



Vol. 10, No. 2, Winter 2013, 102-125

[www.ncsu.edu/acontracorriente](http://www.ncsu.edu/acontracorriente)

## **The Narrative Is (Not) the Territory: Luis Cardoza y Aragón's *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano* and the Guatemalan Revolution**

**Brian Davisson**

Mississippi State University

Guatemala's 1944 Revolution marked the end of thirteen years of dictatorship by Jorge Ubico, and the emergence of a decade of democratic and liberal reform that culminated in the passing of the Ley de Reforma Agraria in 1953. The first acting president during this period, Juan José Arévalo, a socialist who saw a clear separation between Soviet communism and the land-based *komunismo* he supported,<sup>1</sup> undertook the writing of a new constitution, and hoped to initiate land reform as the foundation for industrialization within the country. These reforms were later expanded upon by the government of Jacobo Árbenz, who took control of the nation

---

<sup>1</sup> José Luis Valdés Ugalde writes: "[Arévalo] argumentaba que había una diferencia entre *komunismo* y *comunismo*. Desde su perspectiva, el *comunismo* estaba representado por el Partido Comunista de Moscú y el leninismo, mientras que el *komunismo* era una ideología política democrática, cuyo propósito era la 'defensa de los intereses de los trabajadores y los explotados del mundo', y sus principios enfatizaban el 'nacionalismo y la soberanía, y se atrevían a cuestionar a Estados Unidos'" (137).

following elections in 1950, and who “resultó ser un reformista más radical que Arévalo y, por ende, un modernizador más comprometido, lo que a su vez facilitaba que en aquellos precarios tiempos políticos del continente se le viera como a un revolucionario” (Valdés Ugalde 147).

The reforms enacted during the period of the Guatemalan Revolution, which ended with the invasion of the country by Carlos Castillo Armas in 1954, find their roots in the *unionista* struggles in the late 1910s. This movement drew together the efforts to reestablish the political links between the Central America nations that emerged shortly after independence in 1821 with the anti-dictatorial struggle against Manuel Estrada Cabrera, and many of its leading participants included young intellectuals such as Clemente Marroquín Rojas, Miguel Ángel Asturias, and Luis Cardoza y Aragón, who would later be seen as key members of Guatemala’s literary *generación del 20*. While the unionist platform failed to reunite the Central American states, the movement’s foundation proved significant once again in the 1944 Revolution, as Sergio Tischler Visquerra writes:

El hecho más significativo de la recomposición de fuerzas fue el desarrollo de un liderazgo nacional que tuvo por protagonistas principales a los estudiantes y los maestros, es decir, a la parte ilustrada de los sectores medios. Dicho liderazgo se plasmó en un movimiento que arrastró a la mayor parte de la población nacional a la dinámica política en torno a la candidatura del Dr. Juan José Arévalo. (201)

None of these three writers had direct involvement in the 1944 Revolution, as Asturias was serving in Congress but was not active in the revolutionary movement, and both Marroquín Rojas and Cardoza were living in exile in Mexico. The ideals of land reform, however, remained central to their ideological desires for the nation, and would provide the foundation for the national projects that emerged in their literary and political writings.

The 1944 Revolution was furthermore significant for Cardoza, as it enabled him to chronicle his return to and relationship with Guatemala, and unite the ideals of history, myth, land, and indigeneity which he saw as fundamental in comprehending both the nation and the Revolutionary period. The central work of this period, *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano*, is described by Marc Zimmerman and Raúl Rojas as the “quintessential

expression” of Cardoza’s Indian-centered view of Guatemala (16). Zimmerman later describes it as “a work which constituted a virtual macro-text totalizing the nation’s literary expression and critical analysis, presenting and exploring Guatemala’s social and cultural processes and problems” (*Literature and Resistance* 2). The move toward totality is intriguing, and I find it difficult to dispute the notion that Cardoza attempts to establish a totality of the nation through this work, as the Guatemalan Revolution provided a clear backdrop through which a fundamentally Indian-centered view of the nation could finally appear. *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano* carries the notion of a cultural and political totality further, though, in exploring the absolute connection between the indigenous community, the land it inhabits, and Cardoza’s own presence within the nation.

The poet in this case becomes the key mediating element, and through his presence, the work raises a crucial yet overlooked and easily reductive question: what does Cardoza mean when he invokes “Guatemala”? I pose this question specifically to work through the relationship between the nation and the poet, as a means of comprehending the structures of exile and return, as well as the cultural and territorial concerns that Cardoza invokes throughout the work. In effect, the poet appears incapable of speaking of the cultural legacy of the indigenous population, this community’s attempts to overcome repression and underdevelopment from the time of the *conquista* until the 1940s, and the central issues of land control and agrarian reform, without a concerted effort to break the idea of “Guatemala” down to its absolute root. Through the literary process in which he engages his homeland, Cardoza represents the nation through both territorial and spatial modes,<sup>2</sup> and I will argue below that this split in the identity of the nation appears as the only way of

---

<sup>2</sup> The term “space” refers here to the cultural production and identity of the nation, and not to an abstract idea of location. Yi-Fu Tuan’s phenomenological approach to space and place provides that: “‘Space’ is more abstract than ‘place.’ What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value” (6). I find this approach limiting in terms of determining national identity, and instead turn to Henri Lefebvre’s spatial theory that indicates that “(Social) space is a (social) product” (*Production* 26). This approach allows for a clear division between geopolitical borders and cultural ideas of national identity, while still allowing for the structure of feeling to link the individual to a national consciousness.

mediating the nation through the author's presence, as configured through the exilic experience that frames the text.

*The Return from Exile*

*Guatemala, las líneas de su mano* opens in exceptionally concrete terms, with the description of Cardoza's entrance into Guatemala across the land border with Mexico. The first sentence of the work reads: "El 20 de octubre de 1944 estalló la revolución que estaba transformando a Guatemala, y el 22 crucé la frontera." He continues later on the same page, speaking of the friends who crossed with him: "Con ellos y un fusil en la mano, volví a mi tierra" (7). His entrance into Guatemala appears with a flourish, emphasizing his own connection to the Revolution and the implication of a desire to take up arms in the struggle. Marroquín Rojas would later speak rather glowingly of the work's poetics, but would decidedly undercut this vision the poet gives of himself in his reading of Cardoza's text:

Cardoza había vivido la mayor parte de la vida entre gente vagabunda, gentuza de café, revolucionarios de pacotilla. Gente que hace verbalmente la revolución, que prende fuego a la mecha de las grandes explosiones, sin darse cuenta de lo que hace, de lo que va a ocasionar. (144)<sup>3</sup>

This is perhaps unsurprising considering Marroquín's political trajectory, which saw his organization of the unionist struggles in the 1910s and 20s, from which Cardoza was uninvolved, and his public opposition to positions taken by the Arévalo government, often aired in the press.

Cardoza makes a further curious move with regard to his exile at the close of the entire work, writing as the by-line: "Antigua Guatemala, 1953–México, 1955, de nuevo en el exilio" (422). He would likewise make explicit mention of his exile in the prologue to his *La Revolución Guatemalteca*

---

<sup>3</sup> Marroquín does not appear to have maintained a strained relationship with Cardoza, and thus I take this statement on its face value. Marroquín was among the leading organizers of the anti-Estrada Cabrera movement in the late 1910s, and other members of the Generación del 20, such as Asturias or the lesser-known César Izaguirre, wrote against the dictatorship, signed documents in protest, or participated in student rallies. Cardoza, in contrast, appears to have been largely silent during this period, perhaps in part due to his relative youth. Marroquín's statement above possibly appears as a response to Cardoza's lack of political engagement in the 1910s, yet there is nothing to indicate that his return to Guatemala prefigured a militaristic turn.

from 1955, the work written immediately following *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano*. There he states: “Para nadie será extraño que por haber vivido años fuera de mi tierra, precisamente por ello, haya tenido también la perspectiva del que no se ha formado por completo en el ámbito nativo” (10). From 1920 until 1944, Cardoza lived outside of Guatemala, yet in his writings preceding the Guatemalan Revolution, there is little mention of an overwhelming feeling of exile, whether during his time in Mexico in the 1930s, or during his student experiences in Paris in the 1920s. The biographical and literary similarities between Cardoza and Asturias have been frequently cited, yet little has been commented on regarding their similar treatment of exile during this period.<sup>4</sup> Asturias commented in conversation with Luis López Álvarez that for the students at the Instituto Nacional Central para Varones, where both he and Cardoza were educated as youths, there was no strong feeling of commonality with Guatemala, and that they instead responded negatively to the approach taken by the Estrada Cabrera regime during the years of World War I:

...a nosotros los estudios que habíamos hecho nos hacían ser aliadófilos, sobre todo por lo que Francia significaba como bandera de libertad. Empezamos, pues, a agitarnos, lo que era muy raro, pero no podía la dictadura suprimir algunas de nuestras manifestaciones hacia la Legación de Francia. Llegábamos cantando la Marsellesa, con la bandera francesa, y así íbamos entrando en la vida política. (56)

Cardoza would write in his autobiography *El Río, novelas de caballería*, in a section titled “Descubrí mi tierra en Europa”: “Lejos de las fronteras, sólo la civilización maya mantenía actualidad; paulatinamente, me inicié en ella y desafortunado afirmé que los griegos, mayas de Europa, fueron tristes como los míos porque inventaron calendarios” (203).

If this statement appears trite, it at the same time establishes a strong idea of how exile manifests itself through the subject. Cardoza reflects the inability to draw a strong sense of Guatemalan identity through his proximity to the nation and the resistance he felt to the regime that surrounded him as an adolescent. By establishing distance from

---

<sup>4</sup> Dante Liano’s treatment of the two writers is among the more critical approaches to the link between the two writers. See the chapter of his *Visión crítica de la literatura guatemalteca* titled “Cardoza y Asturias” (185-98), which concerns Cardoza’s reading of Asturias’s work in *Miguel Ángel Asturias, casi novela*.

Guatemala, he discovered pieces of the world that he could cobble together to construct his own sense of national affinity. Terry Eagleton's exploration of exile in the context of English literature repeats this idea, remarking on "the inability of indigenous English writing, caught within its partial and one-sided attachments, to 'totalise' the significant movements of its own culture" (*Exiles* 15). Cardoza thus establishes his relationship to Guatemala, a nation from which he feels estranged, through the commonality its indigenous population shares with Greek culture, which he knows better. His studies under Georges Raynaud, the French anthropologist who educated both him and Asturias in the 1920s, allowed him a stronger sense of cultural attachment to the Mayan civilization, and thus to comprehend and find expression through indigenous modes of literary and cultural production.

Cardoza's experiences in Paris and later in Mexico in this regard enable him to engage the indigenous population of Guatemala and the connection he feels with his native country, though largely outside of the identity of an exile. Prior to 1944, his literary and journalistic production bears traces of Guatemalan identity, as he invokes Mayan art and literature with frequency, though within his poetic works often in constellation with European culture. While in Mexico, where he writes articles and essays concerning Mexican art and artists, history, and general remarks of indigenous aesthetics, the "Guatemalan" Cardoza scarcely appears. This is not entirely surprising, as he would remark in 1954, in an article titled "Dijo el guatemalteco": "Conozco México –y lo conozco bien porque lo quiero como mi segunda patria" (*Guatemala con una piedra adentro* 147). This claim to Mexican identity is well-founded considering his entrance into Mexican intellectual society in the 1930s. He maintained a close friendship with Alfonso Reyes, corresponded with Octavio Paz, wrote for *Cuadernos Mexicanos*, and focused his energies on promoting Mexican culture. Among his closest friends during this time was Arqueles Vela, likewise a Guatemalan who resided in Mexico for the majority of his life and was a key member of the *Estridentismo* movement founded by Manuel Maples Arce.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Arqueles Vela's association with the Generación del 20 is somewhat awkward biographically, as he was educated at the Instituto de Varones de Oriente,

It was not until his return in 1944 that the sense of exilic expression took root in his writings, displayed most clearly through *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano*. Problematically, though, there is a strong sense of Cardoza being less than forthright in his relationship to his homeland. He returned in 1944, as he states in the text, crossing the border with Mexico on October 22<sup>nd</sup>. During the period of the Guatemalan Revolution, he did not remain consistently within the nation. As he describes in his autobiography: “De 1944 a 1954, (la década civilizada) parte la viví fuera, no por mi gusto: el gobierno prefería mantenerme a distancia” (635). This distance was more a political calculation on the part of the government, rather than an explicit ideological separation. In late 1945 he traveled to the Soviet Union to serve as the Guatemalan ambassador in Moscow, remaining through February 1946. He had previously turned down an offer by Arévalo to serve as ambassador to Mexico, which he rejected because, he explained, “necesitaba vivir en mi tierra” (*Río* 615). He returns to Guatemala, but by November of that year he is sent to Bogotá in a ministerial position. He passes late 1947 and early 1948 in Chile, spending time with Neruda and leaving twice to visit Venezuela and Colombia—to the latter to represent Guatemala at the Novena Conferencia Panamericana. It is during this visit to Colombia that the “Bogotazo” occurs, in which president Jorge Eliécer Gaitán is assassinated. Repulsed at this event, he returns to France, feeling that “no había sitio para mí en país alguno de América Latina” (648), and remains there between August 1948 and 1950. In 1951 he returns to Guatemala, and by 1953 he has returned, more or less definitively, to Mexico, where he organized the Sociedad de Amigos de Guatemala in 1954, shortly before the fall of the

---

along with his brother David, himself also a writer associated with the movement. Arqueles's place of birth is furthermore in dispute, as it is not clear whether he was born in Guatemala or in Tapachula, Chiapas. He did reside in Guatemala during his childhood, and like Cardoza and Asturias, lived in Paris for a time during the 1920s, where he and Cardoza met. His literary production places him closer to the Generación del 20 than other writers such as Carlos Samayoa Chinchilla, as his early writings display much of the formal inventiveness seen in the works of Cardoza or Asturias.

Revolution, and attempted to secure support from the Mexican military to defend against the overthrow of Árbenz.<sup>6</sup>

*The Guatemala that is Not Guatemala*

The chronology described above presents two intriguing issues that receive no direct mention or resolution in *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano*: first, that Cardoza did not reside in Guatemala for the majority of the Revolutionary period that he describes in the work, and second, that despite the feeling of exile that emerged following the Castillo Armas invasion in 1954, he would claim that he continued to reside in Guatemala following the overthrow of the Árbenz government. I find it essential to establish a resolution to these issues in terms consistent with Cardoza's literary production during the 1950s, and not to dismiss them as deliberate obfuscations of his biography. While Marroquín maintains that Cardoza was happy to alter the details of his entrance into his homeland, a much more significant issue appears regarding the nature of Guatemala within the author's consciousness. Part of this break appears early in *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano*, which contains an elaborate description of the country's geography. Here, amidst discussion of the mountains, rivers, and valleys, he states of the eastern part of Guatemala: "Muchos pueblos de oriente trabajan para el ferrocarril, para la United Fruit Company, esa 'Guatemala' gringa que no es Guatemala" (21). This final claim appears much more significant upon reaching the end of the work, composed following the overthrow of the Árbenz government, at which point Cardoza engages in a polemic against the aggression of the United States and neighboring countries and the investment of foreign groups such as the United Fruit Company (UFCO). The aggression against the UFCO early in the text, however, is wholly consistent with the role it played in Guatemalan politics and the efforts of the governments of Arévalo and Árbenz to

---

<sup>6</sup> This chronology is pieced together from what he describes in *El Río*. The piecemeal composition of this work, a collage of pieces written when they occurred and included verbatim, and other chapters written in the 1980s from memory, make a definitive chronology difficult to maintain. It appears as a synchronous autobiography, presenting immediate recollections and remembrances long passed, all on the same historical plane, and in consequence can scarcely provide an absolute foundation for a diachronic study of Cardoza's life or works.



establish control over the land.<sup>7</sup> Cardoza continues immediately after: “Entre los ríos, el Motagua, navegable en parte y cuya cuenca es tan fértil como la del Nilo—según Sylvanus G. Morley—, en donde la United Fruit Company ha puesto sus estandartes,” and shortly thereafter, describing the highlands that stretch to El Salvador: “La selva avanza por todas partes, detenida su marcha por los bosques simétricos del banano—¡ay United Fruit Company!—, con sus grandes hojas anchas de mil ocre y mil verdes, que acuñan el sol en los racimos” (21-22).

As Cardoza establishes the presence of the UFCO as the “other Guatemala,” he presents an ambiguity that similarly underscores the meaning of Guatemala for him in personal terms. The idea of the “other Guatemala” indicates the central conflict of his exile and his return as a struggle between the territorial expanse of the nation, which is of absolute significance to him within the text, and the cultural idea of Guatemala. His insistence on writing the geography of the nation in its complexity provides a foundation for all that is to come in the work, as its first one hundred pages lead from geographic description to Guatemala’s mythic history and its cultural development. This works both for and against Cardoza’s overall approach to the text, as he attempts to totalize the nation by mediating history, myth, politics, and culture through the territory of Guatemala, as indicated by Zimmerman above, yet this territorial integrity appears compromised almost immediately. What follows, then, is a struggle within the text over the totality of Guatemala as a concept, as he grapples internally with the mental space of Guatemala.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Cardoza’s *La Revolución Guatemalteca* gives a more explicit treatment of the UFCO in Guatemala, describing the monopoly the UFCO held over agricultural production due to its ties to the International Railways of Central America and the Compañía Agrícola Guatemalteca, and tracing these ties back to the dictatorship of Estrada Cabrera. He explains this relationship in the first chapter, “Jonás en el vientre del monstruo,” 19-44. A more contemporary approach can be found in Valdés Ugalde’s *Estados Unidos: Intervención y poder mesiánico*. Here the involvement of the United States is filtered through the economic interests of John Foster Dulles leading the US to provide protection to the UFCO. See his sixth chapter, “¿Guatemala hacia el comunismo?,” 213-246.

<sup>8</sup> Lefebvre defines mental space as: “a social (but not immediately political) consensus... that includes the representations of the State that people construct—confused or clear, directly lived or conceptually elaborated” (*State* 225). In his conception of political space, Lefebvre indicates that mental space is rooted in both social space and the physical, national territory, and thus is the most immaterial

Cardoza's effort to tie together the various manifestations of Guatemala's identity ends with him leaving unresolved in any specific way what he means by "Guatemala." This move is doubtless convenient in practical terms, by enabling the writer to speak of the abstract idea of nation filtered through the more concrete manifestations he finds in exploring the country's identity. At the same time, and perhaps unwittingly, it begins to work toward the larger question of the function of national ontology. Through the debate over totality, this issue takes on a profound significance. Terry Eagleton writes in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* of the turn taken by Adorno to resolve the particularity of Kant's conception of totality:

What might undo the 'totalitarian' implications of Kantian aesthetics is the idea of affinity or mimesis—the non-sensuous correspondences between disparate features of the artefact, or more generally the filiations of both kinship and otherness between subject and object, humanity and nature, which might provide an alternative rationality to the instrumental. One might even name this mimesis *allegory*, that figurative mode which relates through difference, preserving the relative autonomy of a set of signifying units while suggesting an affinity with some other range of signifiers. (356)

This conceptualizing of allegory easily enables one to comprehend how the nation serves as an allegory for much more minute, and oftentimes more significant, social processes. Guatemala becomes one such allegorical referent, with a utility that exists precisely because it requires no absolute consistency. It instead offers a broader narrative regarding the nation, one that is roughly consistent with its territorial expanse, and embodying the cultural expression of that place's inhabitants.

The crucial turn taken by Cardoza in the opening of *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano* appears to me to be the conjunction of his territorial entrance into the nation and its lack of territorial integrity due to the presence of the UFCO. The text opens with an attempt to draw the map of the nation, enabling the reader to trace the geography of the country, and thus to understand the function of the land in filtering culture and history. The complication arises specifically through the allegorical use of

---

form of political space. It nevertheless provides the foundation for understanding how space is produced within a national or political structure.

“Guatemala” when referring to the geography of the country, yet its resolution is not insurmountable. It is in principle an issue of semantics, as Cardoza attempts to inscribe the territory with his own ideological approach to nation. Alfred Korzybski, speaking of general semantics yet in a manner wholly adequate for this debate, indicates two of the central premises of his theory: that “the *map is not* the territory” and “the map does *not* cover ‘all’ of territory” (29). These points are crucial in comprehending the allegorical significance of nation. The identity of nation and nationalism provides a convenient shorthand for working through larger processes, and becomes embedded in identity through narrative structures. Etienne Balibar addresses this concept in *Race, Nation, Class*, writing:

The history of nations, beginning with our own, is always already presented to us in the form of a narrative which attributes to these entities the continuity of a subject. The formation of the nation thus appears as the fulfillment of a ‘project’ stretching over centuries, in which there are different stages and moments of coming to self-awareness. (86)

This type of narrative ties directly into the national territory, as Balibar affirms, as part of a project of constructing the nation in terms of its present condition rather than originating through the terms of its past. Cardoza makes this move central to his own project, opening *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano* with the actuality of the Guatemalan Revolution facilitating his entrance into the nation, and closing the work with the failure of the Revolution.

The manifestation of this form of nationalism, however, lies in the crux between the territorial identity of the nation and the narrative placed coincident with that territory. Mapping the nation thus becomes essential to the text. I would argue that it is likewise crucial, though often overlooked, in terms of regular ontological identity. George W. White claims that “culture is inextricably intertwined with the concepts of place and territory, not deterministically but as human constructs themselves” (3), and furthermore, that “place and territory represent significant aspects of national identity” (10). In the revised edition of his now-canonical treatment of national formation, Benedict Anderson follows this same line in a more limited way as he writes of the totalizing function of European-

style maps in dictating the expanse of the nation-state (170-78). Anderson's analysis of maps, however, owes considerably more to the role of geography in determining the boundaries of the nation-state in geopolitical terms, whereas it is the fundamentally dynamic nature of the human construction of geography and place that are of concern in resolving experiences germane to the present discussion, such as exile.

Cardoza's use of territory emerges as the principle means of working through the Revolutionary period in Guatemala, and in turn, as the only way of resolving the allegorical struggle he engages early in the text. To find a means of resolving this struggle, I turn once more to Eagleton's discussion of totality, here concerning the works of Benjamin:

Like the commodity, the meaning of the allegorical object is always elsewhere, eccentric to its material being; but the more polyvalent it becomes, the more supple and inventive grows its forensic power in deciphering the real. The allegorical signifier shares in a sense in the frozen world of myth, whose compulsive repetitions foreshadow Benjamin's later image of an historicism for which all time is homogenous; but it is also a force to break open this fetishized realm, inscribing its own network of 'magical' affinities across the face of an inscrutable history. (*Ideology* 327)

Indeed, in order for the meaning of a totalizing structure such as the nation to emerge from the allegory around which it is constructed, it must succeed in showing its mediating element. This element, missing in a simple metaphor but clearly at stake between the individual and the nation, provides the foundation upon which the dialectic of self and nation, or more abstract ideas such as inside and outside, can be overcome. This arrangement thus depends precisely on the means of constructing the totalized nation as allegory, and not upon particular elements such as the recognition of borders or the recitation of national history or culture.

Cardoza marks this relationship in absolute, concrete terms at the opening of *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano*, establishing his own crossing of the border near Tapachulo, Mexico to allow for a resolution to the expression of exile. Decades later he would reveal his comprehension of the metaphor of nation and the limitations of exilic discourse. He would write in 1982, in a piece compiled in *El Río* and titled "¿Qué es ser guatemalteco?": "El exilio es la divergencia entre la imagen y la realidad. Entonces, esa silenciosa confrontación pertinaz es lo esencial: y no hay

exilio puesto que vivimos una metáfora. Guatemala, soy tu Pigmalión” (785).<sup>9</sup> That same year he would likewise write in his treatment of Asturias’s life and works, *Miguel Ángel Asturias, casi novela*, that: “Los ‘exilios’ de Asturias nunca existieron, fueron voluntarios, siempre podía volver” (185). These passages reveal a static understanding of the nation, in terms of both borders and ontological identity, indicating that the idea of return implies the crossing of fixed borders and the restoration of national identity. Guatemala becomes a metaphor of place and territory, overlapping it in its entirety. In this regard, the later Cardoza indicates that the map is the whole of the territory.

It would appear, however, that this approach to nationalism is not consistent with his earlier career. In 1941, writing in *El Nacional*, he would compose a brief article titled “Notas sobre poesía indígena,” in which he states: “En el símbolo, en el mito, forma y palabra están más allá de sí mismas, o si queréis, y esto me parece más exacto, se encuentran en su naturaleza verdadera: la del encantamiento. Llamar las cosas por su nombre es obra de toda poesía auténtica” (*Tierra* 482-83). This approach to poetics prefigures the understanding of nation that emerges in *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano*. Cardoza states plainly that the overlay of language upon dynamic social structures, which is easily extendable to the nation, requires that the language not trap the structure into abstract forms. And following this same approach, it underscores the necessity of maintaining the shifting approaches to these structures as part of a diachronic approach to cultural production. (This becomes the problematic juncture in the reliance on Cardoza’s autobiography to establish his relationship to the nation during the 1940s, which troublingly appears to be the preferred method of treating this period of the author’s life.)

As Cardoza writes his entrance into Guatemala on the opening page of *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano*, it would appear that the nation exists

---

<sup>9</sup> Lucrecia Méndez de Penedo establishes that this section was written much after Cardoza’s return and subsequent exile, in 1982. The autobiography as a whole presents essays, articles, speeches, and fragments written throughout Cardoza’s life, making it difficult to determine the diachronous shifts in the author’s relationship to the nation through the various experiences of displacement in his life. Méndez de Penedo provides the sources for the autobiography’s selections in *Memorie contracorrente*, 66-68.

as metaphor, with the absolute marker of his crossing on display. However, he presents the nuance of this entrance as he moves deeper into the country. He has established territorial coincidence with the nation at the text's opening, yet his destination is not the territorial expanse of the nation specifically, rather Antigua, Guatemala, the city of his birth. He will enter this place with the vague "imagen de mi abuela materna" in his thoughts (32), and it is only upon reestablishing his physical relationship to this place that he engages the culture and history of the nation as a whole. Prior to this point he is capable of establishing the nation's geographic identity, yet this emerges as more a marker of territory than cultural identity. He presents the reader with the division of the nation due to the presence of the UFCO in the east, and even here there is a sense that the idea of Guatemala is something much more significant than its territorial expanse or its economic control. This grounds the move to history, as the markers of territory or nominal identity prove insufficient.

### *The Dissolution of Time*

The later chapters of *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano* are heavily mediated by time and history, yet Cardoza carefully breaks from any notion that the historical account be unimpeachable. In the words of Ana Lorena Carrillo:

Cardoza ignora—y no pretende saber—la metodología del historiador, de modo que su perspectiva y su discurso historiográfico pende de su personal mirada al pasado, de la reelaboración y resignificación de la experiencia histórica que realiza. Esta reelaboración se expresa en la forma en que también *conoce y comprende* la historia a través de su lectura "en primera persona" que se enlaza a la escritura autobiográfica de su propio texto. (159)

This turn to the personal when representing the past is more than a mere rhetorical strategy, as Carrillo's analysis shows. It allows Cardoza to discuss events stretching from well before the author's own life, such as the *conquista*, in personal terms, thus creating a unification of the historically past experience of the Guatemalan people with the concerns for the period of the Guatemalan Revolution that grounds the text. Even while he establishes the history of the nation as one aspect of the expression of

Guatemala that emerges on par with cultural production or geography, it cannot in any way escape the historical point of its composition. It is entirely a product of the Guatemalan Revolution.

From this point of origin, however, Cardoza does demonstrate a break with the diachronic mode of historical representation. There is clear correspondence to the idea of the “leap” of history presented in the historiographic works of Walter Benjamin. In the 14<sup>th</sup> section of “On the Concept of History,” Benjamin writes: “History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now. Thus, to Robespierre ancient Rome was a past charged with the time of the now which he blasted out of the continuum of history” (*Illuminations* 261).<sup>10</sup> This leap into the past, which can be misappropriated by a ruling class (in Benjamin’s use), provides the same foundation for Cardoza’s work from a position both of power and of weakness. In effect, he opens the text from the position of privilege and closes it from a position of resistance. In either case, however, he is directed by the struggle between the nation and its cultural space, mediated by the conjunction of his politics, his exile, and the political struggle governing the nation. I would argue that even more significant than any of these elements is the spatial relationship he holds with Guatemala.

This mediation through space becomes most clear through the larger reflection on the divide between *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano* and *La Revolución Guatemalteca*, where the sweeping view of the cultural significance of Guatemala becomes replaced immediately by the precise detailing of the failure of the Revolution. It is placed in much broader causal detail, however, within *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano* itself. The text’s third chapter, concerning what is effectively a labor history of the

---

<sup>10</sup> This text was originally translated into English as “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” the title by which it is better known. In the original Benjamin writes: “Die Geschichte ist Gegenstand einer Konstruktion, deren Ort nicht homogene und leere Zeit sondern die von Jetztzeit erfüllte bildet. So war für Robespierre das antike Rom eine mit Jetztzeit geladene Vergangenheit, die er aus dem Kontinuum der Geschichte herausprenge” (*GS I*: 701). The emphasis on the “Jetztzeit,” or “now-time,” of history, gives emphasis to the view of “whole language,” which likewise reinforces the notion present here, of the impossibility of understanding either the past or the historical or literary text through any view but that of the present. It is precisely through this constellating of the past that the present is given shape and meaning.

nation, indicates in its fourth section, on “La revolución liberal en 1871,” the first evidence of the end of the later Guatemalan Revolution. Cardoza writes: “La sujeción del campesino se hizo más violenta y se fortaleció la economía de una pequeña clase social que vive del trabajo de la inmensa mayoría. (La Revolución de Octubre de 1944, con la reforma agraria, empezaba a modificar a fondo esta situación” (329).

Here it is significant to mention that Cardoza’s reference to the 1944 Revolution refers to the entirety of the revolutionary period, and not merely to its opening stages.<sup>11</sup> He proceeds to discuss the presence of a *latifundio* within the context of the 1871 reforms which remained intact following them, and in consequence:

Nació parte de una nueva feroz oligarquía que, a la postre, fue la que combatió la destruida Revolución de octubre de 1944-junio de 1954. El “liberalismo” ratero de los autócratas se tornó radicalmente reaccionario y, en casos, peor que el conservatismo, porque entregó al país al capital monopolista yanqui que ha dirigido nuestra vida. (330)

The historical grounding of the text, that takes not only a subjective but also a diachronic understanding of history, becomes overt here where it was largely implied before. The author speaks of a chain of causality leading from the rise of the landholding classes in Guatemala beginning with the *conquista*, through attempted liberal reforms in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and to the events surrounding the land reforms of the Guatemalan Revolution in the 1950s.

The consequence of the end of the Revolution in 1954 is paramount in *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano* largely in terms of the outlook the text provides at its close. With no clear knowledge of how Cardoza intended to

---

<sup>11</sup> Decreto 900, also known as the Ley de Reforma Agraria, was passed by Jacobo Árbenz in 1952. It legislated the redistribution of lands owned by the UFCO, but not being utilized for the growing of crops, to indigenous landowners. All new landowners were required to use the land for agrarian purposes and actively produce their crop, or face the land being redistributed to new landowners. For as much as Cardoza discusses the Revolution as a marked event in *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano*, *La Revolución Guatemalteca* provides a clearer sense of the development of this and related laws, as well as the response to them by the United States. He states at the opening of this later work: “En este libro encontrará el lector tres capítulos sobre la revolución guatemalteca (20 de octubre 1944-27 de junio 1954) detenida hoy momentáneamente” (9). In this regard, there is a sense of eventuality and a recognition of the progressive nature of the development of the revolutionary period that is not made as clear in *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano*.



complete the work prior to the Castillo Armas invasion, it is difficult to comprehend the entirety of its effect upon the work. It is, however, impossible to discount the abundance of direct references to the Revolution and to Castillo Armas, and its effect upon the agrarian and territorial identity of the nation following 1954. Cardoza closes the third chapter merely 12 pages after the first reference to the end of the Revolution, ending the chapter with a discussion of the effects of the invasion upon nation and indigeneity:

La historia de la conciencia de lo indígena en Guatemala nos demostraría la debilidad de su integración como nación. No ha sido una nación: ha sido un feudo. Lo actual se comprende vagamente mientras no se conozca que la estrecha relación que existe con el pasado no es la lógica y normal. Este pasado no es pasado, sino parcialmente: es presente, y está vivo, muy vivo entre nosotros y en nosotros. Por ello deslizamos con tanta sencillez en el tiempo y, para mayor claridad, juzgué conveniente no evitarlo ni buscarlo, sino ceder al declive natural. Ceder a la realidad. (341-42)

The attempt at closure within this passage draws an explicit connection that triangulates between Cardoza, the indigenous population, and the nation. The break with the nation, which here appears explicit, is thus implied for the author who struggles to connect with a nation that no longer exists for him. He is thus left with a lack of spatial consciousness, which he initially derives from the link between the indigenous population and the land. As he establishes clearly at the text's opening, the nation can only exist through this link, and thus it has failed to materialize spatially with the end of the agrarian reforms in 1954.

#### *The Narrator and the Narrative as the Land*

The poetic foundation of Cardoza's work appears consistently within its first chapter, as he details his return. His emphasis in the later sections on indigenous literature, such as the *Popol Vuh* or the *Libro de Chilam Balam*, reinforces the absolute link between indigenous poetry and the nation, yet as the central poetic figure of the text, his own place within this construction is likewise established. He writes of the memory of the nation and the lost paradise he finds there, stating:

La aspiro profundamente. Mi aliento se impregna de olor de Guatemala: caoba y tierra mojada. Sobre el pecho, un haz de maíz y

floreillas silvestres. Soñamos juntos sobre la misma almohada, estrella caída a mi lado. En ella nazco y desemboco. Soy la tierra misma de mi tierra. (25)

We find here the central passage of the text's opening, where Cardoza indicates that there is no land or nation without his own presence within Guatemala. It is not so much a statement of the primacy of the poet or his value as a detailer of the nation, or a claim of his centrality in dictating national identity for other Guatemalans. Here Cardoza establishes both the foundational identity of the nation, as one rooted absolutely within the land, and the mediating presence, the poet, that enables the land and the nation to become one.

Following the Castillo Armas invasion, the text's fourth chapter returns once again to the nation, now less in territorial terms and more as a product of ethnic and cultural identity. Here the author makes direct reference to the year 1955, and it appears to have been composed entirely following the Revolutionary period. In this section, he turns to the colonial history of Guatemala, focusing on the treatment of the indigenous population by the Spanish, and the subsequent exploitation administered by the Spanish crown. The framework of colonial exploitation, however, presents less a colonial history of the nation than a dialectical foundation for the role of the nation in dictating the ontological identity of its population. In this penultimate chapter of the book, Cardoza turns once again to the land, here not extolling the variegated geographical and natural wealth of the country, but understanding that there is no Guatemala without the link between the land and the indigenous population. He addresses this specifically in the second section of the chapter: "nada es verdaderamente nuestro si olvidamos u ocultamos la tierra firme de lo indígena" (371). Such a claim turns immediately back to the relationship between the indigenous and the land stated in the second chapter, addressing the cultural legacy of the indigenous population: "El hombre y el maíz aparecen juntos, como condición *sine qua non* para la vida" (113). This contrast reveals the idea of loss that the end of the Revolution brings about: for the indigenous population there is no fundamental separation between the land (and what it produces) and the individual inhabiting that land; the end of the Revolution and thus of

agrarian reform has exposed a crucial break between the land and its population.

To further expose this context, the sense of time that emerges through the history of the nation is severed through the link between land and population. In connection with ideas of labor, Cardoza writes: “Para el indígena el tiempo no existe, casi no tiene valor alguno” (378). He continues: “La tierra es fundamental, abrirla para sembrar maíz y frijol, que constituirán la ayuda mayor cada año.... Como el maíz, como las estaciones, viven sometidos a la rutina año con año” (379). Indeed, the indigenous population survives within a cycle of time, and thus is not bound to the changes imposed by the construction of an abstract civilization, or one that necessitates a turn to a new form of labor not bound to the land. The historical framing of *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano* begins with the *conquista*, but more powerful for the Guatemalan people is the mythic world housed in the cultural production of the nation.

The broken link between land and the indigenous population appears seemingly irrevocable through the fourth chapter in the text. Where Cardoza once spoke of an absolute sense of national identity as part of the geographic integrity of the country, rooted within those places free of the control of the UFCO, he now explains that there is no nation to be found: “Cuando nos democraticemos y los indígenas sean de nuevo los protagonistas de la historia, Guatemala contará como nación” (384). Tied to this nation, however, is a sense of cultural homogeneity that he finds essential in the establishment of the nation’s ontology. This identity grows increasingly nuanced in its presentation, furthermore, as he contrasts the potential embodied by the Guatemalan Revolution with the course the nation was on prior to and following the Arévalo and Árbenz presidencies:

Con la Reforma Agraria, el país habría tomado ruta conocida: se habría atenuado el espantoso contraste entre opulencia y miseria.... Se encaminaba la creación de una nación homogénea, con su acento no en lo rudimentario y pintoresco, sino en presencias que sobrepasan tales limitaciones. Los factores dominantes, las necesidades que crean y las relaciones de sus mecanismos, están cambiando la estructura de los mercados regionales, de los medios de vida del guatemalteco. (388)

This claim establishes a contrast between the economic homogeneity that agrarian reform intended to implement, specifically through control of the land, and the cultural homogeneity enforced by the dominant power structures, which in turn threaten to diminish the identity of groups such as the Quiché, the Cakchiquel, and the Kekchí, as the text indicates immediately after. What is proposed, then, is the emergence of a nationalism that is fundamentally rooted in cultural localism, while at the same time enforcing a macroeconomic plan of economic restructuring. As he writes on the following page: “Creo, más bien, en cambiar la cultura dominante de los terratenientes por medio de la transformación de las bases económicas semif feudales” (389).

*From Territorial to Spatial Exile*

The nationalism contained in *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano* ties strongly to the cultural identity of the nation, a move that is not surprising due to Cardoza’s affinity for the indigenous population and his attempts to place himself on the same level as that group. This ideal of nationalism, one that is simultaneously its pre-Columbian civilization and the poet himself determines his identity as constantly mediated by ideas of cultural space and physical presence. The implication of this turn corresponds to what Balibar describes as “fictive ethnicity,” which is “not purely and simply identical with the *ideal nation* which is the object of patriotism, but it is indispensable to it, for, without it, the nation would appear precisely only as an idea or an arbitrary abstraction” (96). The desired union of population with nation provides for an identity that Cardoza utilizes to subvert the Castillo Armas government, wresting any notion of Guatemala out of the hands of the civil structure and placing it firmly on the control of the land. The subversion of this move appears at the close of the text, yet the Cardoza of the book’s opening is not so nuanced as he attempts to trace the link between indigenous culture, land reform, and the political circumstance that enabled the restoration of land and native culture. What opens as a patriotic treatise closes as a condemnation of Guatemala as nation.

The author makes plain mention through the text’s close of the profound effect of the Revolution’s failure for the indigenous population,

yet it clearly had a convoluted effect on the poet as well. It draws his exile into stark contrast with the idea of nation as metaphor for territory. In other words, Cardoza is not at all consistent with respect to the territorial conflicts facing the exiled figure, and this inconsistency is rooted as much in the altered mindset that accompanies the end of the Revolution as in any deliberate inconsistency on his part. The physicality of this shift is perhaps most jarring, as he places his entrance into Guatemala and subsequently into Antigua so prominently in the opening of the text. The starkest point of change occurs in the final and briefest chapter of the work, titled “Dije lo que he vivido.” It appears almost as an afterthought, a scant 10 pages in a 400-plus page work, with its own dedication (“*Para Lya*”), and focuses almost entirely on Cardoza himself. For one last time, it presents a focus on his relationship to the nation and the centrality of the author within the text, and it is here that his relationship to the position of the exiled figure and the shaping of nation through spatial and geographic constructs comes into clearest focus. He writes of his feelings toward Guatemala: “Desterrado en mi patria, sin salir de ella,” and shortly after: “No sólo hay que vivir lo que se escribe sino hay que sufrirlo. Necesidad absoluta de una patria, de mi tierra mía y su imprescindible función ecuménica” (415) Cardoza’s feelings of distance from the spirit of the nation linked to the loss of land by the indigenous population and the struggle of that population to maintain its cultural heritage while at the same time struggling under the weight of foreign intervention and local indifference, likewise establishes itself here as a question of geography, facing any inner exile. Even when physically within the nation, he feels cut off from what he comprehends as Guatemala, and it is that continual longing for a nation that might accept him as its own that strikes so hard at him.

The crucial claim, though, that he continues to reside in Guatemala even following the end of the Revolution, when we know that he had already returned to Mexico prior to the Castillo Armas invasion, displays the break between the territorial identity of the nation, and the spatial or cultural comprehension of that nation. His cultural connection with Guatemala appears strong even prior to his return in 1944, in particular through his experiences in Paris in the 1920s and the affinity he found with

the indigenous population. The beginnings of the Guatemalan Revolution appears to have awoken even further in him the yearning for the homeland, and to have united his cultural longing with the territorial conception of Guatemala; he was able to turn the cultural space of the nation into the place he desired to repossess. On a broader scale, the revolutionary government restored the link between the territorial Guatemala (the land) with the cultural Guatemala (the indigenous population), and Cardoza himself could then follow suit. As he describes in *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano*, the nation's struggle since the colonial period to restore land to the indigenous population had never reached a point of potential until the election of Arévalo, and from this point, its potential for union remained intact, even when the anger over the Revolution's failure dominated his mind. The restoration of Guatemala thus exists in dialectical form, as a synthesis of culture and territory, establishing the specific place of the writer as one that is always synonymous with Guatemala. The Revolution mediated the struggle that faced the nation for the preceding four centuries, and the author in turn mediates his own relationship to the nation upon his return. He remains in Guatemala in perpetuity, exiled but still within his homeland, even when residing in a place that is not Guatemala. As he would state in "¿Qué es ser guatemalteco?" decades later: "El exiliado nunca pierde su tierra. La lleva consigo, más que en la memoria en la imaginación. La imaginada es íntima y sutil, por real y por imaginada. Nunca concluimos de recorrerla; nunca nos fatigamos de crearla" (*El Río* 785).

### Bibliography

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. Revised edition. London: Verso, 2006.
- Balibar, Etienne and Wallerstein, Immanuel. *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, trans. Chris Turner. London: Verso, 1991.

- Cardoza y Aragón, Luis. *La Revolución Guatemalteca*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Cuadernos Americanos, 1955.
- . *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1965.
- . *Guatemala con una piedra adentro*. México: Editorial Nueva Imagen, 1983.
- . *El Río, novelas de caballería*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1986.
- . *Tierra de belleza compulsiva*, comp. Alberto Enríquez Perea. México: El Nacional, 1991.
- Eagleton, Terry. *Exiles and Émigrés: Studies in Modern Literature*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1970.
- . *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. Malden: Blackwell, 1990.
- Korzybski, Alfred. *General Semantics Seminar 1937*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, ed. Homer J. Moore, Jr. Brooklyn: Institute of General Semantics, 2002.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. Malden: Blackwell, 1991.
- . *State, Space, World: Selected Essays*, ed. Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden, trans. Gerald Moore, Neil Brenner, and Stuart Elden. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.
- Liano, Dante. *Visión crítica de la literatura guatemalteca*. Guatemala: Editorial Universitaria, Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, 1997.
- López Álvarez, Luis. *Conversaciones con Miguel Ángel Asturias*. Ciudad Universitaria “Rodrigo Facio,” Costa Rica: EDUCA, 1976.
- Marroquín Rojas, Clemente. *El mundo de la polémica*. Guatemala: Tipografía Nacional, 1971.
- Méndez de Penedo, Lucrecia. *Memorie contracorrente: El Río. Novelas de caballería di Luis Cardoza y Aragón*. Rome: Bulzoni, 2001.
- Tischler Visquerra, Sergio. *Guatemala 1944: Crisis y Revolución, Ocaso y quiebre de una forma estatal*. Second Edition. Guatemala: F&G Editores, 2001.
- Tuan, Yi-Fu. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977.

- Valdés Ugalde, José Luis. *Estados Unidos, Intervención y poder mesiánico: La guerra fría en Guatemala, 1954*. México: Instituto de Investigaciones Jurídicas/Centro de Investigaciones sobre América del Norte, 2004.
- White, George W. *Nation, State, and Territory: Origins, Evolution, and Relationships, Volume 1*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004.
- Zimmerman, Marc. *Literature and Resistance in Guatemala Volume 1: Theory, History, Fiction, and Poetry*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1995.
- Zimmerman, Marc and Rojas, Raúl, eds. *Voices from the Silence: Guatemalan Literature of Resistance*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1998.