Bleeding Mud:
The Testimonial Poetry of Hurricane Mitch in Nicaragua

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> *This is how one pictures the angel of history. . . . Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.*
> *—Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (257-58)*

The year 1998 held the distinction as the warmest year on record when a strong El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) exacerbated planetary heat brought on by global warming.[1] The ENSO of 1997-1998 brought extreme weather to Central America in the forms of drought and excess rain before ending in crescendo in late October with Hurricane Mitch. Mitch was the first of nine Category 5 Atlantic hurricanes generated within a decade. Climatologists generally consider these millennial superstorms as harbingers of the warming ocean temperatures that accompany climate change.

In Nicaragua and Honduras, Mitch left an estimated 11,000 people dead, another 11,000 missing, and almost 3 million homeless.[2] Although the hurricane made landfall in Honduras, which suffered the largest loss of life and property, Nicaragua was lashed by Mitch's stalled rainbands, causing massive flooding, mudslides, water-related diseases, and the fear of erupting volcanoes. In this small nation of only 5 million people, an estimated 70% of the infrastructure was destroyed along with 30% of the nation's crops. Some 3,800 people were killed, 20% of Nicaraguans lost their homes, and economic damage totaled $1.5 billion.

Due to a number of coalescing environmental, political, and economic factors, Mitch presented itself as the proverbial "perfect storm" in Nicaragua. Nicaragua was particularly vulnerable to flash flooding because its months of drought earlier in the year prevented the hard soil from absorbing the water. Damaged soil and deforestation due to slash-and-burn farming and industrial agriculture also intensified Nicaragua's flood susceptibility.[4] Further aggravating the crisis, the post-war Chamorro and Alemán governments never implemented any kind of coordinated national emergency management system because of anti-

Sandinista prejudice and austerity measures imposed by national and international politics. Government warnings and aid came too late or never at all.[5]

In addition to unearthing thousands of landmines from Nicaragua's recent civil war, Mitch also uncovered emotional trauma from the conflict. Painful memories of scarcity and violence resurfaced when the conservative Arnoldo Alemán government withheld aid from affected areas, especially the predominantly Sandinista departments of Estelí and Matagalpa, which were among the hardest hit. Alemán's efforts to distance himself from and even punish Sandinista leadership exacerbated the human misery caused by Hurricane Mitch (Olson, et. al.). By initially downplaying Mitch's devastation and refusing to declare a state of national emergency, Alemán later capitalized on the disaster by taxing and embezzling foreign aid and using it to blackmail local Sandinista governments. His government's punitive indifference—combined with an acute lack of food, medicine, potable water, electricity, telecommunication lines, and transportation—contributed to fears of political instability and distrust reminiscent of the war years of the 1980s.

The trauma of Hurricane Mitch stirred up memories of past traumas that had afflicted Nicaragua in recent decades, specifically "terremotos, expropiación de tierras, violaciones, asesinatos por violencia social y sobre todo, los duelos de la guerra de liberación y post revolución" (González, n.pag.) 'earthquakes, land expropriation, rapes, murders due to social violence and, above all, wounds from the war of liberation and post-revolution.'[6] As Nicaraguans tried to process what had happened to them in the worst national crisis since the Contra War, many turned to the literary genre of *testimonio* and testimonial poetry, which had given thousands of Nicaraguans a form with which to express war trauma with word and image a little over a decade before. In 1999 and 2012, Managua psychologist Josefina Murillo published collections of *testimonios* from survivors of Mitch; a collection of testimonies from Mitch was included in a 1999 NACLA Report on the Americas (Maldonado); and in 1999 the Comisión Nacional de Promoción y Defensa de los Derechos del Niño y la Niña de Nicaragua 'National Commission of the Promotion and Defense of Children's Rights of Nicaragua' published a book of drawings, writings, and photographs created by children affected by the disaster. To date no testimonial poetry from Mitch has been anthologized, but the significant number of isolated Mitch poems cited in this article demonstrate that poetry served as an important literary medium for Nicaraguans working through the personal and collective traumas wrought by this natural disaster.

Examining a sample of poetry written in response to Hurricane Mitch, this article reveals the dimensions of testimonial poetry as both literary genre and palimpsestic site of collective memory that can be re-inscribed when political and ecological traumas collide. Although the purpose—at least at one level—of these poems is to bear witness to Mitch's devastation, their extreme despair and

destruction set Mitch poetry apart from earlier Sandinista testimonial poetry, as if overflowing the banks of its simple *exteriorista* 'exteriorist' aesthetic.[7] With its massive flooding and mudslides, the hurricane redefines Nicaraguan testimonial poetry much like it did the Nicaraguan landscape. What results is a "muddy" testimonial poetry that underlines the need for new forms—both aesthetic and ethical—for expressing and confronting the perfect storms that will continue to punctuate the "slow violence" (ecocritic Rob Nixon's term) of global climate change.

Poetry carries a strong tradition in Nicaragua, which was home to the father of Latin American *modernismo*, the poet Rubén Darío, and a vibrant vanguard movement during the first half of the twentieth century. During the 1980s, thousands of Nicaraguans embraced poetry as a creative way to explore their newfound literacy, as well as express *campesino* 'peasant' and guerrilla experiences. Together with Costa Rican poet Mayra Jiménez, Nicaraguan poet Ernesto Cardenal, who served as the Sandinista Minister of Culture from 1980-87, dispatched dozens of poetry workshops across the country to democratize literary culture, encouraging newly literate *campesinos* to write *exteriorista* verse, making poetry accessible to everyone. Following this tradition, the non-governmental organization Redd Barnna (now Save the Children—Norway) financed creative workshops in the month after Mitch to help community responders grieve and heal from their post-traumatic stress (González).[8]

Reinforcing the democratic ideals of the Sandinista project, early workshop poetry was made available to the masses through inexpensive media. Workshops used mimeographs as low-cost ways to publish and disseminate poems, and regular, inexpensive poetry journals, such as *Ventana* ("Window"), *Nicaragáuac* ("Nicaragua Nahuatl"), and the artisanally produced *Poesía Libre* ("Free Poetry"), were published by the Ministry of Culture. Poems were also declaimed daily in public spaces and over Sandinista radio so that poetry, spoken or sung, became the soundtrack of the Revolution.[9] Mitch poetry carried on this tradition of popular dissemination by taking advantage of the Internet. Whereas well-known poets Claribel Alegría, Gioconda Belli, and Helena Ramos published their Mitch poems in books, other Mitch poems appeared in digitally archived national newspapers (Ariel Montoya's "Huracán" ("Hurricane") appeared in *La Prensa* ("The Press"); Germán Cerda Reyes's "Dios y el Huracán Mitch" ("God and Hurricane Mitch") in *El Nuevo Diario* ("The New Daily"), and others were published on blogs (Mari-Cruz Mañas Peñalver, Germán Hernández, Francesc, Erick Martí). Some, such as Jorge Eduardo Arellano's "El desborde de la muerte" ("Overflowing Death") remain unpublished and circulate only among friends.

As Cardenal explained in an interview with Kent Johnson, the concrete, colloquial poetry of the workshops "lends itself to transmit a political or social theme much more naturally than a poetry which is abstract, introspective [and]

hermetic" (Johnson 14). Perhaps due to this political inclination, the Sandinista poetry workshops seem to have naturally incorporated *testimonio*, another literary genre integral to 1970s and 80s revolutionary movements.[10] Jiménez discusses the organic relationship between workshop poetry and *testimonio*:

> The poets . . . in the workshops are young people who have participated in the war. The experience that forms the major emotional burden at this time is still closely related to what was going on before, during and after the war. . . . That's the way these young people write. . . . They're searching for a testimonial form they can use to express in poetry their most recent experiences. (qtd. in White 111-12)

Although Nicaraguan poetry began to shift away from *exteriorismo* and testimonial aesthetics in the 1990s, the need for a testimonial poetic form during and after Hurricane Mitch signaled a return—albeit brief and somewhat evolved—to this early revolutionary poetics that had made lyric expression available to the masses during the Contra War. Belli implies this poetic return in her poem, "Canción de cuna para un país suelto en llanto" ("Lullaby for a Country Overflowing with Tears"), when she alludes to her 1978 poem, "Nicaragua agua fuego" ("Nicaragua Water Fire"), as well as "Nicaragua Nicaragüita" ("Nicaragua, Little Nicaragua"), one of the most beloved revolutionary songs of Carlos Mejía Godoy.

Like workshop testimonial poetry, Mitch poems assume a tone of urgency, but this urgency is rooted not so much in the state of emergency itself, but in the emotional response to it. Indeed, these texts seek to communicate a common sense of desperation and even resignation, with only Gioconda Belli expressing signs of hope at the end of her "Canción de cuna." Arellano, for example, cites "una resignada tristeza desgarradora y muda" (12) 'a resigned sadness, heartbreaking and mute' among the debris in the floodwaters. Belli questions who will sing a lullaby to Nicaragua "para apaciguarte / para que volvás a tener fe" (30-31) 'to soothe you / so you may have faith again.' Despite the desperation that is documented in Mitch poetry, this poetry does not trend towards the abject disillusionment and cynicism that characterizes much of Central American post-war writing from the 1990s and 2000s.[11] It is a poetry of collective trauma and grief.

Another predominant theme in 1980s Sandinista workshop poetry was nature, which, like war, was an integral experience to rural *campesino* life. To this end, Jiménez states that "a permanent feature [of workshop poetry] is the presence of nature: the names of trees, rivers, and birds" (qtd. in White 110). This element, which begs an ecocritical approach to workshop poetry, also positions the genre of testimonial poetry to accommodate the experience of Hurricane Mitch, when

nature became a cruel, crazed menace. As we shall see in the examples to follow, however, the boundaries of Sandinista testimonial poetics are challenged because their simple, everyday language is unable to accommodate the mindboggling devastation of this storm.

Two poems in particular capture the infernal excesses of Mitch. Montoya's "Huracán" ('Hurricane') bears witness to the incessant rain that poured "en complicadas mutaciones del medio ambiente" (9) 'in complicated mutations of the environment' for over five days straight. For ninety-eight lines, the poetic speaker, who suffers from insomnia (perhaps due to worry or the sound of the pounding rain on a zinc roof), lists the acts of ecological violence wrought on Nicaragua by the rain. The active verbs conjugated in the present tense create a tone of immediacy and place the speaker in the middle of things, as if he were improvising as a media reporter due to the lack of media coverage during the storm:

> Las crecientes ilimitadas
> arrastran en Acahualinca
> pordioseras casas de cartón,
> descuelgan herrumbrosos puentes en Tipitapa,
> inundan cocotales en la Carretera Norte,
> despernancan reses y árboles
> tronchados por estridentes remolinos,
>
> y desamarran apacibles corrales
> dormidos en medio de inquietantes balidos.
> La lluvia en Managua no tiene mesura. (12-22)
>
> The limitless swells
> drag through Acahaulinca
> destitute cardboard houses,
> take down rusty bridges in Tipitapa,
> flood coconut groves on the Northern Highway,
> break the legs of cattle and trees
> lopped off by wild whirlpools,
>
> and untie peaceful farmyards
> sleeping amidst the disquieting bleats.
> The rain in Managua has no restraint.

The waters of the storm come to life as "aguas desenfrenadas / de feroces músculos glaciales" (74-75) 'unleashed waters / with ferocious, glacial muscles'

and “aguas necias, / hijas torpes de la irreflexiva naturaleza” (79-80) ‘reckless waters, / clumsy daughters of a thoughtless nature.’ The speaker documents their damaging rampage not only in Managua, but also in other towns and regions in Nicaragua. Like earlier workshop poetry, Montoya mentions these places by name, which contributes to the poem’s journalistic dimension and testifies to the geographical scope of the storm’s wrath.

Arellano’s “El desborde de Mitch” (‘The Overflow of Mitch’) also records the excessive nature of devastation in Nicaragua. As in Montoya, this poem overflows with images of destruction:

> Lluvias diluviales,
> torrentadas de lodo y palos,
> Puentes arrasados por las furias de los ríos,
> Inundaciones de viviendas campesinas,
> Desapariciones, heridos, finados…. (7-11)
>
> Hammering rains,
> torrents of mud and sticks,
> Bridges dragged off by the furies of the rivers,
> Floods of peasant dwellings,
> Disappearances, wounds, deceased….

The verse “desapariciones, heridos, finados” hearkens back to the genre of *testimonio* by evoking images of wartime casualties and the common Latin American practice of “disappearing” political activists.

Along with mud, sticks, bridges, homes, and people, Arellano’s overflowing rivers also carry sadness and resignation. Montoya’s speaker affectively joins the floodwaters, as well, when he complains, “que en Matagalpa los ríos se desbordaron, / arrastrando vidas y sueños en deshumanos raudales” (46-47) ‘that in Matagalpa the rivers overflow, / dragging away lives and dreams in unhuman eddies.’ Later in the poem, the speaker, himself, is swept away by the flood: “con un milenario desvelo / que me arrastra junto al barro de la ciudad / a la líquida e insondable caverna de sus borrascosas miserias” (62-64) ‘with a millennial insomnia / that drags me together with the mud of the city / to the liquid and soundless cavern of its muddiest miseries.’ The subjectivities of the speaker and mud become indistinguishable.

In these poems, the swollen rivers’ *load*—the geological concept referring to the amount of mineral material in a stream—is both sedimentary and catastrophic. The plundering rivers erode everything in their path, even the immaterial, leaving behind only traces of mud and misery as they return to their banks. Here it is as if geology mimics poetry: the greater the load, the greater the

erosion and shear stress on the stream banks, resulting in an even greater load. Load begets more load, and death and destruction beget more sorrow. When the waters recede, the muddied landscape is left transformed, gutted and gullied by the power of the flood. The flood's human victims are also left transformed, having suffered intense material and emotional losses. The mineral deposits that the load leaves behind ironically encourage and beget new life.

Almost all Mitch poems are characterized by images of mud and fluvial load. In Alegría's poem, "Huracán Mitch" ('Hurricane Mitch'), the cemetery in Posoltega explodes, and the dead leave their tombs until they are "de nuevo / sepultados por el lodo" (6-7) 'once again / buried with mud.' Posoltega, which suffered a mudslide killing 2000 people, was not the only town whose cemetery "exploded." In other towns, as well, the earth belched out its corpses, adding caskets to the load. In Ramos's "Nadie recuerda a Carmen Sobalvarro" ("Nobody Remembers Carmen Sobalvarro"), the speaker reflects on the irony that the rains end on November 1, the Day of the Dead: "Mañana nos impondrán un cáliz / con lodo y calaveras" (14-15) 'Tomorrow they'll bury us a chalice / with mud and skulls.' On this holiday in 1998, the skulls of the long-dead literally mixed with the skulls of new flood victims. Families who faithfully visited the cemeteries found either partially emerged coffins to decorate or discovered that their loved ones' tombs had simply disappeared.

Complex images of death are not limited to the cemeteries. Mañas Peñalver's poem, "Mitch," ends with a haunting image that indicates the uncanny calm of the rains' aftermath: "Difusos lodos duermen, / sueñan tras la almohada / de los cuerpos proscritos" (13-15) 'Diffuse muds sleep, / dreaming across a pillow / of exiled bodies.' Like the dead, mud lies splattered and caked everywhere, staining the scraped landscape with the *café con leche* 'milk coffee' color of the pillaging waters that have displaced everyone and everything. Here, however, the mud is given two active verbs, which stand in contrast to the inert bodies. Whereas the people have died, the mud has taken on life. Nature possesses the agency once ascribed to human beings.

In Belli's poem, Mitch's power takes on Biblical proportions. After referencing Noah in the second stanza, the speaker alters the verse from John 1:14: "El agua se hizo lodo y habitó entre nosotros" (13) 'The water was made mud and dwelled among us.' Later Nicaragua is imagined as the sacred, bleeding heart of Jesus: "Nicaragua herida sangra lodo / por las llagas abiertas de su corazón" (21-22) 'Wounded Nicaragua bleeds mud / through the open wounds of its heart.' Water begets tears and mud, blood and pain.

The persistent thematic preoccupation of Mitch poetry with articulating muddy overload and overflow highlights how Mitch poetry expands the everyday aesthetic of revolutionary workshop poetry. Although poetry about Mitch, as testimony, seeks to document the violence wrought by this superstorm, the simple

form of Sandinista testimonial poetry falls short. The content overwhelms the boundaries of colloquial, concrete images because the apocalyptic scene is anything but everyday, and quotidian language is unfit to communicate the massive scale of devastation. Mitch poetry thus reaches for more stylized poetic devices, such as anaphor and amplified lyric imagery, in order to try to capture the Goyesque extremes of the hurricane's destruction.

The fact that revolutionary poetry cannot formally contain the crisis of Hurricane Mitch resonates with the postwar critique that revolutionary ideology was inadequate to meet the challenges of neoliberal 1990s Nicaragua. Revolutionary ideals seem no match for the extreme inequality and lack of social infrastructure that contributed monumentally to the death and devastation wrought by Mitch in Nicaragua. Mitch poetry acknowledges these injustices, but unlike earlier Sandinista poetry, these speakers do not express faith in the Revolution to restore equity and justice. Instead, they cite inequality with indicting bitterness. The young poet, Francesc, remarks that on the tenth anniversary of the Berlin Wall's demolition, "ni el Huracán Mitch (consternación) despierta la equidad" (10) 'not even Hurricane Mitch (consternation) awakens equity.' Similarly, in "Los muertos de Posoltega" ("The Dead of Posoltega"), Germán Hernández writes in the cosmic style of post-revolutionary Cardenal, taking a satellite's view of earth in October 1998 (Belli also opens her poem with a weather satellite's image of Mitch as a ball of cotton candy). The poetic voice questions the value and definition of progress in a world in which men can walk on the moon but human misery persists:

> y mientras las fotos de los muertos de Posoltega
> viajan vía satélite por todo el universo
> y mientras los patrocinadores del tour justifican su inversión
> la humanidad avanza sin lugar a dudas, sin los muertos de
> Posoltega.
> (24-27)
>
> and while the photos of the dead in Posoltega
> travel via satellite throughout the whole universe
> and while the sponsors of the tour justify their investment
> humanity advances without a doubt, without the dead of Posoltega.

Indeed, the dead will not progress, and in the developing world, neither will the *damnificados* 'victims.'

In Mitch poetry, the loss of faith in revolutionary rhetoric and possibility is seen as part of the muddy load. Mañas Peñalver cynically portrays this incorporation of the past into the current(s) when her speaker describes Mitch as

an “aroma fresco” (4) ‘breath of fresh air.’ She goes on to describe the hurricane as

> Un ancho remolino
> nacido de la vida
> para dar voz
> a la ancha muerte,
> para airear
> ese montón de olvido
> que solamente somos. (5-11)
>
> A wide whirlpool
> born of life
> to give voice
> to the wide death,
> to air out
> that heap of forgottenness
> that is all that we are.

Churning up cemeteries and shearing entire towns off their hillsides, Mitch redeposits the past as “polvo sobre escombros” (12) ‘dust over debris.’ Recalling not-so-distant memories of fear and insecurity during the war, Mitch’s rains and floods emotionally and physically reunite Nicaraguans with their past and their dead.

If faith in the Revolution was among Mitch’s casualties, so was faith in the Christian God. In the prose poem “Dios y el Huracán Mitch” (“God and Hurricane Mitch”), Germán Cerda Reyes bears witness to this despair over an impotent God:

> El día en que el huracán Mitch, estaba desatando toda su furia infernal sobre las regiones más pobres de esta Nicaragua cristiana, en alguna colina invisible debería haber estado Dios, contemplando serenamente la violencia incontenible de las aguas y los lamentos de muerte de la indefensa población.
>
> “¡Dios mío!” gritaba la gente, invocando salvación: “Haced algo para contener el desastre”. No contestó nada… y desapareció!!! (9-15)
>
> The day Hurricane Mitch hit, it was unleashing all its hellish fury

> over all the poorest regions of this Christian Nicaragua, and on some invisible hill God must have been there, contemplating serenely the uncontainable violence of the waters and the laments of death of the defenseless population.
>
> "My God!" shouted the people, invoking salvation: "Do something to contain the disaster." God answered nothing… and disappeared!!!

Not only does God ignore the peoples' shouts, but so does the government. Volunteers were generally too few, unequipped, and uncoordinated to make much difference. Claribel Alegría's "Huracán Mitch" also depicts people shouting for help to an absent God or government: "los vivos . . . corrían / dando gritos / y elevando sus brazos / ¿hacia quién?" (8-11) 'the living. . . ran / shouting / and lifting their arms / towards whom?' This loss of spiritual conviction stands in contrast to workshop poetry's optimistic sense of hope and can be seen as accompanying the loss of confidence in the Revolutionary process, as liberation theology was fundamental to Sandinista ideology and cultural identity.[12]

In contrast to the existentialism of these two poems, other Mitch poems, such as Belli's, reference the great flood of the Book of Genesis. Cerda Reyes comments in his poem: "¿Por qué será que casi todas las tragedias naturales hacen impacto certero en la humanidad de los sectores pobres? ¿Será que nos comportamos tan mal y en esa forma tan cruel nos castiga la Madre Naturaleza?" (5-8) 'Why is it that almost all natural tragedies have the greatest impact on the people of the poorest sectors? Is it because we behave so badly, and this is the cruel way that Mother Nature punishes us?' Arellano frames an enumeration of apocalyptic scenes with the verse, "La naturaleza no perdona" (1, 15) 'Nature does not forgive.' As if reporting the facts of the situation over a two-way radio, the poem ends with the following stanza: "Confirmo: / La Naturaleza NO perdona. / Sólo Dios perdona" (14-16) 'I confirm: Nature does NOT forgive. / Only God forgives.' In both of these poems, Nature is represented as a punishing, vengeful, reckoning force at odds with God, who is at best benevolent (as in Arellano) or at worst impotent and absent (in Cerda Reyes).

Arellano's poem presents a peculiar theological issue. In his poem, Nature enjoys all of the agency, and God possesses very little. God does not appear until the last line of the poem, as if His benign forgiveness comes only after Nature has wreaked its havoc, punishing humanity for its anthropocenic abuse. In fact, Arellano labels the cataclysmic natural disasters that Nicaragua regularly suffers as "hijas del Despale," (5) 'daughters of the Clearcut.' God's forgiveness comes too late for human life on earth, wherein it is Nature who holds humanity accountable for its transgressions against the earth and its inhabitants. Humankind

is provided with no easy way out. This depiction of Nature inverts traditionally gendered images of Mother Nature as benign, controllable, subdued, and subordinate to God. Arellano's malevolent Nature is imbued with agency and the ability to establish control and enact revenge for pillaging the environment.[13]

The painful absence of God in Mitch poetry is significant in bearing witness to climate change because it keeps this environmental disaster from being conveniently explained, in eco-historian Mike Davis's terms, as "accidental, random, and unforeseeable acts of God" that promote environmental amnesia (qtd. in Nixon 65). Indeed, through its Biblical allusions to Noah (Belli) and punishment for bad behavior (Cerda Reyes), Mitch poetry implicates humankind for mistreating the environment and the poor people of Nicaragua. Mitch's load, much like the wreckage at the feet of Benjamin's angel of history in this article's epigraph, drags along centuries of colonial occupation resulting in additional environmental devastation, political opportunism, and socioeconomic inequality, all of which are factors that aggravate ecological disasters. Blame is abundant, absolution is nowhere, and the storm is raging.

Mitch poetry's common motifs of hyperbolic rain, overflowing rivers, excessive mud, and apocalyptic destruction reveal the ideological undersides of climate change and its impacts not just in Nicaragua, but in post-war and postcolonial communities across the Global South. The loss of faith in God and humanity in Mitch poetry implies the need for a new ethic that will deliver these communities from the human-driven evils of late capitalism that exacerbate natural disasters. The muddy waters of Mitch poetry overflow the boundaries of Sandinista workshop poetry in a way parallel to how climate change has overwhelmed the conventional means with which we confront natural disasters, as well as political and socioeconomic issues that are interlocked with environmental concerns.

Despite its differences from revolutionary workshop poetry, Mitch poetry is not altogether pessimistic and it does not wholly engage in the aesthetic of cynicism that dominates much of Central American writing over the past 20 years. By citing the testimonial aesthetic, Mitch poetry maintains a sense of urgency and, by extension, the implicit hope that someone, somewhere is listening and will feel compelled to act.[14] Apropos, perhaps, Belli urges us at the end of her poem to join in singing to soothe her wounded Nicaragüita and to work together to heal it: "Empecemos. Hagámoslo todos. / Hagamos la claridad / en este nuestro país suelto en llanto" (47-49) 'Let us begin. Let's do it all together. / Let's settle the water / in this our country overflowing with tears.' Merging poem and song, verse continues to inspire and embody the solidarity and commitment necessary to confront climate change and its ensuing devastations.

Notes

1. Since then, years 2005 and 2010 have exceeded 1998's planetary heat ("2013" n.pag.).

2. All statistics here come from Olson, et. al.

3. This drought may be part of an overall trend of reduced rainfall in Central America since 1850, which scientists believe is linked to industrial air pollution in the Global North (Doyle).

4. It would seem that the present Ortega government did not learn valuable environmental lessons from Mitch, as the interoceanic canal planned with China will destroy mangroves, which act as natural buffers to hurricanes, and replace them with a flood-prone waterway (Nuwer). In December 2014, journalist Matthew Shaer reported:

> A storm like Hurricane Mitch …. would probably cause the canal to flood, triggering mudslides that would breach locks and dams. Communities, homes, roads and power lines would be swamped.
>
> The Nicaraguan government has yet to release promised analyses of the canal's likely environmental impacts, and has even dodged neighboring Costa Rica's request to share disaster plans. (Shaer)

5. A report by Nicaraguan political historian Alejandro Bendaña states, "President . . . Alemán resisted the recommendations of many, including several ministers, to declare a state of national emergency and proceed with mass evacuation and rescue efforts. No, he said, such a mobilization would be something that the Sandinistas would do—and he was certainly no Sandinista" (qtd. in Olson, n.pag.).

6. All translations are my own.

7. *Exteriorismo* refers to Ernesto Cardenal's poetics of taking inspiration from the objects and experiences of everyday life.

8. Belli's poem, "Canción de cuna para un país suelto en llanto" ("Lullaby for a Country Overflowing with Tears"), was read at these workshops, and participants sang the popular Nicaraguan lullaby, "Dormíte mi niña sopita de pipián" ("Sleep My Little *Mole* Girl") as a closure to the workshop experience (González n.pag.).

9. The *Nueva Canción* ('New Song') movement, which started in Chile, was popular in Nicaragua and inspired the revolutionary music of the Godoy family.

10. *Testimonio* here refers to first-person narratives of subaltern subjects that bear witness to an urgent situation involving political or socioeconomic repression, oppression, or violence. Because these narrators are often subliterate, *testimonio* also frequently involves transcription and editing by a professional writer.

11. For more on Central America's contemporary "aesthetic of cynicism," see Cortez; Aparicio and Morelli also include analyses and examples of cynicism in poetry.

12. A link between liberation theology and the poetry workshops can also be made through Cardenal. Cardenal, a Roman Catholic priest, founded the Solentiname community in 1965 as a kind of spiritual and artistic utopia. It was liberation theology that led him to leave the community in order to minister to guerrillas during the war years. His national poetry workshops stemmed directly from similar poetry workshops that he directed on the island of Solentiname.

13. Writing about nature as disorder, early ecofeminist Carolyn Merchant reminds us that the gendered practice of witchcraft—especially among illiterate women of lower social classes—could be used as a "means of control or defense against the repression and injustices of hierarchical society" (140).

14. Critic Kimberly Nance, who describes *testimonio* as "a project of social justice in which text is an instrument," examines the rhetorical strategies of the genre as a call to social action (19).

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