mexico's identity has been lost. Nevertheless, Fuentes acknowledges that there is hope for Mexico. Buried in limbo between the bordering nations, a self-determined nation awaits a return to the earth. Fuentes digs beneath the *self*-destructing Mexican identities to reveal an imaginable community of justice, dignity, and authenticity.

The novel begins with "A Capital Girl," a story that introduces the capital figurehead, Leonardo Barroso. His lover, and soon to be daughter-in-law, Michelina Laborde, is an inverted La Malinche. She is an archetypal character, emphasized by a performative, "little Mexican mask" (Fuentes 1). Despite her disguise, she is *la chingada*. Michelina's character is infused with the capitalistic values of her lover. Fuentes uses Michelina to expose the collision of Mexican myth within a capital culture. On the one hand, Michelina is a relic: she desires to wear a *crinolines* and a veil for her wedding, which presents the appropriated myth of the virgin. At the same time, she is hungry for a specific "liberation," one that women acquire by marrying into wealth. The dichotomy of her wedding attire and actual intentions exemplifies the merging of two central Mexican archetypes: she is the whore in virgin's clothing. In Michelina's masked whoreness, she becomes hollowed out by the myths of La Malinche and the Virgin of Guadalupe. She is a bought, sexual object, incapable of thinking independently as a woman (Valdés 57). From the very beginning, Fuentes stresses that living the stagnated myth of La Malinche fossilizes the self in both life and death: "[She was] immune to the ravages of time. Perfect faces for death..." (Fuentes 3).

Michelina's grandmother similarly maintains a dualism of myth and popular (or capital) culture. She explains, "The world has changed, but we haven't." As a petrified monument, the grandmother is the "pillar of the household," nostalgic for "haciendas, demurrals courts, and Church blessings" (Fuentes 3-4). She is also the "czarina of nostalgia": she receives \$50,000 from an American memorabilia company, which buys her collection of "postcards, movie posters, cigar boxes, matchboxes, bottlecaps, comic books" (Fuentes 7). The binary of historic and pulp surrounds the elite in a landscape described as "Disneyland" (Fuentes 23). Barroso, "tsar of the northern frontier" (Fuentes 25), is the animator of this elite community, which maintains outer dignity as the authentic self is ravaged within.

As the Godfather and Michelina drive across the Mexican-U.S. border, leaving Michelina's new husband behind, she recalls what she said earlier to her intoxicated friends: "We shall never reach the horizon" (Fuentes 24). While she feels empowered by her acquired, purchasing power, their sales transaction involves an abandonment of self, leaving Michelina erased and muted. At the same time, Barroso is similarly abandoned. Despite his purchasing power, he can never truly assimilate into the American community. As Michelina says, they will never reach the horizon. They exist in illusions of self and assimilation. The narrator continues, "[Barroso] did have a limit: the border between Mexico and the United States...He told her...she should understand that she would have anything she wanted...now she was seeing only naked desert, but her life could be like that enchanted city on the

other side of the frontier: golden towers, crystal palaces." While Michelina will never reach the horizon, she will have the illusion of access through the crystal barrier, impenetrable by the Mexican collective. The stage will be set with proper monuments to convey capital inclusion: "a Neiman Marcus, a Saks, a Cartier, and a Marriot" (Fuentes 27). In addition, the Godfather has the ability to transcend the invisible barriers with a ubiquitous and "magical" currency. Their access represents the modern, perverse top-soil on the palimpsest of falsified, historic identities and memories: "Through the half-opened window came a song sung by Luis Miguel, 'I need you, need you a lot, I don't know you...' How could Leonardo and Michelina know that that music was coming from an 'erased' Indian village... That morning, a jet crossed the heavens, and the birds fell silent forever. She was no longer there..." (Fuentes 28). While Barroso maintains the *machismo* title of modernity and progression, Michelina sells herself in order to gain a similar progression of self, yet inadvertently maintains the national, female emblem of "atavistic, inert, backward-looking" (McClintock 92). Michelina is the desperate Mexico incarnate who is screwed by the Buyer. Barroso, on other hand, is neither America nor Mexico. He is the Godfather: a transgressor of borders, chief of an illusory nation. Barroso's aim is not toppling the U.S. community, but rather appropriating his Mexican identity to fit the elite community. He uses this image of driving into the sunset to assert a capital alliance with the dominant, economic community of the United States.

As the Godfather, Barroso is also a provider. The stories that follow the "purchase" of Michelina involve other manifestations of his capitalist project. In "Pain," the young Juan Zamora is financed by Barroso to attend medical school at Cornell. The narrator begins,

Juan Zamora asked me to tell this story while he kept his back turned. What he means is that he wants to have his back to the reader the whole time. He says he's ashamed. Or, as he puts it, 'I'm in pain.' 'Pain' as a synonym for 'shame' is a peculiarity of Mexican speech...(Fuentes 29).

Zamora becomes the male version of La Malinche, turning his back to the reader; Fuentes manipulates the sexual codes of myth to emphasize Zamora's particular "otherness." As a homosexual, Zamora enters into the "erased" (Fuentes 22) landscape of Indians, women, and the poor; he turns his back as a gesture toward *el chingado*—his pain is caused by the shame of homosexuality. Zamora's father, Gonzalo, was Barroso's lawyer, and is criticized by his wife for being too honest. Consequently, Zamora's family was penniless, yet Barroso fulfills Gonzalo's final wish: to send Zamora to college. Zamora boards with a *gringo* family, the Wingates, who "believe that the expression *free world* is synonymous with *free enterprise*" (Fuentes 35). The Wingates embody the Protestant origins of America. They celebrate Ronald Reagan, promote the value of work ethic, omit the word "Mexican" from their vocabulary to show tolerance, and then silently condemn Zamora's homosexuality. When the family becomes aware of his sexual orientation, Zamora loses his name and becomes "the Mexican student." The story magnifies the racism and prejudice in the American psyche. Tony Morrison describes the American association between liberalism and ignoring race in the book, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Morrison explains,

In matters of race, silence and evasion have historically ruled literary discourse...It is further complicated by the fact that the habit of ignoring race is understood to be a grateful, even generous, liberal gesture...and then I saw the structure that transparently (and invisibly) permits the ordered life it contains to exist in the larger world (Morrison 9, 17).

Morrison proposes that the American novel makes great strides to avoid the "other," in order to promote the American ideals of democracy and freedom. Fuentes tackles the "other" in direct correlation with Morrison's revelation. Both Fuentes and Morrison see the invisible barriers that structure American *whiteness*: the marginalized "other" is a shadow without his or her own shadow. The Wingates *use* Zamora to express their Americanness. At first, they are the compassionate and open-minded hosts: the gates to America are open to all. While this gesture typically negates any self-determined sign value in the alien, Zamora compromises the Wingate's methodology of "freedom" by asserting himself. Zamora's homosexuality exposes the inherent prejudice to their version of freedom, thus he becomes worthy of disdain.

Zamora's lover, whom he calls Lord Jim, is the embodiment of Anglo-Saxon: hazel-green eyes, blond hair. Their relationship begins in medical school, where they are paired together to dissect a cadaver. The partners, dark and light-skinned, work together literally above death. Zamora and Jim begin as a polarized pair, "isolated by the latex, the masks, the robes, their gloved hands touched with the same feeling as when a man wears a condom." Staring into each others' eyes *over* death, they are joined by a passionate force of freedom. As they remove their white masks and gloves, the fusion of light and dark allows the boys to "conquer death" (Fuentes 41). This moment is outside time, for it is an unmasking—a revelation of possibility. While Lord Jim's freedom involves a youthful and risky experimentation with the "other," Zamora transcends his imagined persona. He destroys La Malinche, and becomes *himself*. Zamora and Lord Jim enter into an unlimited frontier: they are able to Speak. As Heidegger explains, we live in language:

The belonging together of Man and Being in the manner of a reciprocal challenge drives home alarmingly the that and the how of Man's alienation from Being, at the same time, however, also the that and how of Being. Within the frame-work there prevails a strange alienation and dedication. Now, we are under obligation to experience in our own person quite simply the concinnity wherein Men and Being are concinnate. In other words, we must return to what we call a "concern." "Er-eignen" (to concern) means originally, to distinguish or discern which one's eyes see, and in seeing calling to oneself, appropriate (Heidegger 27).

It is this concern between Lord Jim and Zamora that digs beneath the transparent barrier of the crystal divide; their existence in the "earth" is not of decaying bodies, but of real freedom. Zamora moves into an open frontier in life, as opposed to in death. While the moment of unveiling is silent between Lord Jim and Zamora, they are en route to Being (Valdés). In Heidegger's terms, they appropriate themselves from their imagined identities.

Lord Jim, however, is eventually reminded of his community's strict provisions: "we have to talk about the future...no one controls his destiny" (Fuentes 47). For Zamora, the future becomes a reminder of inevitable memory. Zamora will return to the margins, as speechless "Mexican" and homosexual—he remains a lone pioneer. Fuentes alludes to Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim*: "Perhaps the desire to reconstruct something so perfect it had to crack one day was all too obvious" (Fuentes 45).

Unlike the boys' ethereal experience, Barroso constructs a world that can be sustained in a dominant community. He explains, "Mexico's health depends on the periodic renewal of its elites" (Fuentes 6). The story "Pain," ends with the inevitable disintegration of Zamora's found self: the frontier is closed. The masks return, and Zamora can only dream of a rebirth in death.

During a trip to Cancún, the Wingates decide to surprise Zamora with a visit. Their abrupt rudeness upon learning of his homosexuality does not align with American compassion, thus they need to expel their guilt. They drive to Mexico City where they arrive in Zamora's seedy neighborhood. His tales of family wealth further marginalize Zamora, for the lie re-confirms the family's distrust.

Zamora continues to dream each night of a return to the virgin landscape. His desire for fraternal birthing does not suggest dependency; rather, Zamora's longing is for a new frontier, where fraternity is nation-less. The dream of a just community lies beneath the layers of earth. There are no illusions in the nascent soil. For now, "[Zamora and Jim] jump into the void" (Fuentes 53). Zamora becomes a silent spectacle; his imagined death is the only opportunity for the marginalized to experience freedom. The story ends with Zamora speaking to the reader:

You have to earn heaven by giving yourself over to it: paradise, if it does exist is in the very guts of the earth, its humid embrace awaiting us where flesh and clay mix, where the great maternal womb mixes with the mud of creation and life is born and reborn from its great reproductive depth, but never from its airy illusion, never from the airlines falsely connecting New York and Mexico, Atlantic and Pacific, in fact separating the lovers, breaking their marvelous unity of their perfect androgyny, their Siamese identity, their beautiful abnormality, their monstrous perfection, casting them to incompatible destinies, to opposite horizons (Fuentes 53).

Juliet Mitchell's discussion of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* as a bisexual novel, supports Zamora's community of oneness. Mitchell explains,

Catherine wants to be 'one' with Heathcliff. She says, 'I *am* Heathcliff, he's more myself than I am.' This type of 'oneness' can only come with death...I do not think we can live as human subjects without in some sense taking on a history; for us, it is mainly the history of being men or women under bourgeois capitalism. In deconstructing history, we can...construct other histories. What are we in the process of becoming? (Mitchell 391)

While Mitchell contends history only allows a completion of the self in death, as exemplified by Zamora, ultimately Mitchell and Fuentes, like Heidegger, seek the "process of becoming" in life. Fuentes urges his audience to break from mythic constructions of self. The structural violence of the dominant community extends beyond socially acclimated practices: "From the moment we first realize the link between the language of rape and the discourse of the political structure, we begin to realize that this violation...[this] is not a question of individually deranged sexual psychopaths, but of a form of violence tied to the exercise of power in the social structure itself" (Valdés192). "Pain" exposes this link as the first step in Fuentes's "process of becoming."

Far above the earth, Lisandro Chávez flies aboard an airplane headed for *Nueva York*. In "The Crystal Frontier," Lisandro is a tool in Don Leonardo Barroso's newest project: "As soon as the North American Free Trade Agreement had gone into effect, Don Leonardo had begun lobbying intensively to have the migration of Mexican workers to the United States classified as 'services,' even as 'foreign trade'...What Don Leonardo proposed was already a reality, and *it*—or rather he—was traveling tourist class" (Fuentes 156). Lisandro recognizes Michelina on the plane, whom he met at a party years earlier, yet he decides that she certainly wouldn't remember him. The chasm between Lisandro and Michelina exposes the elite community to which Lisandro does not belong. As a tool, Lisandro lives without Barroso's mirages, yet this "freedom" only leaves Lisandro in a different form of incarceration. The narrator continues, "There was no homeland anymore, no such thing as Mexico...the country was a fiction or rather, a dream maintained by a handful of madmen who at one time believed in the existence of Mexico" (Fuentes 171). Fuentes's desire to deconstruct borders speaks through these fatalistic words, especially as Barroso is the pilot of this exploitive mission. Despite the "magic of the marketplace" (Fuentes 167), enabling Barroso's authority as capital sovereign, penetrating American brings Barroso no closer to the American Dream: "...the rich politicians never appeared [in *Fortune* magazine]—the politicians because none of their businesses had their names on them: they hid behind the seven veils of multiple partnerships, borrowed names, foundations...Don Leonardo imitated them. It was difficult to attribute to him the wealth he actually possessed" (Fuentes 169).

Once Lisandro arrives in New York City, he waits with the other Mexicans: "beaten down, and being screwed rendered them equal" (Fuentes 176). As the city is covered in white snowfall, Lisandro begins his job washing the windows of a skyscraper. He floats as a self-contained unit outside the capital monument, walled off by a pane of glass. As Lisandro moves to a new window, a *gringa* named Audrey sits at a desk inside. At first, she is frustrated by the distraction outside her window; however, as their glances continue, Audrey begins to yearn for something: "She was imagining him" (Fuentes 167). As Lisandro watches her eyes make meaning of him, he wishes to say to her, "...I'm not this, I'm not what you imagine. But he couldn't speak to the glass, he could only fall in love with the light of windows, which most certainly could penetrate her, touch her; they shared the light" (Fuentes 168). They are both alone, and neither can cross the transparent crystal: "Between the two of them an ironic community was being created, a community of isolation" (Fuentes 188). They then write their names on the glass as if it were a mirror. She writes, "YERDUA," and he, "NACIXEM" (Fuentes 189). As Lisandro is called down from the building, they kiss "through the glass" (Fuentes 189). When Audrey opens her eyes he is gone.

While Lisandro represents the Mexican incapable of pushing through barriers, Audrey is no less confined. She is "a bird who confuses its cage with freedom" (Fuentes 182). While this glass becomes clearer as the two begin to imagine each other, Fuentes focuses his lens on the isolation of the American. Audrey has the auspice of freedom, yet movement within the capital frontier is an entirely isolating experience. The difference between Audrey and Lisandro exists in Audrey's blinded

desperation; she is not aware of her loneliness or separation, until she is aware of what she cannot touch.

Juliet Mitchell discusses the rupture between desire and reality in terms of hysteria. She explains, "Hysteria is the woman's simultaneous acceptance and refusal of the organization of sexuality under patriarchal capitalism" (Mitchell 389). Audrey becomes the hysteric as she looks in the mirror. The image reflected is both the manifestation of patriarchal capitalism and also its "other." As Fuentes hands Audrey and Lisandro the pen, they both inscribe their names onto the glass, textualizing their independent space in time. The moment is fossilized on the crystal, which elicits the possibility for renewal.

Audrey and Lisandro dissolve capital hierarchies, and begin to see each other as purely people. This moment becomes another spectacle in shaping new frontiers of identity. McClintock views community as a formation of "a collective identity through the political staging of vicarious *spectacle*" (McClintock 102). Barroso's aerial transportation of Mexicans, above the Mexico-American border, is in itself a spectacle; however, the performance between Audrey and Lisandro is a rejection of the dominant national spectacle. Unlike Barroso's capital identity (in terms of emblems of wealth and assimilation), the performance between Audrey and Lisandro is an authentic revelation of disobedience, imagination, and spirit, and a movement toward Fuentes's belief in an authentic *human* identity.

After mirroring the *gringa* and the Mexican "other," Fuentes turns next to the Mexican woman. In "Malintzin of the Maquilas," the archetype of La Malinche is again manipulated in the character, Marina. Unlike Michelina, Marina hopes for an equal union with a man; she steps outside the "feminophobic" and "depersonalized types of virgin or whore" (Valdés 57).

Marina and her friends, Dinorah and Rosa Lupe, work in Barraso's factory on the Mexican border. Rosa Lupe (Fuentes's pun on the Virgin of Guadalupe) wears only Carmelite attire, and like Dinorah, supports her *famullo* and child: "men don't work" (Fuentes 117). As the women drive to work, Marina looks out the window of the bus: "The sky and the sun seemed her protectors; they were the beauty in the world, they belonged to everyone and cost nothing" (Fuentes 115). Marina imagines the world as hers, despite her movement into an oppressive community. The narrator explains,

The television assembly plant, a mirage of glass and shining steel, like a bubble of crystalline air. It was almost like a fantasy to work there, surrounded by purity, by brilliance, in a factory so clean and modern, what the managers called an industrial park...It was one of the plants that allowed the gringos to assemble toys, textiles...made parts made in the United States, put together in Mexico at a tenth the labor cost, and set back across the border to the U.S. market...(Fuentes 121).

When the girls arrive at the plant for their new job, a green lawn is marked off with a double warning: "NO PISE EL PASTO/KEEP OFF THE GRASS." Dinorah exclaims, "It looks like Disneyland" (Fuentes 121). As the women enter the factory, they begin to share the stories that brought them there. Rosa Lupe describes her departure from a commune—how her father told her to leave a make a life for herself. Lupe explains, "What our men give us we deserve. What my father gives me is remembrance. As long as my father is in the house, I'll never forget. It's beautiful having things to remember" (Fuentes 125). Her comment engages a recycling of the mythic virgin: she is dependent upon patriarchal memory. A moment later, a supervisor in the factory scolds Lupe for not wearing the appropriate smock for work. Lupe responds, "But I've made a vow, ma'am" (Fuentes 125). The supervisor then strips Lupe's clothes down to her waist, and proceeds to grab and kiss Lupe's breasts. As the image metaphorically changes from Virgin to whore, Fuentes emphasizes that neither type is self-determined. At one point in the story Lupe exclaims, "Enough is enough" (Fuentes 139), yet she makes the statement passively and without any understanding of the situation. Lupe is as hollowed as Michelina.

Later, Barroso gives his U.S. investors a tour of his factory: an image of the compassionate pioneer. He explains how the plant liberates women from *machismo* (even though he does not allow unions). As he smiles widely he continues to explain that as breadwinners, women become stronger and freer: "And that, too, was democracy—didn't his partners from Texas agree?" (Fuentes 127). Barroso desperately appropriates himself to fit the scripted, American-democratic voice, yet the

investors continue to see him as a Mexican. They are of the same world, yet within this world, the Mexican is subject to another set of hierarchies and power by birth. The archives (Foucault 131) of capital and demographic "power" spread vertically and horizontally, yet not one will ever "reach the horizon."

The story continues with Marina imagining her lover, Rolando—his evasiveness, yet ability to determine Marina's meaning. She says, "her Rolando, her Rolando..." to her friends, who then respond, "Your Rolando? Yours? Every woman's Rolando" (Fuentes 132). Rolando is indeed inaccessible to Marina. He is part of a different, "superior" community, and idealized by all women in Marina's position. For women like Marina he symbolizes the possibility of penetrating the frontier—in the same way Michelina saw Barroso. Unlike Michelina, Marina wants more than what Barroso's community has to offer: "She...ran onto the grass barefoot, dancing over the grass, laughing, mocking the warning NO PISE EL PASTO/KEEP OFF THE GRASS, feeling a marvelous physical emotion...Her bare feet, the freedom of her body, the freedom of that other thing—what is it called?—the soul..." (Fuentes 134).

Surrounded by death and sadness, Marina hopes Rolando will provide her with new memories. She tries to contact him but his cell phone is busy, then dead. Marina thinks, "I'm asking you to raise me up to where you are, Rolando; let's go up together...and if you don't, we're both going to be ruined, you're going to bring us down so we won't even matter to ourselves" (Fuentes 142). Rolando's potential failure in this moment also points to the hollowed myth of the machismo man. Their mutual confrontation of capital value could destroy history. When Marina crosses the international border to find him, he is with another woman. As she returns to Ciudad Juárez, she walks barefoot on the pavement, and recalls the feeling of the forbidden grass. Just as she begins to imagine the moment, Barroso walks by her with his daughter-in-law, Michelina. He says, "This city is a disaster built on chaos" (Fuentes 144). Michelina responds by kissing his ear. The chaos is not necessarily visible, yet it represents the emptiness lurking behind national emblems.

The story ends with the tragic death of Dinorah's son. As workers hear that Barroso has proposed to tear down homes in order to build more factories, the group decides to unionize illegally and stop him. Dinorah joins them, and leaves her son at home, tied to a table. He is strangled by the rope; the cord that once united mother and child becomes a perverse weapon. While the uprising ends tragically, a civil society emerges from a humanitarian effort of solidarity, independent of the legal nation. Revolution, while ending in death, produces a rethinking of identity. While criticism of Fuentes's earlier novel *Cristóbal Nonato* cites, "Fuentes laments the disintegration of his country, but at the same time mocks and satirizes all attempts at unifying Mexico around a transcendent symbol or utopian political project" (Van Delden 178), *The Crystal Frontier* addresses the space between disintegration and hope.

Dinorah nominally refers to an opera by Giacomo Meyerbeer. The play/opera involves the marriage of Dinorah and her fiancé, Höel; however, a storm intervenes and destroys everything. Höel sets out on a mission to find supernatural treasure to rebuild their home. The catch is that someone else must touch the treasure before Höel, or he will die. Höel leaves on his mission, deciding to trick a fool into touching the treasure, yet he fails to tell Dinorah that he's leaving. Dinorah falls into a state of madness. Like many Mexican novels, Meyerbeer's *Dinorah* exhibits the convergence of madness and enlightenment. The death of Dinorah's child in Fuentes's story propels her anguish into truth:

...now Marina of the Maquilas crosses the bridge over the río grande, río bravo, and she's holding the arm of a tiny old lady wrapped in a shawl, protecting her, an unreadable old woman under the palimpsest of infinite wrinkles that cross a face like the map of a country lost forever. Dinorah asked her this favor, take my grandma to the other side of the bridge, Marina, deliver her to my uncle Ricardo on the other side, he doesn't want to come back to Mexico ever again, it makes him sad, makes him afraid too, that they might not let him back in, take my grandma to the other side of the río grande, río bravo, so my uncle can take her back to Chicago, she only came to comfort me on the death of my kid, she can't do it alone, and not just because she's almost a hundred years old but because she's spent so much time living as a Mexican in Chicago that she forgot Spanish a long time ago and never learned English, she can't communicate with anyone (except with time, except with night, except with oblivion...except with the dreams she can't tell anyone, except with the immense reserve of that which is not spoken today so it can be said tomorrow)...speak, Juan Zamora, bent over,

attending a corpse,...speak Michelina Laborde, stop screaming, think about your husband, the abandoned boy, Don Leonardo Barroso's heir, imagine yourself...poor Mexico, poor United States, so far from God, so near to each other (Fuentes 264-266).

The face of Dinorah's grandmother is a living map of shame and pain. She exists in a purgatorial frontier, without language. From the spectacle of converging death and hope, Dinorah wants each character to speak the language of time, night, oblivion, and dreams. She is compelled by her child's death and her experience to find new words. As Dinorah explains, speaking from the margins and using a dominant discourse, negates the speaker. Juliet Mitchell's discussion of the hysteric once again informs Dinorah's access to language. Like Marina, Zamora, and Lisandro, Dinorah speaks from experience; while these characters have dug below the surface of the divide, and they begin to see through the crystal frontier on the horizon, they remain incapable of moving forward.

American ideology indeed exhibits a commitment to economic freedom. Consequently, injustice takes refuge in America's accepted legalities: free trade or die. Nevertheless, there are those who embark on a journey into the crystal frontier. They create a spectacle, emerging from the margins of society, and dare to speak a language of freedom and human dignity. Henry Thoreau asserts, "not in my world." Like the American existentialist, Fuentes desires a communal disobedience, initiated by the individual. This process is indeed spiritual, for it involves meaningful connection. While Fuentes acknowledges Juliet Mitchell's association of transcendental individuality and a "death-in-life" existence, Dinorah becomes Fuentes's living spectacle of oneness. Fuentes is not looking for a martyr; instead, he inherits Thoreau's attitude of imagination: "...if one advances confidently in the direction of dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. He will put some things behind, will pass an invisible boundary" (Thoreau 216). From universal nature, Fuentes espouses to Thoreau's arousal of the soul. This imagining involves digging into the layers of displacement, death, and dreams. Emerging from the cacophony of memories, and amidst capital destruction, Fuentes's Artemio Cruz imagines the promised nation:

It's a thousand countries with a single name....You will bring with you the red deserts, the steppes of prickly pears and maguey, the world of the nopal, the belt of lava and frozen craters, the walls with golden churches cupolas and stone battlements, the cities of stone and mortar, the cities of red *tezontle*, the towns of adobe, the villages of reed huts, the paths of black mud...the fine bones of Michoacán, the diminutive flesh of Tlaxcala, the light eyes of Sinaloa, the white teeth of Chiapas, the short-sleeved *huipul* blouses, the bow-shaped combs, the Mixtec tresses, wide *tzotzil* belts, Santa María shawls, Puebla marquetry, Jalisco glass, Oaxaca jade...you carry them with you and they weigh you down...they've gotten into your guts (Fuentes 267).

Unlike Michelina's grandmother, stagnated in myth and imposed modernity, Mexican identity lives freely in the memories of the forgotten earth. Despite the inherently contradictory crystal frontier, an invisible border or an illuminating window, Fuentes hopes for the employment of crystal as clarity. Fuentes explains that seeing beyond the blinding and oppressive frontier allows for empowerment and voice—this is a power that money cannot buy. Freedom does not align with a manifest Disneyland, but from an "amorous encounter" with the Mexican Revolution. While Fuentes begins with a return to revolution, real practice consists of a persistent search beneath the barriers. This practice in and of itself sparks a revolutionary spectacle of justice, propelling "multiple realities...reconciled with a higher unity" (Van Delden 149). Fuentes enlists the faithful to see beyond and dig beneath the boundaries of the capital community in the pursuit of being human. Just as the *río grande*, *río bravo* (Fuentes 266) winds through *la tierra*, moving and shaping one another, the community of justice lives forever in the changing earth, uniting us all.

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## Book Review

**Marixa Lasso, *Myths of Racial Harmony: Race and Republicanism during the Age of Revolution, Colombia, 1795-1841* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007), 203 pp.**

Sharika Crawford  
United States Naval Academy  
Department of History

On January 20, 2009 the United States celebrated the inauguration of the first African American president. This milestone marked progress in that country's struggle to overcome its history of violent racial conflict which has characterized much of its recent past. Latin Americans also rejoiced over the election of Barack Obama, recognizing the significance of such a momentous event. They had observed and even experienced discrimination on their visits to their northern neighbor and often criticized American racial chauvinism while touting their own racially harmonious national histories. Yet as 2010 signals the year to begin commemoration ceremonies of the bicentennial of Spanish American independence throughout the region it offers an opportunity to reflect on the progress Latin Americans have also made toward the building of strong nation-states undivided by class and color.

Since the 1980s, both North American scholars of Latin America and Afro-Latin American political activists have declared notions about the region's harmonious race relations as a myth. Offering empirical evidence of exclusionist policies aimed at restricting darker skin Latin Americans of African ancestry from positions of political and economic influence in Brazil, Cuba, and Venezuela, they have called for an examination on how this myth emerged and more importantly, an explanation of its resilience as a popular idea shared by Latin Americans of all hues and skin tones. In *Myths of Racial Harmony: Race and Republicanism during the Age of Revolution, Colombia, 1795-1841*, Marixa Lasso argues the origins of this myth emerged at the inception of Spanish American republics in the early nineteenth century.

The prominent role of *pardos*—free blacks—in the late colonial period meant their participation in the independence struggles was essential. Lasso challenges scholarship of the 1960s and 1970s that understood actions on the part of slaves and free blacks as apolitical. In contrast, she situates them as active participants in making the Colombian nation. *Pardo* military participation and political engagement expanded through agitation and demands made to Creole elites, broadening notions of freedom and equality which shifted republican discourse to link nationalism and racial egalitarianism. Lasso positions Gran Colombia and the Age of Revolution as the source of the enduring ideal of racial harmony, as opposed to late nineteenth and turn-of-the-century Cuba, as most recently argued in Ada Ferrer's *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868 and 1898* and Alejandro de la Fuente's *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth Century Cuba*.

Using records of parliamentary debates, newspaper articles, judiciary sentences, military speeches, manumission ceremonies, and personal diaries, Lasso constructs the social world that free blacks and Creoles inhabited in the late colonial to early national periods. She recreates self portraits of *pardo* patriots through a careful weaving together of fragmentary evidence in an attempt to reveal their motivation and actions. Like other scholars of subaltern actors, this is a challenge but Lasso handles the recovery of their voices well and draws noteworthy conclusions about race and nationalism in Colombia.

Her argument is divided into five chapters. Chapter 2 "Racial Tensions in Late Colonial Society" reconstructs the social landscape of late colonial Caribbean Colombia, highlighting the tense relations among peninsulars, Creoles and *pardos* who made up the majority of the population. Creoles resentful of peninsular authorities and Spanish monopolistic policies began to promote republican ideals while peninsular officials recruited *pardos* to defend the colony as militiamen, opening avenues of social mobility which, in turn, forced free blacks to argue that merit rather than birth or origin should determine social standing. Chapter 3 "A Republican Myth of Racial Democracy" shows Creoles linking republicanism and racial equality during the parliamentary debates at Cádiz in 1810. In an effort to gain proportional representation, Creoles dismissed peninsulars' claims of racial animosity

between Creoles and *pardos*. In contrast, they countered with a narrative of harmonious slave-master relations as well as stressing a shared common "American identity", again emphasizing liberal notions of merit over birth or estate. In connecting racial equality to political representation, Creoles gained *pardo* allies and refashioned Spain as the true enemy of free blacks.

Chapter 3 "First Republic and the Pardos" examines the ambivalent nature of Creole republicans' commitment to racial equality as factions considered the degree in which *pardos* could become active citizens. Retention of the place of whites in the social and political order was at stake; radicalized *pardos* and some Creoles demanded a stricter allegiance to the link between republicanism and racial egalitarianism. Chapter 4 "Life Stories of Afro-Colombian Patriots" illustrate how free blacks and slaves employed nationalist rhetoric to condemn racial discrimination as Creoles grew increasingly concerned with the political and military influence of *pardos*. Chapter 5 "Race War" contends that Creole fears of a race war with free blacks pushed them to commit to racial egalitarian policies such as the abolition of the slave trade and elimination of legalized racial categories which consolidated the connection between republicanism and racial harmony. Yet at the same time allegations of racial hostility on the part of *pardos* prevented them from enjoying political influence and full citizenship as their denunciations of racial discrimination were seen as seditious. This, in turn, motivated *pardos* to employ different strategies at addressing this prejudice.

Lasso's study on race and nation during the Age of Revolution should elicit much interest. It is well-written and insightful. Her work highlights the downplayed role of *pardo* patriots who pushed elites to adopt racial egalitarianism as a principle tenet of the nation. She convincingly argues that ideas of racial harmony and race war served both to maintain Creole elites in positions of power and influence while adhering to racial egalitarian policies, thus, diffusing violent reprisals at the hands of free blacks and even slaves. While Lasso initially sets out to examine the interplay among race, war, and nation, there is actually little war. There are no substantive discussions about the experience of *pardo* militiamen during the independence battles which might offer insight into their embrace of republican ideals. War is more imaginary than real in this study. All in all, the study offers a provocative explanation regarding the silencing of racism in the face of discrimination.

## MACLAS PRIZE WINNERS - 2010

**Arthur P. Whitaker Prize** for the best book published by a MACLAS member in 2009-2010: No prize was awarded this year.

**Harold Eugene Davis Prize** for best article published by a MACLAS member in 2008-2010: **Susan Verdi Webster, College of William & Mary**

Article: "Masters of the Trade: Native, Artisans, Guilds and the Construction of Colonial Quito", in *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*

**Street Prize Essay** for best article published by a MACLAS member in the 2009 volume of *Latin American Essays*: **Carlos Rodriguez McGill, University of Michigan**

Article: "Intertextualidad y la Construcción del Imaginario del Delito Urbano en un *Capitán de Ladrones en Buenos Aires* (1879) de Eduardo Gutiérrez", in *Latin American Essays*.

**John D. Martz III Prize** for best graduate paper presented at the 2010 MACLAS XXX Conference: No prize was awarded this year.

**Juan Espadas Prize for best undergraduate paper presented at 2010 MACLAS XXX Conference**: **Bruno Dubrosin, Trent University**

Article: "The recovered factories and Peronism: A grey zone in an Argentine social movement."

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