

Rewriting on the basis of the Regional and Local Historiography: “Carazo, center of Nicaragua”

by Manuel Meza Fernández

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Summary

This essay is a review of the book “Carazo, center of Nicaragua” by Manuel Meza Fernández, local historian from Jinotepe, Carazo. An overall comparison of scripture from a positivist tradition that permeates the book and a tendency for Regional Studies is done. It is not however, to say that a trend is better than the other, but to propose from the regional studies, a new way of understanding history, in which society as a whole feels identified, but also, understood in its relationships with the environment.

Introduction

“The integrated study of man and nature allows us to treat one of the eternal contradictions of history: man’s struggle with nature, to provide the resources that reproduce life”.

Mares Sorhegui

With this statement, which is part of the regional and local historiography, it is clear that history should not be limited to partial trends, but must come to the understanding of human beings in a totalizing way, as an integrating part of the context, in which it interacts and also establishes economic, political, cultural and social links in order to survive and coexist.

However, it is necessary to specify that the origin of the regional and local historiography, has its roots in the historiography from the French School of the *Annales*, whose focus was the study of space and its relationship with humans. This conception of history is echoed from the 60’s, after the Second World War where the localization tends to be magnified and the man-space-time relationship is considered.

Following this premise, this critical essay also considers that this approach to regional history can help improve the understanding of the regional characteristics of Carazo, regarding the evolution of the history of Nicaragua in its various fields; political, economic, etc. or

even one of them in particular.

On the other hand, if the Nicaraguan history books or any other of its territories in particular are analyzed carefully, we will be able to demonstrate, as in the case that concerns us, that this holistic man-space-time relationship is not established, therefore, the main objective of the essay is to set some guidelines for how we could rewrite, from regional and local history, Carazo's history, written by Manuel Meza Fernandez.

About the author and his work

Meza Manuel Fernandez is a native of Jinotepe, head of Carazo, Nicaragua. Born in 1917, journalist, poet and prominent historian of the municipality, also recognized by the local government in 2001. He wrote for anti-imperialist magazines¹, which caused him to be imprisoned several times under the rule of the Somoza's dictatorship in Nicaragua.

His love for Jinotepe, led him to write the history not only of his municipality, but also Carazo's. However, his work is influenced, as can be seen along the text- by romantic historiography of the late nineteenth century, which exalted nationalism, although in this particular case "localism", is understood in the context of the book, as the strong identification with his birthplace.

Meza Fernandez's work consists of many transcriptions of primary documents such as: fragments of several chronic like those of Oviedo or Ayón- governmental agreements for the demarcation of boundaries in Carazo as a new department, the judgment which ratifies such an agreement, the statement of Jinotepe's transition to a village and then to a city; other supporting documents such as news about events of great importance as the overtaking of Jinotepe's barracks during Somoza's dictatorship, inaugural speeches of important buildings of the municipality, list of important people of the town as lawyers, doctors, musicians, etc.

In this sense, there is no doubt that the information is a lot valuable, but with inaccuracies, namely: temporal and spatial location of the facts, context, trade networks, forms of exchange, the use of the physical environment such as rivers or roads, etc. In addition, it should be emphasized Meza Fernandez's approach in the study of the town, from an isolated understanding of the different aspects of the history of Carazo.

As an example

Here are three examples taken literally from "Carazo, center of Nicaragua", which will be discussed at first and then rewritten on the basis of local and regional historiography although in a limited way, due to reasons of space-in a second moment.

First moment: analyzing

Example 1. Book's subtopic: Going back to his oldest time.

A fertile soil, drinking water sources. Abundant and varied raw material to build with. One of the best climates in the country. All of this came from the niquiranos, the foundation of Jinotepe. Mexican voice was spread to this region. Hunger and randomly made them search for the father corn. They are fleeing from the drought. 350 leagues left behind. Meeting with the natural. Those from Mexico remained and settled, accustomed to see what population

¹ 1931: He wrote for the anti-imperialist Mexican magazine "La Patria Grande" in defense of General of free men and women Augusto C. Sandino, for which he is arrested by the contabularia and is taken prisoner to the prison in Managua. *On the cover.*
1945: He is editor of "Apie", organ of the Association of Journalists of Carazo. He was arrested for covering the arrival of President Rios to Nicaragua to participate in the November 10 uprising against the Somoza dictatorship. *On the cover.*

of nahuales of the language of Mexico was there. (Meza Fernández, 2002, p. 46)

This paragraph cannot escape the mind questions like: What is the type of soil or climate of the region that describes? What language family exactly is meant by the “Mexican voice”? Who is “the corn father” or “the natural”? ¿Did they found Jinotepe or a place which would be later called Jinotepe? Why did they stay in what is now Carazo and not anywhere else in the country? This field of questions and others, I consider, could help a better understanding of the population in this area.

Example 2. Book’s subtopic: Political Life (Meza Fernández, 2002, pages. 28-45)

Transcribe the following documents:

- Territorial limits
- The agreement on November 17, pointing out the territorial limits between Villa de Jinotepe and Santa Teresa.
- Governmental Agreements approving the demarcation of the limits in Villa de Jinotepe.
- Legislative decree about the electoral quarters in Jinotepe.
- Decree in which Jinotepe District is chosen under the name of Carazo.

In this subtopic is the intact content of the documents listed, although in each, the dates and in some cases the places are mentioned, there is no reference -in documents- about who the president of the country was, then or what their political leanings were or who handled such political-administrative divisions and further, the reasons that led to this decision and the criteria for natural, political, social, cultural or commercial delimitations.

Example 3. Subtopic: Carazo had a train

On April 29 the traffic to Jinotepe was opened and on May 1899, the route to Diriamba with 44 kilometers long was inaugurated; although the engineer Jose del Carmen Muñoz, Director of Public Works, received the work in question, the event was attended by J. Santos Zelaya, President of the Republic... The station was wooden floor all the way around the house, here the couples called the “in love” ... They had sales of candies, offered by some boys of the trade: rice pudding, caramel, motajamol and bread... Currently, the railroad disappeared, it was sold as scrap. (Meza Fernández, 2002, p. 140)

Despite this narrative, it is interesting from a regional perspective, allowing us to view everyday life and even feel represented in this story, however prospects who devised and managed the construction of the railway, they should have been of higher dimensions. Surely, these people were thinking in responding to trade and development needs of the country or particular social sectors.

Moreover, the author of “Carazo, Center of Nicaragua” concludes this subtopic with the statement “Today the railroad disappeared, was sold as scrap,” but: Sold by whom? What was it sold for? Under the government of what political trend? How did the sale of the train affect the trade?

Finally, this essay could be completed through many examples as the ones described, but to achieve the main objective of this work which is to provide guidelines for rewriting “Carazo, Center of Nicaragua” from a regional and local approach, not only locally. It will be referred to

a fundamental concept: “The Environment” term that is opposed to the position of the romantic and positivist historiography denied by the French historian Hipólito Tainte (1828-1893) and Paul Vidal de la Blanche (1845-1918) cited by Garcia Ballesteros (1983), who defined the overall environment as the interrelationship between man and the space in time.

It should be noted in any case, that this relationship is not simply the use of natural resources for the survival of man, as it was clarified at the beginning of the essay, but it must be understood on the one hand, this man as a social subject, changing, with new needs and of course with new knowledge and skills; and secondly, to natural space, with resources or resistance in ongoing evolution, sometimes by natural processes and sometimes by human impact. But, despite understanding both components and their characteristics, we must also view them in an integrated way, linked to each other, and within specified times.

In this sense, we must understand Carazo not only as the center of Nicaragua, but as a particular mean, but that is located within a broader context. But how do we explain to this region from the key concept in which has been manifested? Well, we will try to make an approach from the previous examples:

Second moment: Rewriting

Example 1. Book Subtopic: Going back to its old time

Carazo’s history, if he want to understand it from a regionally approach does not begin with its settlement, it certainly has more remote history, which refers to Incer (2011), president of the Academy of Geography and History of Nicaragua, when he says the Pacific emerged from the seabed, becoming part of a primitive continent stretching from Yucatan to the Antilles, about 60 million years ago and more recently in the last million years, lakes and volcanoes were formed. (2011)

This explains at the outset that Carazo, just for being part of the Pacific of Nicaragua has soils, younger than other parts of the country as the region of “Las Segovias”². In addition, Pacific soils are volcanic, so they are fertile and suitable for agriculture. Incer expands us in the explanation of the soils in the Pacific when he says that they contain soluble salts and minerals expelled from the interior of the earth, along with its loamy (not too clayey or very sandy); Likewise, it should be noted the regularity of the relief in the city, which as part of a plateau, is known as “La Caraceña”.

The features described about the soil and other reasons that due to lack of space, are not discussed in this essay were those that led to the first immigrants to settle in this space, which is very similar to the “Anahuac” valley, where they came from. Simultaneously, it helps to understand why they did not initially placed in the central region or the Caribbean, which has very different characteristics to which they were accustomed.

Example 2. Book Subtopic: Political Life

The documents contained in the book are interesting, but each of them has an intention that the author does not explain. Also, they are not located in a historic time, but in the content of the documents, some dates are mentioned, for example, in the agreement, dividing the towns of Jinotepe and Santa Teresa, published dates from 1866; in the legislative decree, which Jinotepe becomes constituency of Granada, it is dated 1883; and in the deed of the public land, the

² Original name that was assigned to the geographic región of the “Northern Part” of Nicaragua, currently that region is formed by the following departments: Jinotega, Madriz, Nueva Segovia, and Estelí.

date of 1892 arises.

These data is located quickly in the late nineteenth century, under the period of 30 years of conservative government in Nicaragua, when coffee cultivation was at its peak and Carazo was the quintessential coffee in the country, especially the territory from Diriamba, Jinotepe and San Marcos, better known as the “Triangulo de Oro” for growing grain.

The production of this crop is closely related to the document “Ejidos” in which it is stated that an amount of 7,300 rods were donated to the prefecture of Carazo in 1982, at the request of the prefect and sub-delegate of Finance Camilo Zuniga .

But this donation was, according Kinloch Tijerina (2012), to be sold to medium and small producers worth 38 pesos per block, for those benefited in relation to his salary rising from 30 to 45 cents a day. According to the same author, between 1877 and 1902 the state gave to the municipalities of Carazo plateau 11,393 blocks as public land.

However, the favorable situation changed rapidly for the small and medium coffee producers for two reasons: changes in the international price of this product and population growth, which led to medium and small producers to sell their land or, the worst case, they were removed due to debt, which consequently provoked to change from a balanced land tenure to a large state situation and a sharper social inequality. So far, it is noticeable that the policy of the suburbs in the short term, it was always intended to benefit the large landowners, who had the resources and technologies for massive production of coffee.

Example 3. Subtopic: Carazo had a railway

Meza Fernandez mentioned in the body of the book the productive activities of the city in the late nineteenth century. In this regard he writes:

- *Jinotepe: ... of sturdy agricultural tradition ... has since the mid-nineteenth century, commercial agronomic movement ... since its inception in coffee cultivation, to which devotes priority attention and increases each day to form the basis of the national economy.*
- *Diriamba: the highest part of the plateau ... bases its economy on coffee production.*
- *San Marcos: strong center of activity during the coffee harvest season is the result of its main financial effort within the agricultural line.*

The author mentions in the book other trade products such as livestock or sugarcane, but what prevails in the towns of Carazo and in Nicaragua as an export-like product was “coffee”; but what does this have to do with the railroad? This is a question that Meza Fernandez did not wonder, since in his work he refers to them in isolation.

Then, considering the high production of coffee, it became necessary, to take coffee out of the farms to brokerages and then to seaports where they would be exported internationally from. This indicates that the transport to international markets was not direct, but the railway was used during its transportation in the country.

From here, you can notice the need to integrate network space through trade or to study space, as it is defined by the human geography: “one economic variable,” but trying to go further. One could understand this unification of space not only from a commercial point of view, but politically and ideologically, as the latter stretches of railway in Carazo, were built under the dictatorship of the Somozas, who owned much of the farms coffee in the region.

Moreover, Fernandez matches Meza Romero and others (2010) when they say that in the late nineteenth century the roads were in a significant delay and that the ways of Nicaragua were mule paths. However, for Meza Fernandez, after the railroad, the economy and lifestyle of Carazo's population improved; and immediately the question of whose economy the existence of the railroad came to benefit?

To answer this, we must take into account factors such as power relations of social classes but not from a Marxist tradition, but from a subaltern approach³; other products generated in the region, such as sugar cane in the town of Santa Teresa; or producing salt and fishing settlements of the Pacific coast; relations that existed between the people of these low economic areas and separated from trading activities with the residents of the upper part of the department that developed around the railroad, among other areas.

In conclusion

Trying to explain the history of man without the interaction with their environment, would only leads us, as it has happened so far- to partialize history towards a sector (political, social, religious) of the population. Meanwhile, the environment cannot be understood without the evolution of man in time.

In this sense, we can say that the work of Manuel Meza Fernandez, is full of valuable information, which is also inspiring, but through an approach like that of the regional and local historiography, could help Carazo's population to fully rediscover themselves, to know who they are, where they come from, what their potential is based on the context in which they are currently living, etc.

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³ It's a field of academic specialization, near to the post colonialism, began in India by Ranaji Guha in 1982.