

HETERONORMATIVE MASCULINITY IN LATIN  
AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY LITERATURE: OMAR  
CABEZAS' MALE TENDERNESS AND SERGIO  
RAMÍREZ'S PATRILINEAL REVOLUTIONARY FAMILY

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The Sandinista Revolution, which toppled the dynastic dictatorship of the Somoza family that plagued Nicaragua for decades, characterized a long history of insurrection and empire in the country's history. Wrestling power from totalitarian dictators to emancipatory revolutionaries, the Revolution of 1979 gave rise to the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional, or Sandinista National Liberation Front (henceforth referred to as the "FSLN"). While much can be said politically of the Sandinista revolution and subsequent eleven year government, the interest of this paper lies in what Sandinistas themselves wrote of their own revolution. Recognizing the limitations of autobiography and memoir as complete and accurate portrayals of history, this paper seeks to understand revolutionaries' conceptualizations of gender, race and class through personal accounts of Nicaragua's revolution.<sup>1</sup> The concept of "the new man," hypothesized by Che Guevara, a Cuban revolutionary, became important to Sandinista revolutionaries as they sought to reformulate bourgeoisie notions of masculinity through revolutionary action.

While the Sandinista revolutionaries, in Omar Cabezas' *Fire from the Mountain* and Sergio Ramírez's *Adíos Muchachos*, attempted to embody the concept of the "new man," Their memoirs promote a construction of the "revolutionary family" that, while ideologically linked to the revolution, requires male lineage to be fully realized. "Revolutionary masculinity" is also realized through a rejection of bourgeoisie masculine tropes, while at the same time realizing masculinity through the physical reality of being male. This revolutionary masculine identity,

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<sup>1</sup> Joan Wallach Scott's *Gender and the History of Politics* served as the basis for establishing gender as the focal point of historical analysis, seeking to go beyond the usual interpretations of "women's history" as history of the family. Particularly influential, was "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis." Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

while linked to intensely patriarchal structures, situates itself within indigenous racial identity as a symbol of resistance.

## **Masculinity and Gender**

In order to thoroughly interrogate the proposed literature, the often nebulous terms “masculinity” and “gender” need to be refined. The paper relies on Elizabeth Dore and her understanding of gender studies and patriarchy as a unified element of analysis, necessary in the study of class and power structures.<sup>2</sup> Building on the works of Joan Scott, Dore defines gender stratification as intrinsic to both private (sociopolitical) and public (market) relations, which, in the case of revolutionary literature, will be integrated into the study of Sandinistas’ gender differentiation in power structures.

Dore’s theories are compounded by Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* in study of the creation of gender identities. Signified and perpetuated by language, Butler’s exploration of gender through binary enforcing language and implicit heterosexuality lends this paper an understanding of gender that is situated entirely within political constructs.<sup>3</sup> In other words, if Dore is to aid in the exploration of how politics are gendered, Butler is far more concerned with the origin of gendered differentiation, allowing a theoretical understanding of certain institutions of culture which produce gendered distinctions.

Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* serves as a foundational text to understanding gendered ways of discourse prevalent in the texts. Butler’s ideas on gender aid in the exploration of gender as an identity, which she claims is performed. Butler argues that, while sex is commonly

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<sup>2</sup> Dore, Elizabeth *Myths of Modernity: Peonage and Patriarchy in Nicaragua* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 27.

<sup>3</sup> Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge Publishing, 2006.

regarded as a biological (and therefore neutral) expression of the socially assumed construct of gender, biological sex is merely a continuation of the “biology-is-destiny” theory.<sup>4</sup> The idea of sex and gender as two distinct categories of identity, to Butler, reifies gender signification as inherently binary, or intrinsically male and female. Furthermore, the “discontinuity” assumed between the sexed and gendered bodies of male and female contributes to her understanding of gender (as informed by sex) as performative.<sup>5</sup>

## **Gender and Class**

An understanding of Butler’s theories on gender alone for the purposes of this paper do not suffice. Additionally, an analysis of class, based off of Karl Marx, should shed light on the necessity of a dual category of analysis. To Marx, the foundation of the family is intrinsically based on capital and private property.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, gender relations become immutably connected to this private accumulation of wealth and property based on their connection to the family. “The bourgeoisie,” writes Marx, “sees his wife as an instrument of production.”<sup>7</sup> In other words, all familial relationships, within the capitalist realm of conception and production, become imbued with a relationship to class and capital. Marx views the construction of the family to be intrinsically linked to ownership of capital and private property.<sup>8</sup> Insofar as it concerns this paper, the framework of Butler and Marx are synthesized to form an understanding of gender which is indivisibly linked to class consciousness. This will become clearer as an understanding of Ernesto “Che” Guevara’s “new man” is established.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>6</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party” in *Marx and Engels Selected Works, Vol.1*, trans. Samuel Moore and Frederick Engels, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), 24

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 40.

## Secondary Literature

This paper contributes to the study of gendered action and rhetoric in revolutionary Nicaragua, by using Sandinista memoirs as an example. In examining masculinity and gendered action, my research complicates works, such as David E. Whisnant's considerations on Nicaragua's politicization of gender in *Rascally Signs in Sacred Places*, which is concerned primarily with gender stratification in Nicaraguan society and the revolution. While Whisnant examines Nicaraguan political culture as a whole, this project seeks to combine the political culture of Nicaragua with gender studies.

Work such as that of Brienne Orr in "From *Machista* to *New Man*?" stands as an example of the negotiation of text to conceptions of masculinity in FSLN memoirs. Focusing exclusively on Omar Cabezas' *Fire from the Mountain*, Orr reconciles Cabezas' transformed notions of masculinity to the works of Che Guevara and the "New Socialist Man." This paper complicates the notions of masculinity among the leaders by exploring the concept of masculinity as a vehicle for reconciliation of social and historic memory, by covering a wider scope of authors and complicating the cultural implications of the relationship between gender and power.

Furthermore, Orr's doctoral dissertation draws on Butler and Scott's theories to create an analytical lens, which she calls the "politics of gender." Dismissing gender as a lone "synchronic" tool for analysis, or that which ignores historical antecedents, Orr demands a reconfiguration of such tools to include class. My paper seeks to establish race as an equally important category of analysis that informs and complicates both gender and class. Through an examination of Omar Cabezas and Sergio Ramírez's memoirs, this analytic perspective of combining race, gender and class should illuminate the authors' similar conceptions on revolutionary masculinity.

This rebel masculinity attempts to resist *machista* personification, which Orr describes as “a self-perpetuated myth, an unreachable masculine model.” Simultaneously, however, revolutionary gender is configured as an automated binary, relying on heteronormative models to signify the adherence to gender constructs differing from bourgeoisie masculinity. In Omar Cabeza’s *Fire from the Mountain* revolutionary masculinity is pitted against the bourgeoisie masculinity of the National Guard. Sergio Ramírez endows his configurations of revolutionary masculinity with elements of class and race, which result in a patrilineal revolutionary familial model. Relying on Butler’s theories, an analysis of both Cabezas and Ramírez reveals that each author situates the purported “new man” of the revolution, which of course also signifies themselves, within the constructs of binary heteronormativity.<sup>9</sup>

Orr’s stated goal is to read Che dialectically through other Latin American revolutionary texts.<sup>10</sup> As she traces interpretations of Che’s “new manhood” throughout different guerrilla literature of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, her analysis becomes much more about the presence of Guevara in the literature than an analysis of gender and class as it pertains to the new code of revolutionary manhood. By reading Che in and throughout her chosen literary corpus, Orr suggests that a break with the “male code” of gender differentiation is achieved by a complete break with the corporeality associated with gender binaries. This she finds present in Omar Cabezas’ *Fire from the Mountain*, one of the texts I have chosen to analyze. Contrary to Orr, my reading of Cabezas’ text does not find a break with masculinity associated and realized through physical maleness, but a redefined masculinity, imbued with class and race consciousness, that is intrinsically

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<sup>9</sup> Binary heteronormativity refers to the assumption that men and women always engage in heterosexual relationships.

<sup>10</sup> Brianne Orr “Cracking the Code: The Politicization of Gender in Latin American Guerrilla Literature,” (PhD diss., Michigan State University, 2009), 2.

situated within a heteronormative construction of the body. Furthermore, my research does not seek to *find* Che within Cabezas' and Ramírez's memoirs, but use the authors' internalization of Che's new man as an autonomous point of theoretical reference.

### **Ernesto “Che” Guevara’s “New Man” and Omar Cabezas’ Masculine Corporeality**

Guevara, as outlined in “From Algiers, for *Marcha*,” sees the social formation of class as inherently linked to capitalist modes of production, asserting that individuals are educated by society and “self-educated” by a system of social controls that seeks to isolate the individual.<sup>11</sup> “To build communism,” he writes “is necessary...to build the new man and woman.”<sup>12</sup> Imbued with class consciousness, the “new man” will correct the institutionalization of social norms that developed under capitalism.<sup>13</sup> The idea of the new man, aware and self-educated against the social reproductions of capitalism, is found in Omar Cabezas’ *Fire from the Mountain*, where his unremitting goal of “[being] like Che” is supposedly realized through paternalistic family structures and endurance of the physical body in guerrilla activity.

Orr proposes Cabezas’ conception of manhood changes in three distinct spaces, related to the city, the mountain and his ascent from the mountain.<sup>14</sup> By no means did Cabezas’ formulation of masculinity, as it is informed by race and class, remain static during his narration. I perceived, in contrast to Orr’s assertions, Cabezas’ changes to be fixated entirely within a heteronormative binary. Although continually fixated within corporeal masculinity and paternalistic family structures, Cabezas distinguishes revolutionary masculinity from bourgeois masculinity.

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<sup>11</sup> Guevara, 4.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 7-8.

<sup>14</sup> Orr, 90.

While training in the mountain, Cabezas and his fellow *campañeros* lug around incredibly heavy sacks as they hike up and down mountainous terrain. In a moment of defeat, the army decides to go no further, to the chagrin of their military leader and trainer, Tello. In an effort to mobilize the men, Tello tells the men “you’ve heard talk of the new man...do you know where he is? He’s there on the ridge at the top of the hill we’re climbing.”<sup>15</sup> Placing the achievement of the new man within the grasps of the men, Tello’s words ignite within Cabezas an understanding of the new man that is founded within physical endurance, specifically that which is dedicated to revolutionary actions. “To give more than the typical man...to kill the old man,” within themselves, is to unlock the physical capabilities of the body, to continue climbing through exhaustion.<sup>16</sup> The new man, in this instance to Cabezas, is only found within the revolutionary if it is achieved through the physical act of endurance. While the new man “can generate a whole society of new men,” the vanguard of this revolutionary process has its origins in physicality. The origin of the new man, to Cabezas, was “in the FSLN...with fungus infections and with his feet oozing worms; the new man begun to be born with loneliness and eaten alive by mosquitos.”<sup>17</sup> In other words, the origin of the new man was found in a redefined masculinity, guerrilla masculinity. This guerrilla masculinity was situated within the corporeal realization of masculinity.

### **Male Tenderness**

Guerrilla masculinity, while still situated within a heteronormative matrix of identification, resisted individualism in favor of communalism, found in Omar Cabezas’

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<sup>15</sup> Cabezas, Omar. *Fire from the Mountain: The Making of a Sandinista*, trans. Kathleen Weaver. (New York: Plume Publishing, 1985) 92.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.



narrative as “male tenderness.” “Male tenderness,” to Cabezas furthered definitions of masculinity perpetuated by physical strength and endurance, relying on resistance to the individualism produced and reinforced by capitalism. To Cabezas, this communal love was developed “through action” to produce “a spirit of iron, a spirit of steel, a contingent of men that was morally and mentally indestructible.”<sup>18</sup> References to iron and steel unsurprisingly relate the affection, a character trait generally denoted as female, of the guerrillas to stereotypically masculine elements as a reference to physicality. Beyond reference to strength found in the body alone, iron and steel represent the link formed between physical and mental guerilla masculinity. “Extremely tough and hardened,” Cabezas explains, “fraternal love,” arose due to the physical strain exerted by the men on the mountain. Cabezas’ reformulation is significant because this tenderness did not arise in spite of physical exertion, but *because of* it, articulating masculinity, even its “feminine” expression, in terms of masculine physicality. However important to the revolution, Cabezas made absolutely clear this “tenderness” was not mistaken for homosexuality. Heterosexuality acted as an equally vital component of guerrilla masculinity.

Described as a sort of “gruff affection,” communal male tenderness sought to dismantle individualism, transforming “loneliness into a brotherhood,” creating a class conscious definition of affection. If “building socialism...is characterized by the abolition of the individual,” the male tenderness expressed by Cabezas represented a class conscious reformulation of masculinity that fit within Guevara’s new masculine identity.<sup>19</sup> This contingent of men, to Cabezas, was “capable of mobilizing the entire society against the dictatorship.”<sup>20</sup> In other words, the new men developing the communal affection within revolutionary spirit on the mountain represented the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>19</sup> Guevara, 1.

<sup>20</sup> Cabezas, 85.

vanguard of revolutionary action, capable of redefining Nicaraguan society as a whole. To Cabezas, “male tenderness” found class consciousness and gender equally important to the redefinition of politics in Nicaragua.

## **Heterosexuality**

Of equal import to guerrilla masculinity was a heterosexual expression of sexuality. Cabezas’ encounter with a female nurse during a hospitalization for “mountain leprosy” showcases his adherence to a heteronormative expression of sexual desire. Requiring surgery, Cabezas’ genitalia was shaved by a female nurse, resulting in a self-proclaimed “embarrassing” erection. Considering the nature of memoirs, the author’s “humiliation” should be overlooked for polite braggadocio. Unimportant to the overall narrative of the revolution, Cabezas’ in-depth discussion of an accidental erection seems purposefully placed to counter any suspicion of his heterosexual appetite. “It had been a year since I touched a woman, since a woman laid a hand on me,” Cabezas says, overwhelmed with pent up sexual energy.<sup>21</sup> Making note of his sexual starvation in the mountain reaffirms his heterosexual desires and abolishes homoerotic notions “male tenderness” may have connoted. Cabezas’ self-reported accidental erection, while adding little to the narrative itself, adds to the definition of guerrilla masculinity through the performance of purposeful heteronormative sexuality.

When Cabezas left for the mountain he left behind his pregnant girlfriend, Claudia. Rarely mentioning her or his newborn daughter throughout most of the memoir, Claudia becomes important to Cabezas’ concept of guerrilla masculinity when she leaves him for another man. Cabezas’ lamentation for the loss of Claudia reaffirms his heteronormativity, while

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<sup>21</sup> Cabezas, 154.

establishing revolutionary spirit as his main identifier. Cabezas shames Claudia, claiming backhandedly that he kept her “standard spotless,” a reference to his fidelity while in the mountain. In reference to her adultery, Cabezas angrily attests to his own fidelity as a means to reaffirm heteronormative identifiers of familial relationships. Cabezas lost “his sense of man and woman,” a reaction signifying his adherence to heteronormative identities within his own formulation of self. “I had lost my sense of self,” writes Cabezas, conflating self with heteronormative relationships.<sup>22</sup> That this comes at the end of Cabezas’ “transformation” signifies its importance to guerrilla masculinity.

Finally, Cabezas decides to write Claudia a response, in which he determines to prove her worthlessness to him. Explaining that if he had not been “lead,” or *plomo* in Spanish, he “would have been shit,” to learn Claudia left him. *Plomo*, Cabezas explains is made up of the initials for *Patria Libre O Morir*, or the revolutionary catchphrase of Sandino and the Sandinistas “Free Homeland or Death.” Through Claudia’s infidelity, for which she is considered under review from patriarchal societal expectations, Cabezas realizes his fidelity to the revolution. In other words, heterosexual relations, to Cabezas’ guerrilla masculinity, remained important, but women could (and quite possibly *should*) be cast aside for the sake of the revolution.

### **Phallocentric Reference as Masculine Performance**

Phallocentrism, or being concerned with the phallus or phallic reference as a symbol of dominance, is central to Cabezas’ narrative.<sup>23</sup> Phallocentrism in Cabezas narrative purposefully introjects reference to masculine physicality as a means of asserting dominance. Reference to the phallus, according to Butler, signifies more than an assertion of dominance, but a continuation of

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>23</sup> Butler, 13-17.

the male signifying economy. Drawing on Foucault's theories of rhetorical ontology, the male signifying economy determines what is considered "being." In other words, references to phallic symbols asserts that man is the totalizing Subject of humanity and female is its lack or Other.<sup>24</sup> This is distinct from the female being the "opposite" of the male. Opposition implies a counterpart, and to Butler male inherently represents a logical connection to humanity, while female its disconnect and deficiency. The male body, therefore, becomes the instrument of this representation in Cabezas narrative, therefore, reinforces these codes while it becomes a vessel through which revolutionary action is carried out and tested.

In moments of weakness, like when he reads Claudia's letter, Cabezas makes reference to his testes being bitten by fleas, a sign that his self-conceived masculinity was compromised by Claudia's infidelity.<sup>25</sup> Cabezas' reference to male genitalia being attacked signifies that the end of his comfortable heteronormative relationship threatened his self-conceived image of masculinity. Phallocentric reference to the testes, in terms of Butlerian signification, determines Cabezas to be the Subject, representing his being with the symbolic phallus.<sup>26</sup> Cabezas incident in the hospital, another example of phallocentric language, reflects this rhetorical signification as well.

In terms of masculinity, phallic reference in Cabezas narrative is continued as male versus male competition. When cornered by the National Guard, the dictator's Praetorian military force, Cabezas writes "our only way out was to fight our way out. We would have to bust our balls against the Guard."<sup>27</sup> Direct reference to the testes as a determining factor of

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>25</sup> Cabezas, 197.

<sup>26</sup> Butler, 59.

<sup>27</sup> Cabezas, 165.

strength, places masculinity at the fore of Cabezas' internalized definition of guerrilla masculinity. Portrayed by Cabezas as ultra-masculine, the Guard in Cabezas narrative appear as hyper masculinized, almost non-human entities of strength and virility. Cabezas however, speaks of the guerrillas as emaciated from hunger in the mountains, with furrowed brows from always frowning. The guerrilla's body "is transformed into a new and different present."<sup>28</sup> Compared to the Guard, the guerrillas look diminutive and weak. However, their bodies have been transformed from revolutionary activity on the mountain, providing its strength. Virility, then, lies not in the physical appearance of muscles or defined jawlines, typical depictions of masculinity, but in the phallic symbols proposed by Cabezas as combative. Busting "balls" against the Guards' is an extension of the masculine into the revolutionary physical space, theoretically testing one masculinity, the bourgeoisie Guard's masculinity, against another, the class conscious guerrilla fighter.

### **Patriarchal Revolutionary Family**

Integral to Cabezas and Ramírez's construction of masculinity is the paternal family structure. Cabezas constructs a guerrilla family, centered on historical lineage passed down from the Sandino rebellion of the late 1920's and early 1930's.<sup>29</sup> Ramírez, while less present in the construction of a historically aware lineage, engages his family in the revolutionary struggle, constructing a revolutionary family, wherein lineage is carried by possession of maleness.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>29</sup> Augusto César Sandino led an armed rebellion against the U.S. occupation, reinforced by Somoza's National Guard, from 1927 to his death in 1934. The Sandinista revolution of the late 1970's was ideologically rooted in the principles of Sandino's rebellion, even taking the "Sandino" namesake and transforming it into "Sandinista." Walker, Thomas W. *Nicaragua: Living in the Shadow of the Eagle* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2003).

As he travels throughout rural Nicaragua, talking with *campesinos* in an attempt to find safe refuge from the Guard and raise the political consciousness of the peasant class, Cabezas meets an older man, Don Leandro, who fought with Sandino during the insurrection. The “little old man,” connected Cabezas with “the old Sandinistas, from his own day, from the days of General Sandino.”<sup>30</sup> Wishing to join Cabezas in the revolution but realizing his age limits his ability, the man brings out all of his sons and gives them to Cabezas to fight in the revolution.<sup>31</sup>

Cabezas refers to the gesture as “historic patrimony,” a reference to the passing down of revolutionary traditions and class consciousness, which is then framed in a patriarchal masculinity.<sup>32</sup> Revolutionary combatants within this structure are linked solely by class consciousness and their “maleness.” Don Leandro, Cabezas writes, educated his children in the tradition of revolutionary class consciousness.<sup>33</sup> In opposition to bourgeoisie family structures, relying on private property and capital accumulation, the guerrilla family was constructed through class and revolutionary consciousness. Continuing as a patriarchal family structure, male heredity signified the family’s lineage, while also indicating the combatants of the new revolution.

Sergio Ramírez’s *Adíos Muchachos*, a memoir written mostly to excuse Sandinista policy mistakes after the elections of 1990, constructs a revolutionary family, as well, through its heavy handed political justifications. Ramírez, who was not a guerrilla fighter during the revolution, came to power in the Sandinista government in post-revolutionary Nicaragua. Although the

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<sup>30</sup> Cabezas, 217.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 220.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

Somoza government had been toppled by 1979, Ramírez and his fellow Sandinista policy makers faced counterrevolutionary forces, funded both legally and illegally by the United States.

Much like Don Leandro bequeathed his sons to the revolution as guerrilla fighters, Ramírez's only son, also named Sergio, would go "off to war" to fight the contras. "He was a weakling with a peach fuzz mustache, beanpole thin, and very similar in appearance to my father who was skinny his whole life."<sup>34</sup> Sergio, in this sense, fits Cabezas formulations of guerrilla masculinity, diametrically opposed to the a-typical masculine man. Sergio's revolutionary spirit, once again a precursor to revolutionary lineage, defined his masculine capabilities in the new Nicaraguan gender climate.

Ramírez often resists the "temptation" to "bring him home," saying it would have been accomplished easily with Ramírez gaining significant power in the Sandinista government ranks. Ramírez "swallowed" this temptation, however, realizing his pride. In this sense, Ramírez constructs patriarchal lineage, which affirms itself through revolutionary acts. Ramírez himself admits, he "never held a gun during the revolution," distancing himself from the traditional masculine roles of society. Ramírez, however, while he did not fight, retains masculinity through his revolutionary consciousness, through participation in the revolutionary government and revolutionary sacrifice of his son.

### **Race and the Sandinista Revolutionary Identity**

Finally, Cabezas and Ramírez construct revolutionary consciousness through an identification of indigenous race. Before he departs for the mountain, Cabezas lives in León as a

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<sup>34</sup> Sergio Ramírez. *Adíos Muchachos: A Memoir of the Sandinista Revolution*, trans. Stacey Alba D. Skar. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012) 9.

student activist. Part of his activism included holding small rallies in Subtiava, a *barrio* in León.<sup>35</sup> The Subtiavan ethnic identity, to Cabezas aided in the formulation of his revolutionary identity. Discovering the “Indian origins of the Subtiavans,” Cabezas “encourages these as strengths; we tried to transpose the old ancestral struggles of Adiac, their ancient chief.”<sup>36</sup>

As protests and marches mounted in Subtiava, rallies of Subtiavans through the streets of León consisted of *abatales* drumlines, which Cabezas drew upon in the formulation of his revolutionary identity. “It’s a muted, serious sound... This instilled respect and began to frighten the bourgeoisie. For this was the Indian awakening.”<sup>37</sup> Not only did the marches in Subtiava generate class consciousness among the indigenous populations, Cabezas saw the resurgence of insurrection as part of his own rising consciousness, taking this with him to the mountain. “So when I left for the mountain I knew they could kill me. But I also knew that this march of Indians was a march of Latin American Indians, a march of Indians against colonialism, a march of Indians against imperialism, a march of Indians that could mark the end, or the beginning of the end for our peoples.” Cabezas identifies with the Indians of Subtiava, claiming indigenous racial identity as both his personal identity, and as the identity of insurrection. So that when he ascends for the mountain, Cabezas says “I knew that Subtiava was behind me.”<sup>38</sup>

Ramírez constructs the racial identity of the revolution through a similar process to Cabezas’. “The cult of the dead,” meaning those remembered for fighting in any one of

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<sup>35</sup> A *barrio* is an enclave, populated mostly by indigenous people. In Nicaragua, Subtiava has a long history of rebellion against occupying forces dating back to rebellions against Spanish colonists. The FSLN agitated resistance to the Somoza dynasty in Subtiava, drawing on the history of insurrection and political consciousness in the *barrio*. Whisnant, David E., *Rascally Signs in Sacred Places: The Politics of Culture in Nicaragua* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 183.

<sup>36</sup> Cabezas, 40. Adiac, the Subtiavans’ ancestral *cacique* had been hanged by the Spanish. Whisnant, 182.

<sup>37</sup> Cabezas, 41.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-2.



Nicaragua's many insurrections against imperialism, occupation or dictatorship, was "nourished with roots in Catholic and also indigenous traditions, which the rigors of clandestine struggle came to exhault...Mixantanteotl, the Nahuatl god of the dead demands live sacrifice."<sup>39</sup> Ramírez constructs a revolutionary identity around historical antecedents to the Sandinista revolution. Combining, much like Cabezas did, the history of colonialism and imperialism in Nicaragua with the Sandinista class consciousness, Ramírez constructs a revolutionary identity imbued with racialized histories.

## **Conclusion**

The men examined here, through their memoirs of the Sandinista Revolution, reveal the importance of gender in historical analysis. Through an examination of Omar Cabezas' *Fire from the Mountain* and Sergio Ramírez's *Adíos Muchachos*, gender, class and race are revealed as intrinsic to the actors' formulations of revolutionary identity. Cabezas' guerrilla masculinity, while differing from a-typical bourgeoisie masculinity, classifies itself within a heteronormative matrix, utilizing phallic symbolism and reference to recognize power. Ramirez constructs a revolutionary family structure, within the heteronormative matrix, that passes revolutionary identity down through male class-consciousness. Both authors recognize race as integral to their identities, combining race and class to ignite political consciousness for the revolutions' purpose.

While historians should consider the limitations of memoir as a medium for historical analysis alone, when treated as decrees of personal values, *Fire from the Mountain* and *Adíos Muchachos* serve as intimate declarations of Sandinistas on gender, class and race. If treated as bold projections of the authors' internalized definitions of masculinity, memoir may in fact aid in

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<sup>39</sup> Ramírez, 25.

historians' understanding of Sandinista policy. Guerrilla masculinity and the model of the "new man" were clearly integral in the establishment of a revolutionary sense of self to Cabezas and Ramírez. These aspects of identity could have an impact on Sandinista policy on women or their involvement on the Atlantic Coast. If they didn't have a direct impact *on* policy, historians may perhaps use these projected identities to understand the dialectic between self and Sandinista policy.

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