

Neil, Monica

In response to the Draft Law on Autonomy proposed by the Nicaragua government, I must say that the Nicaragua government started with the right idea but ended with the wrong idea in the proposal. To begin with, it is impertinent to understand my background and involvement with the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict. I, Brooklyn Rivera, was an “insurgent” leader for the Miskitu people. Being educated from National Autonomous University of Nicaragua, I had great relations with the central government and could be a good intermediary between my people and the Sandinistas (Hawley 123). To understand the needs of my people, I closely worked with the Moravian Church even though I am Baptist. “But for the sake of ethnicity, for ethnic identification, I am tied to the Moravian Church. When one is involved in the indigenous cause, the Moravian Church plays an important role. Many of the activities that one has to do as an activist, one does within the Moravian Church” (Hawley 125).

While being a leader for MISURASATA, I have gained supporters and enemies amongst my own people since I split from this organization to create ARDE, Revolution Democratic Alliance based in Costa Rica in 1984 (Bourgois 205). I mainly led the people in the south of the Atlantic Coast while my rival leader, Fagoth, led those in the north (Dennis 221). I had made a division because I thought that Fagoth was going over the deep end and I was even quoted when I called him “psychopathic with persecution trauma” in 1982. I don’t know what Fagoth was thinking or even doing but he allied with the “dirtiest, most assassinating right wing elements of the Honduran army..[choosing] the dirtiest Somozists expelled from the FDN” (Bourgois 205). I too hated the Sandinista’s and the lack of cooperation from our people but I did not abuse them to the extent that Fagoth did. I know that because of my past mistakes that it will be hard for all our leaders to come together and regain trust from all the costeños. Yet, the fact remains that I was the one who tried to start the peace initiative in 1984 when I visited Nicaragua in October. In November I returned to Honduras to unite my people, the Miskitu Indians, in exile but the Honduras government would not deport them (“Misurasata/Sandinista” 59). I tried but was stopped because of politics. It is the United States who has used us and now influenced the Honduran government to not let my people go. I will ensure that a peace will be found even though I have personal conflicts with Steadman Fagoth and Leonel Patin (Wilde 927). In fact, we Miskitus were never interested in causing such havoc. The *Latin American Weekly Report* quoted me when I stated, “We were not interested in overthrowing the government whether it was right or left-wing, as long as [our] culture and heritage was respected. Noting that the Sandinistas had accused the Indians of being CIA dupes to smokescreen their determination to ‘integrate’ the tribes into the revolution, [I] said the US government was just as hypocritical in using the Miskitus to claim the Sandinistas were totalitarian, without ever showing any interest in the Indians’ real complaints” (Macdonald 38). I, however, understand and know my people. Before I criticize the Nicaraguan proposal, I must say that I represent the Miskitu people, their history and their ideals before this conflict began. This proposal was made so that the Miskitu people can be heard and have our demands recognized by the central government. We, the Miskitu people, have always viewed autonomy as our “cultural heritage, not as a law that was given and can be revoked by western Nicaraguans” (Wilde 926). In light of this, MISURASATA claims that autonomy is 1) “the recognition of indigenous communal ownership of village communal lands, waters and resources that collectively comprise Miskito, Sumo and Rama territories; and 2) the recognition of indigenous rights of self-determination such that Indian peoples (and ethnic groups) may pursue their distinct and independent political, legal, and economic and religious institutions” (“Misurasata/Sandinista” 59). We will not accept an identity reformed by the state.

Based on our intentions, the *Historical Considerations* greatly follows our previously stated demands, especially number (3) and (5). We do have identities different than the rest of the nation and we may be considered a nation within a state (Nitschmann 5). Furthermore, I agree with (5) that states that we especially want self-determination in the development of our languages, social organization, land, and self-government.

However, I disagree with certain sections in the rest of the proposal. Many times in the *Principles and Objectives of the Regional Autonomy*, the proposal stresses how regional autonomy will reinforce the unity of the Nicaraguan people and national culture. This point is not something that we are striving for because

we do not want to be associated with the rest of the Nicaraguan people. We don't want unity but to have autonomy and be left alone. As for the section III, Organization and Function of the Regional Autonomous Government, it is evident that the central government does not think that we can exercise our own autonomy without the help of them. Perhaps the central government is too paternalistic. I also disagree with the (3) in the *Powers of the Chief Executive of the Region* where it states that the executive needs to collect regional taxes that are established by the law. We have not nor hardly ever participated in the state's activities, nor do we plan to begin. We have never paid "significant taxes, never been drafted for conscript labor or served in the armed forces, or engage in extensive trade and commerce" (Helms 5). Yet, despite my concerns I will sign this peace initiative so that we may freely go back to our homes and continue to work towards autonomy.