

"BELOVED ENEMIES":
Race and Official Mestizo Nationalism in Nicaragua¹

Juliet Hooker

The University of Texas, Austin

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Abstract: This article analyzes the persistence of an official discourse of mestizo nationalism in Nicaragua in spite of the adoption of multicultural citizenship rights for black and indigenous costeños in 1986. These reforms appeared to directly contradict key premises of previously dominant nationalist ideologies, particularly the idea that Nicaragua was a uniformly mestizo nation. Instead of a radical break with the past, however, what we find in contemporary Nicaragua is a continuous process of negotiation and contestation among three variants of official mestizo nationalism: vanguardismo, Sandinismo, and "mestizo multiculturalism" that emerged in the 1930s, 1960s, and 1990s respectively. This article traces the continuities among these disparate but intimately related accounts of national history and identity and the way they all operate to limit the political inclusion of black and indigenous costeños as such.

INTRODUCTION

In 1987 Nicaragua was one of the first Latin American countries to adopt multicultural citizenship reforms that assigned special collective rights to *costeños*, the black and indigenous inhabitants of its Atlantic Coast region.² These reforms appeared to directly contradict key premises of

1. I would like to thank four anonymous *LARR* reviewers, Ken Greene, Wendy Hunter, Raúl Madrid, Kurt Weyland, and especially Edmund T. Gordon and Charles R. Hale for their valuable comments and suggestions. An initial version of this article was presented as part of the Diaspora Talk series of the Center for African and African American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. All translations from texts originally in Spanish are my own.

2. Since then a large number of Latin American countries have enacted similar reforms. According to Donna Lee Van Cott, a "multicultural model" of constitutionalism is emerging in the region composed of five elements: formal recognition of the multicultural nature of national societies and of specific ethnic/racial sub-groups, recognition of indigenous customary law as official public law, collective property rights (especially to land), official status for minority languages in predominantly minority regions, and guarantees of bilingual education. See Van Cott, "Constitutional Reform and Ethnic Rights in Latin America," *Parliamentary Affairs* 53 (1):41-54 (2000).

previously dominant nationalist discourses, particularly the idea that Nicaragua was a uniformly mestizo country. As a number of scholars have noted, ideologies of *mestizaje* legitimated the Nicaraguan state's efforts to colonize the country's outlying regions and questioned the right to full citizenship of the black and indigenous inhabitants of these areas.³ Historically, these discourses of *mestizaje* denied the existence of non-mestizo Nicaraguans, especially outside the Atlantic Coast, which tended to be omitted from visions of the nation altogether. The enactment of special collective rights for black and indigenous *costeños* in 1987 was thus a decisive shift from past state practices and would appear to have required a radical revision of the central tenets of dominant nationalist discourses.⁴ This has led some scholars to argue that "an official discourse of multiculturalism" that endorses a limited set of collective rights has replaced nationalist ideologies of *mestizaje* in Nicaragua and the rest of Central America.⁵ The wave of multicultural citizenship reform that has swept Central America in recent decades appears to support this view. Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama, for example, have enshrined collective rights for indigenous (and in some cases, Afro-descendant) groups at the level of statutory or constitutional law, and Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Honduras have ratified the International Labour Organisation's Convention 169 on the Rights of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples. In spite of these important transformations in legal frameworks that recognize racial and cultural diversity, I argue that closer inspection reveals the stubborn persistence (at least in Nicaragua) of official discourses of mestizo nationalism that continue to place limits on the political inclusion of black and indigenous *costeños*. One implication of this argument is that, paradoxical as it may seem, there are important continuities between contemporary multiculturalism and the various *mestizaje* ideologies that preceded it.

Three variants of official mestizo nationalism: *vanguardismo*, Sandinismo, and what I call "mestizo multiculturalism," emerged in the 1930s, 1960s, and 1990s respectively in Nicaragua. Vanguardismo, the nationalist ideology articulated by the poets of the Vanguardia movement, portrayed

3. See Edmund T. Gordon, *Disparate Diasporas: Identity and Politics in an African Nicaraguan Community* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998); Jeffrey Gould, *To Die in This Way: Nicaraguan Indians and the Myth of Mestizaje, 1880–1965* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); and Charles R. Hale, *Resistance and Contradiction: Miskitu Indians and the Nicaraguan State, 1894–1987* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

4. See Consuelo Sánchez, *La conformación étnico-nacional en Nicaragua* (México: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1994) and Miguel González Pérez, *Gobiernos pluriétnicos: La constitución de regiones autónomas en Nicaragua*. (México: Editorial Plaza y Valdés, & URACCAN, 1997).

5. See Charles R. Hale, "Does Multiculturalism Menace? Governance, Cultural Rights and the Politics of Identity in Guatemala," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 34 (3):485–524 (2002).

Nicaragua as a preeminently indo-Hispanic country in which Spanish paternity was determinant. By representing mestizaje as a heterosexual romance between active Spanish fathers and passive indigenous mothers, vanguardismo sutured over potentially divisive racial heterogeneities and justified the exclusive hold on political power of the self-identified heirs of the old colonial masters. Until Sandinismo (the revolutionary ideology of the leftist Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional or FSLN) challenged some of its elements in the 1960s and 1970s, vanguardismo was the hegemonic discourse of Nicaraguan nationalism. In contrast to vanguardismo, Sandinismo emphasized the violent nature of the encounter between Indian and Spaniard, and the dominant indigenous ancestry of Nicaragua's mestizo culture and identity. Sandinismo thus rejected the legitimacy of prevailing political arrangements that privileged the access to power of elites that identified themselves as the heirs of the Spanish conquistadors. Sandinismo instead sought root to anti-imperialism in national history, and to revert the exclusion from politics of the majority of Nicaraguans—the descendants of heroic Indian ancestors. Unlike Sandinismo and vanguardismo, the discourse of "mestizo multiculturalism" that emerged in the 1990s does not claim that every Nicaraguan citizen is biologically or culturally mestizo, but that when taken as a whole the entire nation is mestizo because of all the different racial and cultural groups that comprise it. Mestizo multiculturalism thus appears to recognize racial and cultural diversity in a way that older variants of mestizo nationalism did not. Whereas diversity is recognized, a hierarchy among the diverse constituent identities is asserted. Because mestizo multiculturalism retains the idea of the nation in general as mestizo, it does not create an alternate multicultural national identity; instead, like its predecessors, it discourages the assertion of "subnational" racial/cultural identities except insofar as they are contributors to this overarching national identity. In spite of important differences then, all variants of official mestizo nationalism share two important elements: one is the idea that contemporary Nicaraguan national identity and culture is preeminently mestizo, and the other is the continued exclusion from full citizenship of blacks and Indians *as such*.

I am far from arguing that no other forms of nationalist ideology existed in Nicaragua prior to the advent of vanguardismo, Sandinismo, and mestizo multiculturalism, however. Following independence from Spain in 1821, Nicaraguan elites faced the problem of how to make "Nicaraguans" out of populations for whom such an identity hardly resonated.⁶

6. During the colonial era, the central and Atlantic regions of what was to become Nicaragua were not really under Spain's effective control, as Spanish settlers resided mainly on the Pacific Coast. The central region was populated mostly by indigenous groups organized in their own communities with few Spaniards or mestizos, while the Mosquito Coast, which was populated by black and indigenous groups, enjoyed relative autonomy from

Initially, the continuous intrastate and domestic civil wars of the post-independence period (1821–1857) hampered state formation, but in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Conservative (1857–1893) and Liberal (1893–1903) regimes turned their efforts to state-building activities. The forcible “reincorporation” of the Mosquito Coast (known today as the Atlantic Coast) in 1894, and the dismantling of indigenous communities in the Pacific and Central regions, were fundamental elements of these nation-building efforts.⁷ Successive Nicaraguan governments justified the internal colonization of black and indigenous peoples and the regions in which they lived on the basis of protonationalist and nationalist ideologies that envisioned Nicaragua as a “civilized” nation that was neither black nor Indian.⁸ While the residues of nineteenth-century national ideologies can be found in the twentieth-century nationalist discourses analyzed here, the latter share two important features that distinguish them from the former: they are both official and mestizo.

What then are official mestizo nationalisms? Contrary to the assertions of nationalists everywhere that their nations have existed since time immemorial, contemporary scholarship on nationalism emphasizes the constructed character of nations. Nations are the product of nationalist discourses and movements, but these nationalisms may differ in character and content. “Popular nationalisms,” for example, are those where a mass nationalist movement struggles for a state of its own on behalf of a pre-existing nation, while in instances of “official nationalism,” elites build nations where they had previously not existed. Official nationalism, according to Benedict Anderson, is “an anticipatory strategy adopted by dominant groups which are threatened with marginalization or exclusion from an emerging nationally-imagined community.”⁹ Official nationalisms are thus accounts of national his-

Spain. The Mosquito, the largest indigenous group in the region, forged an alliance with the British to resist Spain’s colonizing efforts, and the British established a protectorate over the “Mosquito Kingdom” in the seventeenth century. In 1860 Nicaragua and Great Britain signed the Treaty of Managua, which recognized Nicaraguan sovereignty over the Mosquito Coast, but also created a Mosquito Reserve, whose inhabitants enjoyed self-government rights. It is partly due to this historical background that *costeños* have been perceived as potential agents of foreign powers by Nicaraguan elites at the same time that the territory they inhabit has been claimed as an integral part of the nation.

7. See Dora María Téllez, *¡Muera la gobierna!: Colonización en Matagalpa y Jinotega, 1820–1890*. (Managua: URACCAN, 1999).

8. I argue elsewhere that the dispute over the Mosquito Coast played a central role in shaping official discourses about the content of Nicaraguan-ness in the post-independence era. See Juliet Hooker, “The Myth of Inclusion: *Mestizo* Nationalism, Identity Politics, and Citizenship in Nicaragua.” PhD diss., Cornell University, 2001.

9. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991), 101.

tory, culture, and identity that intellectual and political elites articulate and attempt to render hegemonic to justify their own rule, and are generally state-sponsored. Post-independence political turmoil prevented Nicaragua's criollo elite from promoting official nationalism until the second half of the nineteenth century, and they did not articulate national ideologies of mestizaje until the early twentieth century. After 1857, conservative and liberal elites sought to forge a common national identity, but the content of that identity revolved more around the idea of Nicaragua as a "civilized" nation trying to incorporate "savage" blacks and Indians than "mestizo-ness" per se.¹⁰ Elites did not formulate a vision of Nicaragua as a mestizo nation until the early twentieth century, in response to direct United States military intervention (1917–1933).

Ideologies of national identity and belonging actively shape relations between citizens and the state; in Nicaragua official nationalisms have legitimated exclusive mestizo political power through the erasure of blacks and Indians as citizens. Analyzing the shared premises and connections between different variants of mestizo nationalism is thus crucial to understanding the way they all operate to deny black and indigenous costeños full access to citizenship. Although Nicaraguan nationalists of opposing ideological persuasions formulated them, vanguardismo, Sandinismo, and mestizo multiculturalism are "beloved enemies." I borrow the term from the vanguardistas, who referred to fellow Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío as "el amado enemigo" and "el paisano inevitable" because he was always their point of reference, even as they rebelled against his poetic style and themes.¹¹ Just as Darío was the "inevitable compatriot" of the vanguardistas, they were in turn the "beloved enemies" of the Sandinistas, as Sandinismo incorporated many elements of the older nationalist discourse it sought to replace, particularly the idea that Nicaragua is a mestizo nation. Vanguardismo and Sandinismo are likewise the "beloved enemies" of mestizo multiculturalism, because it continues to incorporate notions of mestizaje central to the earlier versions of official mestizo nationalism even while recognizing racial and cultural diversity. Thus, my claim here is not that newer variants of official mestizo nationalism have seamlessly supplanted older versions. Instead, I want to stress the continuities between seemingly disparate nationalist discourses and the way in which the

10. During the era of conservative rule from 1857 to 1893, for example, the Nicaraguan state engaged in classic nation-building activities such as commissioning the creation of an official national anthem, flag, and history textbook that could be taught in schools. See Miguel Angel Herrera, "Nacionalismo e historiografía sobre la guerra del 56: Nicaragua, 1850–1889," *Revista de Historia* 2: 27–39 (1992–1993).

11. Pablo Antonio Cuadra, "Un nicaragüense llamado Rubén Darío," in *El nicaragüense*, 13th ed. (Managua: Hispamer, 1997), 79; and José Coronel Urtecho, "Oda a Rubén Darío" [1927], reprinted in *El Pez y la Serpiente* 22–23 (Winter 1978/Summer 1979): 24.

persistence of official mestizo nationalism continues to limit the political inclusion of black and indigenous *costeños*.

The article is divided into three sections. In the first section I outline the main elements of vanguardismo: the erasure of blacks, and the use of the trope of *mestizaje* as harmonious fusion to justify mestizo political power and authoritarianism. The second section traces the connections between vanguardismo and Sandinismo, and shows how the latter incorporated many of the former's premises, even while contesting others. The third and final section analyzes the emergence in the 1990s of a new but recognizable version of official mestizo nationalism—mestizo multiculturalism—that recognizes racial and cultural difference while reinscribing them within *mestizaje*.

VANGUARDISMO: THE EMERGENCE OF OFFICIAL MESTIZO NATIONALISM

The poets of the Vanguardia movement have been described as “the ruling intellectual group” in the process of constructing Nicaragua’s imagined community.¹² They commenced their literary and political activities in the 1930s, as young men in their late teens and twenties who combined an avant-garde literary sensibility with conservative ideology, founding the Vanguardia (1927–1933) and Reactionary movements (1934–1940).¹³ In the 1940s they reorganized into the *Cofradía de artistas y escritores católicos del Taller San Lucas* with other like-minded intellectuals. The most prominent vanguardistas were José Coronel Urtecho (1906–1994), Manolo Cuadra (1907–1957), Pablo Antonio Cuadra (1912–2002), Joaquín Pasos (1914–1947), and Luis Alberto Cabrales (1901–1974).

12. Leonel Delgado Aburto, “Textualidades de la nación en el proceso cultural vanguardista,” *Revista de Historia* 10:19 (1997). Benedict Anderson has famously defined the nation as an “imagined community” because “the members of even the smallest nations will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. It is imagined as a community because “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.” Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6, 7.

13. As a literary movement, vanguardismo was a reaction against Ibero-American modernism, of which Rubén Darío (1867–1916) was the foremost exponent. In the 1920s, vanguard movements, rebelling against what they viewed as the sterile literary context of modernism, arose in Spanish America and Brazil (where they are known as modernists). Nicaragua is the only Central American country where a cohesive vanguard group with collective political and literary goals emerged. The poetry of the Nicaraguan Vanguardia used conversational and colloquial language, free verse, dialogue, and humor. It cultivated new “modern” imagery, including urban and mechanical themes, and utilized innovative linguistic music drawn from popular and traditional sources. See Jorge Eduardo Arellano, *Entre la tradición y la modernidad: El movimiento nicaragüense de vanguardia* (San José, Costa Rica: Libro Libre, 1992).

Because the members of the Vanguardia and the Cofradía played “a hegemonic role in the intellectual life of the country, to the point that they controlled its major cultural institutions,” the importance of the mestizo nationalist discourse they popularized cannot be overestimated.¹⁴ Traces of vanguardismo can be found to this day in school textbooks, the speeches of national politicians, and popular understandings of national history and identity.¹⁵

The vanguardistas originally articulated their mestizo nationalism in response to the threat of cultural absorption posed by direct U.S. military intervention in Nicaragua in the early twentieth century.¹⁶ Similar concerns about U.S. imperialism and justifications for intervention derived from scientific racism also led to the formulation of new national ideologies (of *indigenismo* and *mestizaje* in many cases) in other Latin American countries at this time. National ideologies of *mestizaje* that advocated the fusion of different “races” because it produced a new and superior racial type, for example, challenged European and North American scientific theories that unequivocally advocated the superiority of Anglo-Saxon peoples and inverted the view that racial mixing led to degeneration.¹⁷ In Nicaragua, nationalists like Augusto C. Sandino (the liberal general who led the armed struggle against U.S. military occupation of Nicaragua, and whose name the FSLN appropriated in the 1960s), repeatedly called for the unity of the “indo-Hispanic race” in order to better confront U.S.

14. Arellano, *Entre la tradición*, 193. Pablo Antonio Cuadra, for instance, edited the literary supplement of *La Prensa*, *La Prensa Literaria* from 1954 to 2000, and he and other vanguardistas edited the journals, *El pez y la serpiente* and *Revista conservadora*, both founded in 1960. They also taught at the leading universities and were editorial board members of the major academic and literary presses.

15. Take for example Pablo Antonio Cuadra’s best-selling essay collection, *El nicaragüense*, of which thirteen editions have been printed since it was first published in 1968. It is viewed as the definitive account of Nicaraguan-ness, to the point of being repeatedly cited in a section on national identity in a fifth grade civics textbook in use in 2004, which also suggests that the book be brought to class by the teacher for additional reading. See Azucena Armijo de Quintanilla and Auralina Salazar Oviedo, *El nuevo ciudadano: Texto de moral, cívica y urbanidad, quinto grado* (Managua: Hispamer, 1999), 102–05, 108–09.

16. Between the arrival of the marines in 1912 and their departure in 1925, U.S. officials administered almost all state functions in Nicaragua. The marines returned again in 1927 after civil war erupted between Conservatives and Liberals, and remained until 1933, when they were withdrawn after Sandino’s successful guerrilla war. Control of the National Guard (organized in 1927) was given to Nicaraguan officers trained by the United States.

17. It is worth noting, however, that while a positive depiction of racial mixing challenged some of the tenets of scientific racism, national ideologies that advocated *mestizaje* as a form of “whitening” left intact the basic racist evaluations of European science that non-whites were inferior. See Nancy Leys Stepan, “*The Hour of Eugenics*”: *Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

imperialism. Sandino, a contemporary of the vanguardistas—who ardently admired his struggle—also exalted his indigenous origins at a time when the latter were emphasizing Indian passivity and predominant Spanish paternity in the context of *mestizaje*.¹⁸ Yet Sandino’s ideas did not become the dominant tropes of Nicaraguan nationalism (at least not until some aspects of his ideology were selectively appropriated by the Sandinistas in the 1960s). Instead, the *mestizaje* of the vanguardistas, who systematized different strands of earlier narratives about national history and identity into a coherent and powerful discourse, would become accepted as the authoritative vision of Nicaraguan-ness.

The vanguardistas originally found the essence of “true” Nicaraguan culture in the mestizo peasant of the Pacific and central regions of the country, a view they continued to espouse in the 1960s, in some of their most widely read works (such as Pablo Antonio Cuadra’s *El nicaragüense* and Coronel Urtecho’s *Reflexiones sobre la historia de Nicaragua*). The claim that Nicaragua was an overwhelmingly mestizo nation, the product of a harmonious mixing process that took place exclusively between Spaniards and Indians, was thus an enduring element of vanguardismo. This was true despite certain shifts in the representation of Indians, from passive recipients of Spanish culture to (almost) equal participants in *mestizaje*. Even after the vanguardistas began excavating Nicaragua’s indigenous past in the 1940s, they still subtly portrayed Spanish contributions to the mixing process as ascendant because they assigned Spain the masculine role in their gendered representation of *mestizaje*. Thus, two key elements of vanguardismo remained consistent over time: one was the almost complete absence of *costeños* (and blacks in particular) from this otherwise exhaustive catalogue of Nicaraguan-ness, and the other was the use of the trope of *mestizaje* as harmonious fusion to naturalize and justify mestizo political power.

Mestizaje is portrayed as taking place exclusively between Spaniards and Indians in vanguardismo, while African contributions are almost never acknowledged. Pablo Antonio Cuadra, for instance, finds the essence of Nicaraguan-ness in the dual identification with Spanish and indigenous ancestors who confronted each other during the conquest:

As a young man I was Indian and Spanish,
and I was wounded simultaneously.
I have a bilingual cry in my two graves
because they sent arrows into my white side
and bullets into my brown pain . . .¹⁹

18. See Augusto C. Sandino, “Manifiesto [1 de Julio de 1927],” and “Carta a Froylán Turcios [10 de Junio de 1928],” in *El pensamiento vivo*, rev. ed., ed. Sergio Ramírez (Managua, Nicaragua: Editorial Nueva Nicaragua, 1984), 117, 270–279.

19. Pablo Antonio Cuadra, “Los hijos de Septiembre,” in *El nicaragüense*, 15.

Just as the vanguardistas tended to ignore the participation of people of African descent in *mestizaje*, they only rarely identified the contemporary Nicaraguan as an indigenous *costeño*, and almost never a black person. Indigenous *costeños* and blacks are mentioned in less than a handful of Vanguardia poems from the 1930s, for example, and in only one of these are Africans claimed as ancestors.²⁰ Similarly, of the forty-three essays collected in *El nicaragüense*, indigenous *costeños* appear only twice, blacks never. The Atlantic region and two of its indigenous groups are mentioned briefly in an essay about the country's geography and population, while in an essay on Nicaraguans' wanderlust, Cuadra claims that Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe character was in fact based on the story of an indigenous inhabitant of the Mosquito Coast.²¹

In addition to the absence of *costeños*, another constant of vanguardismo was the notion of *mestizaje* as harmonious fusion. The vanguardistas derived their gendered representation of *mestizaje* from the conservative ideology of Carlos Cuadra Pasos, a prominent intellectual and leader of the Conservative Party (and Pablo Antonio Cuadra's father). According to Cuadra Pasos, *mestizaje* was a more humane strategy of colonization, one that "little by little eliminates the inferior element through absorption, forcing it to a certain degree of servitude, utilizing it at the same time as a branch for the graft of the conquerors' stalk, in the sowing of *mestizaje*."²² In this account the Spanish conquistadores were the active, masculine element; they were the stalks that engendered the *mestizo* race. Cuadra Pasos in fact claims that *mestizos* are the descendants of the most masculine of the three types of Spaniards involved in the Conquest, not the priest or the statesman, but the conquistador, who "penetrated jungles, killed caciques, fought against Indian men, and impregnated Indian women."²³ Meanwhile, Indians participated in *mestizaje* only as passive, submissive vessels for Spanish seed. Indigenous women were the branches onto which the Spanish stalk was grafted, they provided nutrients that nourish the new *mestizo* people, but did not determine any of their essential characteristics.²⁴ Unions between Indian men and Spanish women were assumed not to

20. Idem, "Carta del joven mosquito a su novia [1930]," and "El negro [1930-1933]," collected in *Poesía I*, ed. Pedro Xavier Solís (Managua: Colección Cultural de Centro América, 2003), 57, 130-132; and Luis Alberto Cabrales, "Canto a los sombríos ancestros [1932]," reprinted in *El pez y la serpiente* 22/23 (Winter 1978/Summer 1979): 127.

21. Pablo Antonio Cuadra, "El Robinsón," and "Población y tiempos," in *El nicaragüense*, 65-66, 177-178.

22. Carlos Cuadra Pasos, "Los Cuadra: Una hebra en el tejido de la historia de Nicaragua," in *Obras*, vol. 1 (Managua: Fondo de Promoción Cultural BANIC, 1976), 53.

23. Idem, "El plebiscito de los pueblos hispanos," in *Obras*, vol. 2, 693.

24. Idem, "Los Cuadra," 52-3.

exist, and Indian men played absolutely no role in Cuadra Pasos' account of mestizaje except as the dead victims of heroic Spanish conquerors. Indians served only to "moderate" Spanish "ardor." The mestizo temperament, he argued, was "ignited by fierce Spanish blood moderated by indigenous torpidity." Mestizo Nicaragua was the child of Spanish fathers, and only the most traditionally masculine ones at that. As Cuadra Pasos phrased it "paternity corresponds exclusively to the conquistadores."²⁵

While the vanguardistas at times appeared to adopt Cuadra Pasos' notion of Indian passivity, they also tended to exalt Nicaragua's ancestral indigenous cultures in a way that he did not; what remained constant, however, was the gendering of mestizaje whereby Spain was assigned the masculine role. In 1929, for example, Coronel Urtecho echoed the idea of mestizaje as absorption of the indigenous element:

Our culture was born with the Conquest. By hook and by crook our Spanish ancestors subjugated the Indian who was sunken in savagery, and set themselves the still incomplete task of incorporating the Indian into a superior culture. They elevated him blood-wise through mixture; they gave him a redemptive religion and a vast and almost perfect language. Since then the Indian, the *criollo*, and the pure Spaniard were on the way to the same inexhaustible culture.²⁶

In contrast, in 1963 Pablo Antonio Cuadra portrayed mestizaje as a process entirely devoid of power relations, as fusion on equal terms:

There are two separations which are the premises of Nicaragua's existence as a cultural entity: the separation of the Spaniard from his native world and the separation of the indigenous people from their cultural and existential world . . . Once these two separations take place a simultaneous process of fusion of these two currents begins and in the measure that this fusion goes indigenizing the Spaniard and Hispanicizing the Indian in *Nicaragua*, the new limits of what will later be known as "Nicaraguan culture" become clearer and more defined. [emphasis in original]²⁷

Note Cuadra's use of the term *fusion* to describe mestizaje, which as a result, appears to entail equal measures of Hispanicization and indigenization. Likewise, the "separations" of Indian and Spaniard from their original cultural and territorial worlds are equated, resulting in the erasure of the violence and conquest that gave rise to mestizaje. For Cuadra, however (like his father), the process of mestizaje is gendered such that Spanish contributions are dominant because they are masculine. Nicaraguan culture, he claims: "is made up of two components.

25. Idem, "El plebiscito de los pueblos hispanos," 691, 693.

26. José Coronel Urtecho, "Política y literatura [1929]," quoted in Jorge Eduardo Arellano, *El movimiento de Vanguardia de Nicaragua* (Managua: Imprenta Novedades, 1969), 10.

27. Pablo Antonio Cuadra, "Introducción a la literatura nicaragüense," in *El pez y la serpiente* 4 (January 1963), 9.

For historical and cultural reasons, one of these components was the passive, feminine, terrestrial sign: the Indian component. The other—the Spanish—was the active sign, fertile, masculine, oceanic.”²⁸

The use of gender/familial tropes to portray mestizaje as harmonious fusion in vanguardismo ultimately served to justify mestizo political power. As Anne McClintock has noted, the use of familial metaphors to describe nations (as “fatherlands” and “motherlands,” for example), is used to naturalize hierarchical relations within what is supposed to be a community of equals.²⁹ The vanguardistas, like Cuadra Pasos, developed a conservative critique of liberalism and democracy. They believed that nineteenth-century liberalism had broken the harmonious patriarchal order of the colonial era by implanting romantic notions of equality and democracy that were unworkable in Nicaragua, as the continuous civil wars of the post-independence era demonstrated. The vanguardistas portrayed the colonial era as a time of peace and harmony when the “natural” hierarchies of the domestic and familial spheres were respected because of religious faith. Basing politics on secular, abstract ideas such as equality and democracy led to the loss of the natural hierarchies in the political realm that mirrored the natural patriarchal order of the family; it also led the state to take on an impersonal, irresponsible form that culminated in the loss of its natural authority and paternal role. In his *Reflections on Nicaraguan History*, for example, Coronel Urtecho argued that contrary to the misrepresentations of liberal historians, the colonial era encompassed “at least two and a half centuries of internal peace.” Central to that peace were the harmonious race and gender relations produced by religious faith. He claimed that there was very little indigenous resistance to the Spanish conquest in Nicaragua, and the sporadic indigenous uprisings noted in history texts were localized, social phenomena, not true political events. Nicaragua’s indigenous population did not rebel thanks to its conversion to Christianity: “In a certain fundamental sense it can be said that [after conversion] they ceased to consider themselves Indians, and saw themselves simply as Christians. In reality they never liked being called Indians. Only the non-Christians who inhabited the mountains were Indians for them, whom they themselves perceived as savages.”³⁰ For the vanguardistas the colonial era was thus not a time of conquest and subjugation of the

28. *Ibid.*, 10.

29. See Anne McClintock, “No Longer in a Future Heaven: Gender, Race and Nationalism,” in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, & Postcolonial Perspectives*, eds. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti & Ella Shohat (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 89–112.

30. José Coronel Urtecho, *De Gainza a Somoza*, Tomo I, *Reflexiones sobre la historia de Nicaragua* (León: Editorial Hospicio, 1962), 11–13.

indigenous population by their Spanish conquerors; it was an idyllic era of peace and harmonious coexistence, where everyone knew and followed their "natural" place in the social and political order.

The vanguardistas thus claimed that authoritarian politics was a natural and necessary outgrowth of national history, which explains the apparently paradoxical shift in their support from Sandino to Anastasio Somoza García. Coronel Urtecho argued in 1932, for example, that: "Dictatorship is the natural political system of post-independence Nicaragua."³¹ He emphatically claimed that: "Nicaragua requires being governed by a free, strong, and lasting personal authority. . . . We need a man who will organize Nicaragua, a man! We need a dictator."³² For the vanguardistas the centrifugal tendencies of Nicaraguan politics in the post-independence era could only be controlled by a strong state backed by a strong army. Their search for a benevolent, nationalist dictator led them first to support Sandino, whose opposition to U.S. intervention they shared. Ironically, however, after Sandino was assassinated in 1934 by order of Somoza, the Jefe Director of the National Guard, the vanguardistas shifted their support to Somoza, and they formed the Grupo Reaccionario to support his candidacy in the 1936 elections.³³ Most of the vanguardistas later recanted their support for Somoza. In the meantime, however (as Coronel Urtecho later acknowledged), they had "no doubt helped to establish the dynastic regime of the Somozas."³⁴ This is not to suggest that there is a necessary relationship between nationalism and authoritarianism. But once a group articulates a nationalist discourse that portrays dictatorship as more than an expedient solution to the country's problems—as a cultural and spiritual necessity—the ideology becomes available as a legitimating force for authoritarian political projects. Given this and other elements of vanguardismo,

31. Urtecho, "Contestación de Coronel Urtecho," quoted in Arellano *Entre la tradición*, 110.

32. Urtecho, "La propaganda moscovita," quoted in Arellano, *Entre la tradición*, 187.

33. In 1938 three reactionaries ran as candidates of a dissident faction of the Conservative Party, the Partido Conservador Nacionalista, in elections for a Constituent Assembly convened by Somoza and his supporters. The reactionary deputies (including Pablo Antonio Cuadra and Coronel Urtecho) supported constitutional reforms to make Somoza president for life. By 1941, however, Somoza controlled a wing of the Liberal Party and no longer needed the support of the reactionaries. Moreover, their outspoken antidemocratic stance was becoming a liability for him with the United States. In 1940 they were tried for espousing propaganda contrary to the fundamental institutions of the state. When Nicaragua entered World War II in 1941 the expression of fascist ideas was prohibited. By then the reactionaries had outlived their usefulness to Somoza and had ceased political activity. See Knut Walter, *The Regime of Anastasio Somoza, 1936–1956* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 100.

34. Urtecho, "Tres conferencias a la empresa privada," quoted in Arellano, *Entre la tradición*, 152.

it is ironic that the movement is the “beloved enemy” of its ideological foe, Sandinismo.³⁵

BELOVED ENEMIES: SANDINISMO AND VANGUARDISMO

The suturing over of racial heterogeneity and class conflict in order to justify patriarchal mestizo political power is not surprising in a variant of nationalism formulated by conservative elites. One would thus expect there to be a stark opposition between vanguardismo and Sandinismo, the revolutionary ideology articulated by the Marxist FSLN in the 1960s. Indeed, in contrast to vanguardismo, Sandinismo emphasized the violent nature of the Spanish colonial enterprise, and the importance of indigenous ancestry to contemporary mestizo national identity. Instead of focusing on the role of the Spanish conquistador, Sandinismo highlighted the Indian’s heroic resistance to colonization as the true foundation of their national identity. Sandinismo thus contested the myths of harmonious mestizaje, indigenous passivity, and colonial peace that were central elements of vanguardismo. Yet, as we shall see, there are also important continuities between Sandinismo and vanguardismo, in spite of their ideological opposition. They are in fact “beloved enemies,” because Sandinismo simultaneously contested some elements of vanguardismo while incorporating others, notably the idea that Nicaragua is an overwhelmingly mestizo nation.

The FSLN’s omission of issues of race (and gender) is generally attributed to its orthodox class analysis. But Sandinismo departed from orthodox Marxism in significant ways, as the adoption of Sandino as a national symbol through which to advance the revolutionary class struggle in Nicaragua indicates.³⁶ Moreover, Sandinismo was by no means a monolithic ideology, as illustrated by the disagreements be-

35. In fact, the vanguardistas initially portrayed the Sandinista revolution as a continuation of their own cultural and political struggles. In a special 1979 journal issue that was dedicated to the fifty-year anniversary of the vanguardia movement, for instance, Pablo Antonio Cuadra noted that the anniversary “coincided with the triumph of our Sandinista Revolution, liberator of our *patria*.” See “50 años del movimiento de vanguardia de Nicaragua,” *El pez y la serpiente* 22/23.

36. The FSLN was founded in 1961 by a collection of Marxist student groups disenchanted with the Nicaraguan Socialist Party. Carlos Fonseca Amador, a founder of the movement who indelibly shaped Sandinismo, believed that for a socialist revolution to be successful it had to be portrayed as arising from national history. The FSLN sought to do this by linking the Marxist cause to Sandino’s anti-imperialist struggle in the 1920s and 1930s, but the neo-Sandinismo of the 1960s is quite distinct from Sandino’s own ideology. The FSLN’s selective reinvention of Sandino, for instance, emphasized his class analysis and downplayed his references to “la raza indo-Hispana.” See Matilde Zimmerman, *Sandinista: Carlos Fonseca and the Nicaraguan Revolution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

tween the three *tendencias* of the movement in the 1970s.³⁷ The Sandinistas' typical Marxist focus on class at the expense of race was not the only reason they were not prepared to or initially failed to confront challenges from *costeños*. Instead, as a number of scholars have noted, the Sandinistas' mestizo nationalism ultimately made them ill equipped to deal with questions of race.³⁸ In this regard the Sandinistas were the heirs of the vanguardistas. Sandinismo was another variant of official mestizo nationalism because, despite the disagreements over revolutionary strategy between the movement's different *tendencias*, they all shared vanguardismo's silence about blacks, and its claim that contemporary Nicaraguan identity was mestizo.

Sandinismo (like vanguardismo) generally did not acknowledge the presence of black Nicaraguans and *costeños*. Moreover, in the few instances when their presence was noted, they were often identified as potentially divisive agents of imperial foreign powers such as Britain and the United States. The FSLN's only significant discussion of race before attaining power is in a section of its "Programa histórico" (originally published in 1969) entitled "The Atlantic Coast Will Be Integrated and Developed." In it *costeños* are referred to as "our brothers of the Atlantic" and the "hateful discrimination" to which indigenous and black *costeños* are subject is denounced. Under the FSLN, the Atlantic Coast would be "truly incorporated and developed along with the rest of the country," and the flowering of *costeños*' "traditional cultural values" would be encouraged.³⁹ While the FSLN's acknowledgement of racism

37. They were the *guerra popular prolongada* faction, the *tendencia proletaria*, and the *insurreccionalistas* or *terceristas*. Carlos Fonseca, one of the FSLN's founders, initially argued that a socialist revolution would resolve the fundamental antagonism between the bourgeoisie on the one hand, and exploited workers and peasants, on the other hand. But Ricardo Morales Avilés argued that because there were cleavages within both the bourgeoisie and the popular forces, the objective conditions for revolution were not present, and a prolonged people's war was necessary. Jaime Wheelock, in contrast, argued that the strategy of a prolonged people's war in the countryside was irrelevant to the fundamental confrontation between a growing industrial proletariat and the dependent bourgeoisie of the major urban centers. The *insurreccionalistas*, led by Humberto Ortega, argued that there were contradictions within both the bourgeoisie, and between the bourgeoisie as a class and workers and peasants; the strategy should therefore be to lead a nationwide general insurrection that combined a prolonged people's war in the countryside, guerrilla warfare in the cities, and the mobilization of middle class opposition to Somoza. The differences between the three *tendencias* were resolved in 1977, when the *terceristas* gained control of the FSLN.

38. My analysis here follows the work of scholars such as Edmund T. Gordon, Jeffrey Gould, and Charles R. Hale, all of whom established the similarities between Sandinismo and the nationalist discourses that preceded it with respect to the erasure of black and indigenous Nicaraguans as contemporary political agents (see n. 3 above).

39. "Programa histórico del FSLN," in Humberto Ortega Saavedra, *50 años de lucha Sandinista* (Havana, Cuba: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1980), 199.

in the “Programa histórico” is noteworthy, the document also echoes dominant views that Nicaraguan nationals held of *costeños*. As Gordon and Hale have both noted, *costeños*’ association with Britain, and later the United States, made them appear “foreign” to Sandinistas who identified “authentic” Nicaraguan culture with an indigenous past and a mestizo present.⁴⁰ Insofar as the Atlantic Coast is discussed in Sandinismo then, it is in terms of ending the economic exploitation of the region by foreign capital, the development of the region’s natural resources, and its integration with the rest of the nation.

While the Sandinistas shared vanguardismo’s silence about *costeños*, and blacks in particular, the FSLN categorically rejected vanguardista portrayals of mestizaje as harmonious fusion, and the concomitant denial of class conflict. In *Raíces indígenas de la lucha anticolonialista en Nicaragua*, for example, Jaime Wheelock (a member of the National Directorate of the FSLN)⁴¹ rejects Pablo Antonio Cuadra’s claim that “Nicaraguan history begins with a dialogue between a conquistador and an Indian cacique.” The use of the term “dialogue” signals the harmonious nature of mestizaje, its portrayal as a meeting of two cultures, not the conquest of one by the other. In contrast, Wheelock argues that Nicaraguan “history began with the fierce struggle of the Indian against the Spanish colonizer, which was sustained—without any dialogue—during the three centuries of Iberian domination.”⁴² For Wheelock, vanguardista accounts of national history that omitted any mention of indigenous resistance to Spanish colonization served the purpose of erasing the violence and class conflict inherent to the process. “The need to construct an ideology that justified the appropriation of land, labor, and as a result, power,” Wheelock argued, had given rise in Nicaragua to a kind of “culture of the colonized.”⁴³ Following Fanon, Wheelock claimed that vanguardismo’s identification of Nicaraguan mestizo identity with Spanish paternity was an example of the colonized adopting the

40. Gordon, *Disparate Diasporas*, 142–147. *Costeños* identified with Britain and later the United States, for both historical/cultural and economic/employment reasons. Following the departure of the British, the United States’ economic presence in the region became increasingly important, especially in the early twentieth century, with the arrival of lumber and, later, mining and banana companies. Additionally, Moravian missionaries, who during the first half of the twentieth century hailed mainly from the United States, provided many of the basic services (such as education and health) that the Nicaraguan state neglected. See also, Hale, *Resistance and Contradiction*.

41. Although Wheelock belonged to the *tendencia proletaria*, the claim that Indians became mestizo peasants during the nineteenth century is shared by Fonseca and other Sandinistas, as is the view that Nicaraguan identity owed more to indigenous antecedents than Spanish heritage.

42. Jaime Wheelock Román, *Raíces indígenas de la lucha anticolonialista en Nicaragua* (Mexico: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1974), 1.

43. *Ibid.*, 2.

colonizer's point of view.⁴⁴ The idealization of the manly, heroic figure of the conquistador, he argues, served to conceal the brutal nature of the colonial enterprise to the point that "frequently indigenous America is portrayed as overcome by the desire to throw herself, crazy with love, on the courageous and proud conqueror."⁴⁵ Just as rape and conquest thus become consensual heterosexual romances, vanguardista portrayals of the hacienda as "a center of luminous sanctity and monastic tranquility, where owners and servants are united by a supposedly sacred patriarchal loyalty," illustrate the way the tropes of harmonious mixing and colonial peace displace the true nature of the relationship between Indians and conquerors.⁴⁶ The myth of harmonious mestizaje, despite its conciliatory tone, served to occlude and justify the new forms of exploitation that the heirs of Spain's colonial enterprise implemented after independence. Vanguardismo not only failed to acknowledge the existence of class contradictions and economic exploitation; it actively sought to erase them.⁴⁷

In contrast to vanguardismo, Sandinismo imagined a national identity in which the dominant ancestor was the Indian, not the Spaniard.⁴⁸ Daniel Ortega, president of Nicaragua from 1984 to 1990 and a member of the FSLN's National Directorate, clearly stated the Sandinistas' vision of Nicaraguan identity in a 1981 speech:

From the moment when that clash took place in the colonial era between the conqueror who came to dominate and colonize . . . in our countries since then a heroic, titanic struggle has been taking place, a resistance in order not to be crushed by the different colonizing currents that have hurled themselves continually against our population, colonizing currents that have sought to negate our identity . . . *The conqueror was not able to crush us and make our own identity disappear, instead, our own identity imposed itself over the colonizer and in spite of his presence, our people were able to maintain a permanent presence of our roots.* [emphasis added]⁴⁹

Sandinismo thus rejected vanguardismo's insistence on the dominant Spanish paternity of Nicaragua's mestizo culture, and valued Indians as ancestors. The Sandinistas also contested vanguardista notions of

44. In Fanon's terms it is the identification of the native with the settler. See Frantz Fanon, "Concerning Violence," in *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 35–106.

45. Wheelock, *Raíces indígenas*, 4.

46. *Ibid.*, 51.

47. *Ibid.*, 8–9.

48. A good example of this is Gioconda Belli's work of historical fiction, *La mujer habitada* (Managua: Editorial Vanguardia, 1988).

49. Daniel Ortega, "La revolución es creatividad, imaginación," in *Hacia una política cultural de la revolución popular Sandinista*, Bayardo Arce et al. (Managua: Ministerio de Cultura, 1982), 88.

indigenous passivity. Wheelock, for instance, recovers colonial-era indigenous uprisings dismissed by Coronel Urtecho and other vanguardistas and portrays them as early examples of both class struggle and anti-imperialism.⁵⁰ As Gould and Hale have both noted, however, despite their rediscovery of indigenous resistance as an anti-imperialist precedent, the Sandinistas did not necessarily view Indians as contemporary actors with agency.⁵¹

In fact, notwithstanding their emphasis on indigenous resistance to Spanish colonialism, the Sandinistas adopted the vanguardista claim that contemporary Nicaraguans were mestizo and had been so since the colonial era. Carlos Fonseca (one of the founders of the FSLN), for example, claimed with regards to what is known as the “war of the Indians” of Matagalpa in 1881 that “even though it is known as the ‘War of the Indians’ . . . [the people in question] *are not precisely Indians, but mestizo peasants* who speak Spanish and do not retain their autochthonous language, although racially they present a dominant indigenous origin . . . [emphasis added].⁵² Fonseca denies the indigenusness of the protagonists, who he claims were really mestizo peasants. Wheelock likewise describes the revolt as “one of the most explosive class struggles that Nicaragua has ever seen.”⁵³ This eliding of indigenous rebellions with mestizo peasant struggles is symptomatic of the Sandinistas’ adopting the premise that Nicaragua had been a mestizo country long before the twentieth century, and of their desire to find antecedents of class struggle for their movement. They believed that indigenous groups had become proletarianized peasants. Wheelock, for instance, claimed that indigenous identity disappeared in the nineteenth century as a result of the destruction of the indigenous community. “The break-up of indigenous communal lands resulted in the separation of the Indian from his communal plot, and cast him into the wage labor market, transforming him into an agricultural worker. *A new historical subject was thus born that was more capable of destroying the system of oligarchic exploitation at its foundations* [emphasis added].”⁵⁴ For Sandinismo, mestizo peasants, not Indians, were the protagonists of twentieth-century nationalist struggles.

50. Wheelock, *Raíces indígenas*, 89, 107. During the struggle for independence Indians allied themselves with the oppressed classes of the colonial system, Wheelock argues, and after it “they continued fighting motivated by then by an instinctive class consciousness, making common cause with the advanced sectors of society whenever these confronted the fundamentally exploitative classes,” 89.

51. Hale, *Resistance and Contradiction*, 89–94; Gould, *To Die in This Way*, 273–79.

52. Carlos Fonseca Amador, “Viva Sandino,” in *Obras*, vol. 2, *Viva Sandino*, ed. Instituto de Estudios del Sandinismo (Managua, Nicaragua: Editorial Nueva Nicaragua, 1985), 34.

53. Wheelock, 89.

54. *Ibid.*, 113.

In contrast to vanguardismo, Sandinismo found an “authentic” Nicaraguan identity rooted in indigenous resistance to imperialism and class exploitation, but this new nation was still mestizo.

INEVITABLE COMPATRIOTS: COSTEÑOS AND MESTIZO MULTICULTURALISM

Black and indigenous *costeños* had generally not participated in the revolutionary armed struggle to overthrow the Somoza dictatorship, but they initially welcomed the Sandinistas’ triumph in July 1979 because they believed that it would allow them to realize their long-held demands for self-government.⁵⁵ But *costeños* and Sandinistas quickly came into conflict when the FSLN sent mestizos from the Pacific to govern the region, many of whom the local population perceived as arrogant and racist.⁵⁶ The FSLN did agree to the formation of an independent organization, MISURASATA (Miskitu, Sumu, Rama, and Sandinista together), to represent *costeños* in 1979.⁵⁷ Between 1979 and 1980 MISURASATA obtained agreements from the national government regarding natural resource management and bilingual education on the Atlantic Coast, but MISURASATA’s initial support of the Sandinistas turned into active resistance by 1981, when it called on the FSLN to recognize the “aboriginal” rights of the “indigenous nations” of the Atlantic Coast. The FSLN accused the organization of separatism and disbanded it, which led some of MISURASATA’s leadership and its Miskitu followers to forge alliances with the *contras* (the counterrevolutionary guerrilla forces supported by the United States) in their armed struggle against the Sandinista state. By 1984 the Atlantic Coast was a war zone, and accusations of human rights violations against *costeños* had damaged the FSLN’s international image.

But a faction of the exiled Miskitu groups fighting alongside the *contras* claimed that their struggle was not against the revolution *per se*, but in favor of indigenous communal lands and self-government.⁵⁸

55. Six distinct ethno-racial groups inhabit the Atlantic Coast today: the Miskitu, Mayagna (or Sumo), Rama, Creoles, Garifuna, and mestizos. The Miskitu, Mayagna, and Rama are indigenous peoples, while Creoles and Garifuna are of African descent.

56. This article is primarily about mestizo self-making practices. I do not discuss *costeño* attempts to contest mestizo discourses in detail here. While this is certainly an important topic, I focus on mestizo discourses because they by and large determine the way that national actors interpret *costeño* struggles for rights.

57. Despite its name MISURASATA’s ability to represent the interests of all *costeños* was debatable, as it was an almost exclusively Miskitu organization.

58. When MISURASATA was dissolved in 1981, two indigenous armed organizations were formed. One, MISURA, was openly allied with the United States–financed *contras*, the other, which kept the name MISURASATA, took a more moderate position. MISURA developed a much more clearly anticommunist stance than MISURASATA, and accused the Sandinistas of being undemocratic.

The claim eventually led the FSLN to realize that the nature of the conflict on the Atlantic Coast was primarily regional rather than ideological, and that it could not be resolved militarily. A political solution was needed.⁵⁹ The FLSN declared an amnesty for any *costeños* that had participated in anti-Sandinista activities and began peace negotiations with moderate Miskitu organizations that resulted in separate peace accords in 1985. One of the central elements of the peace negotiations was the enactment of multicultural citizenship reforms that would fulfill *costeño* demands for self-government. Many of the collective rights sought by *costeños* (but short of MISURASATA's demand for an autonomous indigenous territory) were incorporated into the new constitution that the National Assembly approved in 1986. They include: the right to "preserve and develop their cultural identity within national unity," to regional autonomy, to "live and develop under forms of organization that correspond to their historical and cultural traditions," to bilingual education, and to "the preservation of their cultures, languages, religions and customs." The constitution also recognized *costeños'* rights to the communal ownership of land, and to "the enjoyment, use and benefit of the waters and forests of their communal lands."⁶⁰

The approval of multicultural policies in 1986 would thus appear to mark a historical moment when the official mestizo nationalisms articulated by both vanguardistas and Sandinistas had been superseded or discarded. Yet in practice *costeños* have not been able to fully implement regional autonomy and other collective rights adopted in 1986. The center-right administrations of Violeta Chamorro (1990–1995), Arnoldo Alemán (1996–2001), and Enrique Bolaños (2002–present) that succeeded the FSLN after its electoral defeat in 1990 have embraced neoliberal policies and generally been hostile to the multicultural citizenship rights approved during the Sandinista regime. Regional governments have been consistently elected since 1990, but they have had little power because they depend on the central government for financing of their day-to-day operations. By allotting the regional governments basically symbolic budgets or withholding funds entirely, the central government can render regional governments inoperable and facilitate political co-optation. At the same time, however, other collective rights such as bilingual and intercultural education and the rhetorical recognition of the multicultural and multiracial character of the Nicaraguan state have been respected (if not embraced). Since 1986, *Costeños* have also won important victories strengthening existing multicultural citizenship provisions, such as the passage of a long-awaited land demarcation law to title communal lands.

59. Manuel Ortega Hegg, interview by the author, Managua, Nicaragua, 13 January 1999.

60. *Constitución política de Nicaragua* (Managua: Editorial el Amanecer, 1987), 30, 56–57.

It is important to note, however, that these gains have come as a result of *costeño* political mobilization and have faced considerable resistance from central governments.⁶¹ The difficulties *costeños* have faced in trying to implement the multicultural citizenship provisions adopted in 1986 suggest that what has taken place in Nicaragua is not a decisive break with the past, but the persistence of official mestizo nationalisms that continue to hinder the full political inclusion of *costeños* as such.

This apparently contradictory outcome—the adoption of multicultural policies on the one hand, and their incomplete implementation on the other—can only be understood by analyzing the nationalist discourses that authorized and legitimated the particular state arrangements that *costeños* sought (and continue to seek) to transform in Nicaragua. This is not to suggest that *costeños*' inability to attain full self-government since 1987 can be attributed solely to the persistence of ideologies of mestizo nationalism without reference to geopolitical realities that have also undeniably shaped these outcomes, however. One must consider that the Sandinistas adopted multicultural citizenship reforms in the context of a civil war with U.S.-backed contra forces in the 1980s, as well as the general reluctance of central governments (of any ideological persuasion) to devolve decision-making powers to subnational units, for example. *Costeños* themselves also bear some responsibility for the problems with the implementation of multicultural rights; regional politicians have displayed the same susceptibility to corruption, internal squabbling, and inefficiency as their counterparts at the national level. Yet, I argue that official nationalist discourses that deny or obscure the existence of black and indigenous *costeños* continue to justify mestizo political power and thereby delegitimize the very basis of multicultural citizenship rights and impede their implementation.

The adoption of collective rights for *costeños* in Nicaragua in the 1980s would appear to have required, if not the abandonment, at least radical reformulations of official mestizo nationalisms. Yet a careful analysis of the 1986 debates in the National Assembly regarding the adoption of multicultural policies reveals both the persistence of central tenets of both *vanguardismo* and *Sandinismo*, and the emergence of a new version of official mestizo nationalism, mestizo multiculturalism, that exhibits important continuities with its predecessors. While the approval

61. The land demarcation law is an excellent case in point. It was only approved by the National Assembly in 2003, sixteen years after *costeño* communal land rights were recognized in the constitution, in order to comply with a 2001 ruling by the Inter-American Human Rights Court against the Nicaraguan state in a case brought by the Mayagna community of Awas Tingni. The court ruled in favor of Awas Tingni, requiring that the government demarcate and title the communal lands of all *costeño* communities making land claims.

of multicultural rights for *costeños* did not necessarily mean that the central claims of previously dominant mestizo nationalist discourses were abandoned, a certain amount of ideological change was required in order for such provisions to be adopted. This ideological shift is best illustrated by the emergent discourse of mestizo multiculturalism, which abandons vanguardista and Sandinista claims that every Nicaraguan citizen is biologically or culturally mestizo and acknowledges the nation's racial and cultural diversity, that is, the presence of black and indigenous *costeños*. At the same time, however, this recognition occurs in the context of a nation that a majority of non-*costeño* Nicaraguans, and political elites in particular, still envision as mestizo. Ideologies of *mestizaje*, even as they posit a homogenous identity in the present, contain within them an acknowledgement of prior heterogeneity (in the form of the different groups that participate in the mixing process). In mestizo multiculturalism this nominal recognition of diversity is extended to the present, but without a simultaneous reimagining of national identity in general, such that the presence of *costeños* can still only be legitimately recognized insofar as it placed in the context of an ongoing process of *mestizaje*. But while mestizo multiculturalism gained ground in the 1990s, it did not seamlessly supplant vanguardismo and Sandinismo. Instead, we see in contemporary Nicaragua the sometimes-uneasy coexistence of different variants of official mestizo nationalism that continue to determine *costeños'* access to citizenship.

The debates about multicultural citizenship reform that occurred in the National Assembly in 1986 attest to the persistence of official mestizo nationalism in Nicaragua. Proponents as well as opponents of multicultural rights used arguments drawn directly from vanguardismo and Sandinismo to support their respective positions. Once the FSLN decided to support collective rights for *costeños* as part of the effort to pacify the Atlantic Coast their adoption was virtually assured, since the Sandinistas held a significant majority in the National Assembly. Of a total of ninety-eight deputies in the Assembly, sixty-one were Sandinistas, twenty-nine belonged to center-right parties (fourteen to the Conservative Democratic Party, nine to the Independent Liberal Party, and six to the Popular Social Christian Party), and six to orthodox Marxist parties (two each from the Nicaraguan Communist Party, the Nicaraguan Socialist Party, and the Marxist-Leninist Movement for Popular Action). A 60 percent majority was needed to ratify an article, and 48 articles in the new constitution were approved unanimously, 117 articles with the support of 80 percent of the deputies, 19 articles with 70 percent, and 18 articles with 60 percent. In addition, all three *costeño* legislators in the Assembly had been elected on the Sandinista ticket (as part of its effort to end the conflict on the Atlantic Coast, the FSLN had recruited *costeños* to run as regional candidates in the 1984 elections). The debates in the

Assembly about multicultural rights might thus be dismissed as token exercises in pluralism given that the final outcome was all but assured, but there were in fact enormous changes at stake in these discussions regarding both the terms of costeño political inclusion and the very content and meaning of Nicaraguan-ness. Moreover, not only were there limits to Sandinista support for multicultural rights, but opposition to and support for such rights appears to have been determined less by political ideology than by adherence to different tenets of official mestizo nationalism, be it vanguardismo or Sandinismo.

Legislators from the Atlantic Coast argued that Nicaragua would only really become a democracy when the existence of costeños was formally recognized and past histories of internal colonialism and racial exclusion were abandoned. Dorotea Wilson, a Sandinista, creole legislator, claimed that including the phrase "the people of Nicaragua are by nature multi-ethnic" in the constitution would signal a new way of conceiving of national unity that was not dependent on the myth of mestizo homogeneity.⁶² It would remedy the traditional understanding, in Nicaragua and the rest of Latin America, of "unity as excluding any element of diversity and plurality and therefore as synonymous with uniformity, homogeneity." In contrast, Wilson argued, costeños believed that "unity is possible within diversity."⁶³

But multicultural citizenship reforms, including the recognition of the country's cultural and racial diversity, faced opposition from non-costeño, non-Sandinista legislators on both the left and the right. Deputy Allan Zambrana of the Nicaraguan Communist Party, for example, argued that an article whose sole purpose was the recognition of racial diversity was "entirely unimportant," and "irrelevant."⁶⁴ Others claimed that race had no bearing on citizenship. As Carlos Cuadra Pasos of the Marxist-Leninist Movement for Popular Action put it, "*In order to express concrete political interests one does not have to be white or black, since the color of one's skin or hair or the fact of having a particular racial ancestry do not have a specific political effect*" [emphasis added].⁶⁵ Cuadra Pasos and his fellow Marxists criticized myths of harmonious mestizaje for glossing over class conflict, but they could not see how these myths also obscured racial difference and racism. For some non-costeño legislators the recognition of racial diversity threatened national unity. In order to forestall concerns about separatism, costeño representatives suggested that the wording of Article 89 be changed from, "the Communities of the Atlantic Coast are an integral part of the Nicaraguan people," to

62. Asamblea Nacional, Sesión Constituyente, *Diario de Debates* 2, no. 3 (1986), 9.

63. *Ibid.*, 365.

64. *Ibid.*, 371.

65. *Ibid.*, 368.

"the Communities of the Atlantic Coast are an indivisible part of the Nicaraguan people." But even such changes did not satisfy non-costeño representatives who opposed any deviation from the myth of mestizo uniformity. Representative Eduardo Molina Palacios of the Conservative Democratic Party, for example, urged the National Assembly to "consider the dangers that could present themselves against our own national identity, as a result of a certain tendency of these communities of the Atlantic Coast to autarky or secession, the former understood as the power to govern oneself."⁶⁶

The way in which ideas about national history and identity entrenched by official mestizo nationalism served to restrict the extension of multicultural rights is especially clear in the discussions about who the recipients of these rights should be. The term "indigenous peoples" that had been used in early drafts of the constitution was replaced by "communities of the Atlantic Coast" in the final version. Both the FSLN, concerned about the more extensive set of rights implied by the use of the term *pueblos*, and Creoles, concerned that it might be construed in a way that applied only to indigenous groups and excluded black costeños, supported this change. When non-costeño, non-Sandinista legislators sought to revert to the term *pueblo* in order to extend collective rights to indigenous groups outside the Atlantic Coast both costeño and Sandinista legislators objected to the proposal. Indigenous costeño legislators feared that the specificity of their experiences would be diluted within a broader category encompassing all the country's indigenous groups. Ronas Dolores Green (a Mayagna Sandinista deputy), for instance, argued that because indigenous costeños had preserved their culture and customs, and had historically been isolated from the rest of Nicaragua, they "face a very different situation" from Indians in other regions of the country.⁶⁷ For Green, including costeños in articles that applied to all indigenous Nicaraguans would have unfairly and inaccurately assumed a homogeneous indigenous experience. To non-costeño legislators accustomed to hearing vanguardista and Sandinista claims about the indigenous ancestry of contemporary mestizo Nicaraguans, however, it seemed only logical that indigenous groups in the Pacific and Central regions should gain the same rights as costeños.

The proposal to extend multicultural rights to non-costeño indigenous groups was ultimately defeated, in large part due to the FSLN's opposition. As the party in power, the FSLN obviously had very good reasons for wishing to restrict the number of groups being awarded special collective rights. The discussions surrounding the proposal nevertheless illustrate the way that certain key tenets of official mestizo nationalism

66. Asamblea Nacional, Sesión Constituyente, *Diario de Debates* 6, no. 7 (1986), 55.

67. *Ibid.*, 60.

shaped the contours of multicultural rights in Nicaragua. In some ways the fact that *costeños* had always stood outside the mestizo norm facilitated the adoption of collective rights in their case. The existence of *costeños* may have been erased in official mestizo nationalisms, but that silence was precisely a result of the fact that they were black and indigenous and undeniably not mestizos. For example, Domingo Sánchez Salgado of the Nicaraguan Socialist Party, a proponent of the extension of collective rights to non-*costeño* indigenous groups, claimed that the reason the proposal faced such opposition was that

this type of Indian of the indigenous communities . . . from the Pacific, unfortunately only has one type of physiognomy, there are no blacks, no *cobrizos*, they speak only a broken Spanish. They do not speak other languages; they do not speak English as the majority of those ethnicities on the Atlantic Coast do . . . that is what has become apparent.⁶⁸

As Sanchez suggests, extending multicultural rights to indigenous groups in Central and Pacific Nicaragua would have required recognizing that these groups had not disappeared, as both *vanguardismo* and *Sandinismo* claimed, but in fact continued to exist.

The main argument that Sandinista deputies marshaled against extending collective rights to indigenous groups in Central and Pacific Nicaragua was in fact the claim (central to *Sandinismo*) that *mestizaje* was so advanced in those regions that there were no Indians left. Carlos Nuñez Téllez, the President of the National Assembly and a member of the FSLN's National Directorate, claimed that Indians outside the Atlantic Coast "are in the process of extinction . . . because finding themselves in . . . regions of the country whose socio-economic development throughout all these years has been more accelerated, they have . . . passed from the condition of craft-based [production] to the process of economic and social insertion."⁶⁹ Indigenous communities outside the Atlantic Coast did not deserve protection from the state, Nuñez argued, because they were not "real" Indians anymore. Another Sandinista legislator, Alejandro Serrano Bravo, likewise claimed that "what we call indigenous communities on the Pacific . . . are no longer anything but groups of peasants that preserve some traditions, some cultural ties, but are not per se united by that powerful ethnic-cultural tie, as are our brothers from the Atlantic."⁷⁰

Non-Sandinista opponents of the extension of collective rights to indigenous groups outside the Atlantic Coast similarly deployed *vanguardista* claims about prior indigenous absorption into Spanish

68. *Ibid.*, 719.

69. *Ibid.*, 64.

70. *Ibid.*, 64–65.

culture. For representative Gerardo Alfaro of the Conservative Democratic Party, for example, loss of indigenous identity was signaled by Indians' adoption of Spanish customs. "I have not seen in the rivers of the Pacific our women bathing with a piece of cloth around their waists and naked from there on up," he declared, "I have not seen that custom—so pure in the Indians of the Atlantic—in the Pacific. To the contrary, in the Pacific they say that in times past women used to wear up to seven skirts to cover their bodies, and that is not an indigenous custom, that is influenced by Spanish culture."⁷¹ For Alfaro, the primitive sensuality of indigenous women, undistorted by Catholic sexual mores is a marker of indigenous identity, which is embodied not by the use of traditional clothing or *traje* but by "undress." Even non-Sandinista supporters of the proposal to revert to the use of the term "pueblo" echoed vanguardista notions that Indians would be "civilized" by contact with Nicaragua's Hispanic culture. Eduardo Coronado Pérez of the Independent Liberal Party, for example, argued that while the existence of indigenous communities outside the Atlantic Coast should be recognized, "there will always be better spaces, better means to take civilization and culture to them and integrate them completely as citizens, like any white, mestizo, black, Chinese citizen that lives in Nicaragua."⁷²

If the debates about multicultural citizenship rights illustrate the persistence of older versions of official mestizo nationalism (namely vanguardismo and Sandinismo), they also reveal the emergence of a new variant of this discourse, mestizo multiculturalism, which simultaneously recognizes the nation's racial and cultural diversity and reinscribes it within the trope of mestizaje. Many non-costeño legislators, for example, understood collective rights whose intent was to recognize the specific identities of black and indigenous costeños as acknowledgements of mestizaje. Danilo Aguirre Solís of the FSLN, for example, claimed that the article acknowledging Nicaragua's multi-ethnic character, "besides recuperating racial mixing . . . completes the definition of our racial origin, of our ethnic origin in which we find Caribbean elements, racial mixing, and the ethnicities of the Atlantic Coast . . . the article such as it stands is beautiful; it gathers great traditions not only of the Atlantic Coast but also of mestizaje."⁷³ Aguirre's remarks are an excellent example of the discourse of "mestizo multiculturalism," whose defining feature is the acknowledgement of the existence of costeños at the same time as this recognition is cast as part of the mestizaje that characterizes Nicaraguan history and identity. Thus, an August 2004 tribute to Nicaraguan regional music featured no costeño artists, but

71. *Ibid.*, 67–69.

72. *Ibid.*, 70.

73. Asamblea Nacional, Sesión Constituyente, *Diario de Debates* 2, no. 3, 376–77.

did include a Miskitu song performed by artists from the Pacific, and the repeated use of the following phrase: “somos mestizos, con una gran diversidad cultural. Somos un país multilingüe y multiracial.” Likewise, contemporary arguments that the central government should understand and respect regional autonomy as an instance of decentralization that is crucial to democratic governance overlook the fact that *costeño* demands for self-government are partly rooted in the desire to preserve non-mestizo cultures and identities, not only the desire for local control over regional affairs.⁷⁴ In all these examples while the presence of *costeños* is recognized, the specificity of their experiences and identities is subsumed under the overarching theme of ongoing *mestizaje*.

The multicultural citizenship reforms that the Nicaraguan government enacted in the 1980s did represent a change in state practices and require a shift in nationalist discourses, but this was not nearly as radical or decisive a break with the past as some have claimed. The considerable resistance *costeños* have faced from central governments to the full implementation of the multicultural rights enshrined in law reflects the persistence of official mestizo nationalism in Nicaragua today in different forms. Vanguardismo, Sandinismo, and mestizo multiculturalism have not enabled the political inclusion of black and indigenous Nicaraguans because they are myths of racial and cultural homogeneity. Although Nicaraguan nationalists of opposing ideological persuasions formulated them, these mestizo nationalisms are in fact “beloved enemies” because they are connected by shared assumptions about the defining feature of national identity (*mestizo-ness*). Older ideologies of *mestizaje* implicitly recognize diversity insofar as they assume the prior existence of distinct groups (portrayed as rapidly declining) that participate in the mixing process, and against whom the mestizo norm is defined. Contemporary mestizo multiculturalism achieves a basically similar end through different discursive means: it no longer claims that all citizens are mestizo, but demands for multicultural citizenship rights on the basis of distinct black and indigenous identities are still denied by means of the reinscription of the trope that—as the nation as a whole is mixed—special recognition of non-mestizo groups is unnecessary. What we see in Nicaragua today is thus not the abandonment of *mestizaje* in favor of a truly inclusive vision of the nation, but the persistence of official mestizo nationalisms that have yet to find a way to make true compatriots of *costeños*.

74. See for example, the editorial “Democracia y autonomías,” in *La Prensa*, 30 de Octubre del 2003.