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SUBALTERN PERSPECTIVES ON A REVOLUTIONARY STATE:
THE SANDINISTA-MISKITU CONFLICT IN NICARAGUA, 1979-1990

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the
Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

Anupama Mande, M.A., M.Phil.

*****

The Ohio State University
1999

Dissertation Committee: Approved by
Professor Ileana Rodríguez, Adviser
Professor Kenneth J. Andrien
Professor Nancy Ettlinger
Professor Thomas W. Walker

Ileana Rodríguez
Adviser
Interdisciplinary Program
Most historical narratives of the Sandinista revolution and the Miskitu demand for regional autonomy on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua represent an assumed unity called the "Nicaraguan people" that is always split into two—the modernizing Sandinistas and the yet-to-be-modernized Miskitus. Many of these narratives speak from within a metanarrative whose theoretical subjects are U.S. imperialism and Sandinista revolutionary nationalism. The first half of my dissertation demonstrates that these historical narratives are not monologic; In fact, they are replete with ambiguity and paradox that allow for conflicting readings and challenging voices. However, my interest is not limited to deconstructing master narratives; rather the purpose is to present a wide variety of Nicaraguan voices in order to show how meanings are chosen and how they compete because texts and contexts force us to rethink causality.
The second half of my dissertation problematizes two assumptions that underlie most nationalist and Marxist analyses of regional autonomy in Nicaragua. First, economic grievances transformed Miskitus into political actors. Second, in the context of US intervention and the Miskitu-US alliance, Sandinistas could not defend the revolution without suppressing Miskitus. Drawing on the work of postcolonial and new social movement theorists, my dissertation suggests that cultural differences and resistance/counter-hegemonic movements should not be viewed merely as the contention between antagonistic traditions of cultural value. The interaction between the revolutionary state and Miskitus was more sinuous; the articulation of their cultural differences in the construction of a national culture can help us explore forms of cultural identity and political solidarity that emerged in Nicaragua during the 1980s. My dissertation does not develop a critique of past scholarship in an attempt to produce a new theory which presumes to explain the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict by reducing it to something else. Instead, it problematizes the nature of cultural spaces created by the revolutionary state, and raises questions about the study and writing of hybrid cultures in Latin America.
In memory of my lovely sister, Neela
&
For Amma, Baba, and Vivek

Pues no hay dolor más grande que el dolor de ser vivo,
ni mayor pesadumbre que la vida consciente.

Rubén Darío, Lo Fatal
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VITA

January 3, 1967....... Born---Nagpur, India

June 1987.................. B.A. History, University of Madras, India

June 1989.................. M.A. History, University of Poona, India

December 1990............. M.Phil. History, University of Poona, India

June 1994.................. M.A. History, The Ohio State University

1991-1997.................. Graduate Research Assistant, Division of Comparative Studies in the Humanities, The Ohio State University

1997-1998.................. Graduate Teaching Associate, Division of Comparative Studies in the Humanities, The Ohio State University

1998-1999.................. Graduate Research Assistant, Dept. of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, The Ohio State University

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Interdisciplinary Program
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

You can never have a revolution in order to establish a democracy. You must have a democracy in order to have a revolution.

G.K. Chesterton

In July 1979, a popular revolution led by the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) overthrew the Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua.¹ During the first five years of the revolution, the Sandinista government established a number of grassroots organizations in its attempt to reclaim national sovereignty, democratize

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¹ The Somoza family ruled Nicaragua from 1937 to 1979. The founder of the dynasty, Anastasio Somoza García (a.k.a. Tacho) became the head of the National Guard after the U.S. Marines withdrew from Nicaragua in 1933. In 1934, he ordered his subordinates to murder Augusto César Sandino, and in 1937 he became the President of the country. He ruled as president or through puppet presidents until 1956, when he was assassinated in León. His eldest son, Luis Debayle, completed his presidential term and remained in power until 1963, while the younger son, Anastasio "Tachito" Debayle became the head of the National Guard. From 1963 to 1967 the Somozas ruled through two puppet presidents; In 1967, Tachito became President and remained in power until 1979, when the FSLN took control of Nicaragua, ending the forty-six-year dynastic rule of the Somozas. Walter Knut, The Regime of Anastasio Somoza García and State Formation in Nicaragua, 1936-1956 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987); Richard Millet, The Guardians of the Dynasty: A History of the U.S.-Created Guardia Nacional de Nicaragua and the Somoza Family (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1977).
political power, and improve workers' access to land, food, education, and health. Ironically, the Sandinista government's development model premised upon the political and economic inclusion of the popular classes led to the militant mobilization of Miskitu Indians, who developed a strong critique of the FSLN and demanded regional autonomy.

My dissertation focuses on the political and cultural

2 The Atlantic Coast is home to three Amerindian groups (Miskitus, Sumu-Mayangnas, and Ramas) and two groups of African descent (Creoles and Garifunas). Miskitus constitute the majority population of northeastern Nicaragua and southeastern Honduras (a.k.a. the Mosquito Coast). See Figure 1.1 for map of ethnic distribution on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua. Hans Peter Buvollen and Hai Almquist Buvollen, "Demografía de la RAAN," Wani 15 (March 1994): 5-19; CIDCA, Ethnic Groups & the Nation State (Managua: CIDCA, 1987); Germán Romero Vargas, Historia de la Costa Atlántica (Managua: CIDCA-UCA, 1996); Peter Solís, "The Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua: Development and Autonomy," Journal of Latin American Studies 21 (October 1989): 481-520.

3 The Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) was founded in 1961 by Carlos Fonseca, Tomás Borge, and Silvio Mayorga with the aim of overthrowing the Somoza dictatorship. They modeled their organization after Fidel Castro's "26th of July" Movement and believed that guerrilla warfare was the best way to implement political change. From 1962 until the mid-1970s, the FSLN grew very slowly, operating clandestinely as a small guerrilla group in the mountainous jungles of central Nicaragua. The FSLN's first attempt at guerrilla warfare in 1963 ended with its defeat at El Chaparral by Somoza's National Guard. In 1967, Carlos Fonseca led the guerrillas in a combat against the National Guard in the mountains of Matagalpa, but was defeated at Pancasan. During the 1970s, the failure of most guerrilla forces to succeed made revolutionaries in Latin America to reassess their strategies. The FSLN split into three factions: Proletarian Tendency (Proletarios); Prolonged People's War (GPP); and the Insurrectional Tendency (Terceristas). In March 1979, all three factions reunited under a National Directorate composed of three members from each faction. Because of its military leadership and role in organizing the final offensive, the FSLN emerged as the major party in the new government that took power in July 1979. Donald Hodges, Intellectual Foundations of the Nicaraguan Revolution (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986); Humberto Ortega, Cincuenta Años de Lucha Sandinista (Mexico City: Editorial Diogenes, 1979).
relations between the Sandinista government and Miskitu Indians from 1979 to 1990.

The "Miskitu question" was an important issue in some of the most controversial debates over political, social, and economic changes introduced by the Sandinista government during the 1980s in Nicaragua. The literature on this topic, produced in Nicaragua and the United States, is enormous but extremely polemical in nature. My principal aim is to show that Miskitu resistance to the revolutionary government was not the result of their situation of subordination itself; Miskitu resistance was discursively constructed and became politicized in the context of the egalitarian claims of the revolution. My dissertation deals extensively with the complex politics on which political narratives are based and the cultural representations of

4 In early 1979, when it became clear that the Somoza dictatorship was floundering after a year and a half of social unrest and protests, the FSLN formed a government-in-exile, the Governing Junta of National Reconstruction (JGRN), in Costa Rica. The first five-member Junta included Daniel Ortega, Sergio Ramírez, Moisés Hassán (all from the FSLN), Violeta Barrios de Chamorro (widow of La Prensa Editor, Pedro Joaquín Chamorro), and businessman Alfonso Robelo Callejas (from the Nicaraguan Democratic Movement). Daniel Ortega was chosen as the coordinator of the JGRN. Violeta Chamorro resigned from the Junta in early 1980 for personal reasons; Shortly thereafter, Alfonso Robelo resigned because of disagreements concerning the membership of the Council of State. Arturo Cruz, an international banker, served briefly on the Junta from 1980-81, but resigned to become Nicaragua's Ambassador to the U.S. Moisés Hassán left the Junta in 1981 for a cabinet post. From 1981 to 1984 the Junta's members were Daniel Ortega, Sergio Ramírez, and Rafael Córdoba (from the Democratic Conservative Party). John A. Booth, "The National Government System," in Nicaragua: The First Five Years, ed. Thomas W. Walker (New York: Praeger, 1985), 29-45.
both Miskitus and Sandinistas in these narratives. My research explains why cultural representations were central in the efforts to create a revolutionary state as well as in the construction of Miskitu collective identity. Thus, what follows in the next few chapters my analysis of the institutionalization of revolutionary discourses and the politicization of resistance discourses.

Doctoral students and academics are often expected to present "objective" accounts of historical events, but it is quite difficult to remain "neutral" about Nicaragua. My dissertation is definitely a sympathetic critique of the ideology of revolutionary nationalism and is guided by the work of postcolonial theorists (Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, and Sara Suleri) and the work of the Latin American and South Asian Subalternists (Ranajit Guha, Partha Chatterjee, Gayatri Spivak, Ileana Rodríguez, and John Beverly). My main argument is that Sandinismo promised to establish an egalitarian society by launching a direct attack on U.S. imperialism. Paradoxically, however, Sandinismo's promise of national liberation also meant the marginalization of many subaltern groups (ethnic minorities, women) that were supposed to benefit from the revolution. The Sandinistas claimed that their project was about equality (not the
extension of equal opportunities); they wanted to empower the masses by transferring power from the wealthy minority to the poor majority. The Sandinistas perceived social inequities as economic matters, which could be resolved by the dissolution of Capitalism. Although Sandinismo claimed to establish a "democratic" society it failed to provide an adequate framework to promote indigenous peoples' rights. I think the Sandinistas envisioned their struggle as a single class-centered struggle against Capitalism, and in so doing they subsumed all other democratic struggles (the struggle for indigenous peoples' rights and women's rights) under the leadership of the revolutionary government. Consequently, the Sandinistas failed to win the support of Miskitus on the Atlantic Coast. Since the ideology of revolutionary nationalism did not appeal to Miskitus, who are probably the poorest of the poor, I think it is important to develop a critique of the discourse of revolutionary nationalism in order to understand the relationship between Sandinismo's discourse of equality and Amerindian rights and representation.

The purpose of my critique of Sandinismo is not to provide a solution to the economic and social problems of Nicaragua; rather my purpose is to examine the manner in
which the Sandinistas posed and dealt with those problems. An analysis of revolutionary nationalism from a subaltern perspective can show how the discourse of revolutionary nationalism tried to suppress resistance to the revolutionary project. Postcolonial theorists and subalternists are currently engaged in performing similar tasks that seek to problematize contemporary political discourses. Although my reading and interpretation of Sandinismo as well as Miskitu resistance has undertones of a polemic, I hope my analytical insights on the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict in Nicaragua highlight the relationship between revolutionary nationalism and the construction of Miskitu collective identity.

My approach is thematic, but Chapter 2 provides a chronology of the most significant interactions among the revolutionary government, Nicaraguan counterrevolutionary forces, Miskitu leaders, and the U.S. government from 1979 to 1990. The following sections of this chapter provide a critical overview of the most significant analyses of the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict. Section 1.2 explains my research strategy and the significance of Subaltern Studies in a research project concerning revolutionary changes and Miskitu resistance to those changes. Section 1.3 outlines
the organization and focus of each chapter of the dissertation. Section 1.4 is a description of my sources, fieldwork and research methods.

1.1 Past Research and Historiography of the Sandinista-Miskitu Conflict

During the 1980s, the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict attracted international attention, and a number of social scientists, journalists, lawyers, artists, and novelists from different parts of the world traveled to Nicaragua to study, analyze, and report the situation. Individual contributions were written from a range of perspectives and ideological viewpoints that addressed specific concerns of the writers or their disciplinary fields. This section provides a critical overview of some of the most significant works on the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict produced during the 1980s and early 1990s to illustrate the major trends in the literature. My main purpose is to explain the relevance of Subaltern Studies in the analysis and historical writing of the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict. Since this is a historiographic rather than
bibliographic review, I will limit my discussion to the works of some prominent social scientists, who, either directly or indirectly, served as advisers to policy makers in Nicaragua or the United States.

Scholars such as Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, Carlos Vilas, Charles Hale, and Galio Gurdian were sympathetic to the revolution, and their analyses of the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict emphasized issues concerning U.S. imperialism and revolutionary efforts to establish an egalitarian society. During the 1980s, Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, a faculty member in the Department of Ethnic Studies at California State University, Hayward campus, worked closely with the Centro de Investigación y Documentación de la Costa Atlántica (a.k.a. CIDCA). The revolutionary government created CIDCA in 1982 as an autonomous research institution with offices in Managua, Puerto Cabezas, and Bluefields to gather data and conduct research pertaining to the history and culture of Costeños. Galio Gurdian served as the Director of CIDCA for several years and later became member of the National Autonomy Commission under the Sandinista government. Carlos Vilas, an Argentine political scientist, and
Charles Hale, an American anthropologist, also worked very closely with CIDCA.

In the United States, scholars such as Bernard Nietschmann and Joshua Muravchik condemned the Sandinistas because they viewed the revolution as a "slow march toward Communism." Consequently, their analyses of the Nicaraguan Revolution focused on issues related to the revolutionary government's alleged human rights violations and lack of democracy in Nicaragua. During the 1980s, Bernard Nietschmann served as a faculty member in the Geography Department at University of California at Berkeley. In 1983 he testified against the Sandinista government before the Organization of American States' commission on human rights. Joshua Muravchik worked as research associate for the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research in Washington, DC.

The brief literature review in the following pages illustrates the different ways in which scholars perceived the revolution in Nicaragua. Debates over the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict served as markers for a wide variety of political programs, philosophies, and economic interests. Thus, my review of past research not only provides a brief summary of each work, but also
problematizes Marxist and liberal discourses of representation, rights, and democracy.

1.1.1 Statist Narratives

In *La Cuestión Miskita en la Revolución Nicaragüense*, Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz argued that the Sandinista government had good intentions and wanted to protect the political, cultural, and land rights of indigenous communities. The revolutionary government encouraged the formation of MISURASATA (Miskitu, Sumu, Rama, Sandinista Asla Takanka) and supported the organization's demands for multicultural education and language training on the Coast. However, the revolutionaries "lacked experience and understanding of the Atlantic Coast," which made them seem insensitive to the culture and demands of the Amerindians. According to Dunbar Ortiz, government policies for the Coast failed mainly because the Sandinistas did not comprehend internal class differences in the Miskitu community or the role of

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6 The Sandinista government created MISURASATA in 1979 as a grassroots organization to represent the needs of the peoples of the Atlantic Coast. See Chapter 2 for details.
Moravian pastors, who exercised a "messianistic influence" on Miskitus.⁷

According to Dunbar Ortiz, counterrevolutionary activities on the Coast made it extremely difficult for Miskitus to negotiate with the revolutionary government without seeking the U.S. government's support for their struggle for self-determination. However after 1984, Miskitus realized that they had been manipulated by the Contras, who did not care about their land rights or cultural autonomy. This realization eventually led both Miskitus and Sandinistas to negotiate and work on a proposal for regional autonomy.⁸

In an article entitled "The Autonomy Project of the Sandinista Popular Revolution on the Atlantic Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua," Galio Gurdian described the principles and perspectives of the revolutionary government's autonomy project.⁹ He argued that the Sandinista view of Miskitu

---

identity and regional autonomy differed significantly from the indigenist, ethnicist, or economistic approaches that Latin American governments had used to address the "ethnic question." *Indigenismo* is a term that is used by Latin American social scientists (Héctor Díaz Polanco, Galio Gurdian) to describe policies of cultural assimilation or homogenization, which viewed indigenous peoples as a "historical residue." According to Gurdian, the creation of a "national" culture meant that indigenous peoples had to learn Spanish, convert to Christianity, become salaried workers, and adopt urban lifestyles in order to facilitate the modernization of their country and promote the economic interests of the Mestizo elites.

Gurdian argued that the concept of ethnicism refers to policies that romanticized Amerindian cultural traits. The implication was that indigenous peoples had not been affected by larger political, economic, or social transformations, and were, thus, morally superior to Mestizos. As a result, it was necessary for indigenous peoples to pursue their goals independently of other oppressed groups in Latin America. In Gurdian's view, economistic approaches aimed at reducing class differences,
and were based on the assumption that social conflicts were the result of conflicting economic interests. This implied that a reduction in class differences would automatically lead to social integration. This approach completely ignored the role of language, religion, and cultural traditions in the formation of group identities.

Gurdian argued that the Sandinistas tried to resolve "the ethnic question" in Nicaragua by taking into consideration the problem of class exploitation, the neocolonial dependency of the nation as a whole, as well as the specific problems and demands of Miskitus and other indigenous groups on the Atlantic Coast because he believed that "the solution to the ethnic problem [was] linked, in every way to the solution of class problems."\(^\text{10}\) Such an approach to indigenous peoples' rights led him to believe that the revolutionary government was committed to establishing a legal framework that would guarantee Costeños' political, socioeconomic, and cultural rights. The revolutionary government's policies for the Atlantic Coast failed mainly because Miskitu leaders such as

\(^{10}\) Idem, 177-178.
Steadman Fagoth and Brooklyn Rivera manipulated the issue of Amerindian rights to their own advantage.\textsuperscript{11}

Two Mexican anthropologists, Héctor Díaz Polanco and Gilbert López y Rivas, claimed that the principal obstacles in the negotiations between the revolutionary government and Miskitus were the U.S. government and North American organizations such as the Indian Law Resource Center (ILRC). According to these anthropologists, Miskitu leaders, especially Brooklyn Rivera, were highly influenced by the ILRC, and "at times it seemed that the Sandinista representatives were negotiating not with MISURASATA but with the ILRC." The Fourth World discourse wrongly claimed that Amerindians had "Aboriginal rights."\textsuperscript{12} Instead of helping the Miskitus to resolve their problems, the ILRC used the concept of "Fourth World" as an ideological tool to prevent a positive and constructive dialogue between the


Sandinistas and Miskitos and justify U.S. aggression in
Central America.\textsuperscript{13}

In mid-1985, the United Nations Task Force on
Indigenous Populations held its meeting in Geneva. The
ILRC organized a roundtable to discuss self-determination
of indigenous peoples of Central America. Brooklyn Rivera
in conjunction with the ILRC proposed the approval of a
Declaration of Principles containing twenty points. The
eighteenth point of the declaration stated: "When the
Indian peoples and nations see their rights threatened they
have the right to self-defense and can request the
intervention of a third country." Fortunately, Amerindian
leaders from other Latin American countries rejected the
ILRC's proposal. Héctor Díaz Polanco's and Gilbert López y
Rivas's analysis of Brooklyn Rivera's behavior and
connections with the ILRC led them to conclude that
Brooklyn Rivera lacked independent thinking, as a result of
which Miskitus were unable to benefit from the
revolutionary government's programs and projects.\textsuperscript{14}


Carlos Vilas, framed his argument about the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict on the Atlantic Coast in terms of the unequal integration of regions and social groups into the revolutionary process. By posing questions concerning Miskitu mobilization from within a classical Marxist framework, he argued that the Miskitu-Sandinista conflict was related to the anti-imperialistic orientation of the Sandinista Revolution, which came into conflict with the pro-US perceptions of the Miskitus.  

Vilas's analysis suggests that between 1926 and 1956 the dynamic center of dependent capitalism in Nicaragua shifted from the Atlantic Coast toward the Pacific region because enclave capitalism gave way agro-export capitalism dominated by the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie and the Somoza family. From the 1950s through the 1970s, the Nicaraguan economy went through rapid capitalist growth and change. The cotton boom followed by industrialization and the expansion of export cattle raising generated a new bourgeois sector and dispossessed thousands of peasant families of their lands on the Pacific Coast and in the central-northern regions. Part of the rural force was proletarianized and another part migrated to the cities,

and in less than twenty years, more than two-thirds of the economically active population of the country was affected by these transformations. These economic changes were accompanied by repression and corruption of the Somoza regime.  

According to Vilas, rapid capitalist development created the conditions for a revolution in Nicaragua. However, the concept of imperialist exploitation did not appeal to Miskitus because the Atlantic Coast had not been affected by these rapid socioeconomic transformations. Consequently, the FSLN concentrated its political and guerrilla activities in the central-northern region of the country, and Miskitus did not participate in the antidictatorial struggle. The following excerpt from his book entitled *State, Class and Ethnicity* shows he attributed the failure of revolutionary projects to Miskitus' "pre-revolutionary passivity":

> With the replacement of the authoritarianism of the previous regime by processes--at first, inorganic but nevertheless real--of democratization and broad participation, all subordinated groups (social classes, ethnic groups, age or gender categories) have the possibility of expressing their demands and complaints and of raising the level of urgency of these demands.

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The intensity of these social struggles, including competition among different ethnic groups, increases after the triumph of the revolution. When power has a given ethnic identity, the criticisms and confrontations of that power on the part of other ethnic groups take on the nature of ethnic conflicts and not political ones; or, rather, political conflicts appear only as one aspect of ethnic demands.¹⁷

Vilas argued that the revolutionary government encountered opposition from the Miskitus because the Sandinistas nationalized natural resources on the Atlantic Coast, replaced foreign companies with state enterprises, and changed labor policies. For example, after INPESCA (The Nicaraguan Institute for Fishing) took over the fishing companies on the Coast, the state changed the system of payment to fishermen. Instead of paying them per volume of fish caught, Miskitus were paid a fixed salary. As productive fishermen, Miskitus objected to these kinds of changes introduced by the Sandinistas.

A North American Anthropologist, Charles Hale, argued that the Sandinista program of participatory democracy failed on the Atlantic Coast because the Sandinistas associated Miskitu identity with "cultural backwardness."¹⁸

¹⁷ Idem, State, Class & Ethnicity in Nicaragua: Capitalist Modernization and Revolutionary Change on the Atlantic Coast (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1989), 191.
As a result, the Sandinistas designed and implemented policies for the Atlantic Coast without consulting the local population. The upshot was that "Miskitu people and Sandinista cadres locked themselves into cultural forms that were mutually antagonistic." In the context of US intervention and the Miskitu-US alliance, the Sandinistas became convinced that they could not defend the revolution without suppressing Miskitus. Hale's concept of "contradictory consciousness" among Miskitus (broadly defined as the existence of a strong ethnic identity on the one hand and a paradoxical affinity for North American values and institutions) deepened the militancy with which they asserted their right to be different from the Mestizos.

According to Hale, MISURASATA used the discourse on land rights to mobilize Miskitus against the revolutionary government, although in strictly legal terms, Miskitus had rights only to community lands. However, MISURASATA leaders such as Brooklyn Rivera and Steadman Fagoth used the notion of a "national territory" to mobilize Miskitus to fight for their "land rights."\textsuperscript{19}

1.1.2 A Critical Evaluation of Statist Narratives

Marxist scholars such as Galio Gurdian and Carlos Vilas suggested that prior to 1979 there was very little contact between the Pacific and Atlantic regions of Nicaragua. The revolutionaries wanted to establish an egalitarian society, but their project failed on the Atlantic Coast mainly because they did not have adequate information about the Coast or its inhabitants. Costeños did not fully understand the discourse of anti-imperialism and did not appreciate the revolutionary government's efforts to promote Miskitu culture and satisfy their socioeconomic demands. In addition, counterrevolutionary activities on the Coast made it extremely difficult for the Sandinistas to negotiate with Costeños or implement their development policies on Coast.

While I do not necessarily disagree with the Carlos Vilas or Galio Gurdian, I would like to highlight the limitations of their argument. First, questions of inadequate information cannot be limited to whether the Sandinistas knew much about Amerindian cultures or the geography of the Atlantic Coast. By alluding the failure of

was published in Remapping Memory, ed. Jonathan Boyarin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 67-98.
Sandinista policies to the revolutionaries' inadequacy of information about the Atlantic Coast and its peoples, scholars avoided addressing important questions concerning state planning or the role of the FSLN's vanguard intelligentsia in the construction of Miskitu identity. Second, by emphasizing class differences, U.S. imperialism and military intervention, these narratives presented a very sanitized account of Sandinista policies and decisions.

In my opinion, narratives that focus solely on issues concerning military strategies, economic policies or U.S. imperialism provide very little room for Miskitu agency or Sandinista responsibility. Economic interests are important, but can we really reduce the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict in Nicaragua to a struggle for land and money? It seems imperative to me that Central Americanists discuss violence in their writings because it has played an important role in the construction of indigenous peoples' identity. Sixty seven out of seventy Miskitus who filled out my survey questionnaires stressed the negative effects of war on their lives and family.

In *To Lead as Equals*, Jeffrey Gould offers an interesting critique of Marxist analyses, especially of
Carlos Vilas's work on the Nicaraguan revolution.\textsuperscript{20} In the past, Marxist scholars emphasized three factors to explain the emergence of a popular struggle (not a proletarian struggle) against Somoza: (1) the social dislocations caused by rapid capitalist development after 1950; (2) cross-class political alliances caused by Somoza's coercive military dictatorship; (3) the tenacity and acumen of the FSLN to unite all oppositional groups. However, Gould argued that the Somozas did not use coercive measures to suppress opposition groups; in fact the Somozas adopted a populist political style, which was a combination of anti-oligarchic discourses and appeals to the working classes to remain in power. Workers and peasants accepted the Somocista populist discourse until the late 1970s when they experienced extreme poverty and saw the big gap that existed between reality and the Somoza rhetoric; subsequently, they joined other opposition groups against Somoza. The significance of Gould's analysis of Chinandegan campesinos lies in his argument that the Sandinistas wrongly assumed that the participation of Nicaraguan

peasants and workers in the struggle against Somoza emerged from their "innate" hostility toward Capitalism. Gould's work does not focus on the Atlantic Coast, but I think his argument is important to understand how and why Sandinistas wrongly assumed that they knew exactly what the Miskitus needed on the Atlantic Coast.

1.1.3 Anti-Sandinista/Pro-Miskitu Narratives

The past is not history. History is the reconstructed past that is important to people. As a result there is one past and many histories. Two histories are in collision in the same area known by different names: Yapti Tasba and eastern Nicaragua-Honduras. One is a history of defense against invasion and the other is a history justifying attempts at occupation.

Bernard Nietschmann, The Unknown War

Scholars who were critical of the Sandinistas focused on a different set of issues. Some illustrative examples include the works of Bernard Nietschmann, John Norton Moore, and Joshua Muravchik, who focused mostly on issues concerning human rights abuses, political pluralism, non-alignment, misinformation campaigns, and corruption in revolutionary Nicaragua.
In a book entitled *The Unknown War*, Bernard Nietschmann argued that Miskitus cannot be considered to be an "ethnic group" because ethnic groups live in other peoples' territories; Miskitus live in their homeland, the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua. His basic argument was that the concept of an ethnic group is embedded in state hegemony. An ethnic group is a sub-state population that maintains its own cultural identity but not its own sovereignty, self-government, territory and resource base. The Sandinistas defined Miskitus as an "ethnic group" in order to justify their invasion and occupation of the Miskitu nation. Without military pressure from armed Miskitu groups, the Sandinistas would never have granted Miskitus their basic rights.  

According to Nietschmann, Nicaragua was the source of many regional security problems in Central America because it was a base for Soviet and Cuban subversive activities, and also because the Sandinistas supported Communist insurgencies in El Salvador. The Reagan Administration had to "maintain its long-standing commitment and policy objectives" to guarantee that: (1) there was no Communist threat in Central America; (2) Nicaraguans would be

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liberated from the oppressive regime of the Sandinistas; (3) the possibility of a Sandinista-controlled modern inter-oceanic canal would be eliminated. According to Nietschmann, failure to do so would have been interpreted as a major foreign policy setback for the Reagan Administration, and the United States would have lost its credibility in confronting Soviet-supported repressive regimes even "in its own backyard." Thus, the main objectives of U.S. foreign policy were threefold: (1) remove the Soviets and Cubans from Nicaragua; (2) stop Sandinista support for insurgencies in Central America; (3) replace the Sandinista regime with a pro-U.S. "democratic" regime.

Nietschmann's argument was that the CIA (U.S. Central Intelligence Agency) was committed to assisting Amerindians in their struggle for self-determination against a Communist regime. He claimed that indigenous nations served as a territorial and cultural firebreak to the spread of Communism. Figure 1.1 shows the territorial demarcations of indigenous nations and states as imagined by Nietschmann. Figure 1.2 shows Central America's firebreak nations. The maps illustrate how he spatially conceived and explained the concepts of nations and states. It is interesting to
note that he uses these maps to explain how the indigenous communities of Central America can be used to undermine the power of Communist governments in the region.
Figure 1.1: Bernard Nietschmann's Map Showing the States and Nations of Central America

Figure 1.2: Bernard Nietschmann's Map Showing Firebreak Nations in Central America

According to Nietschmann, Communism was established in Cuba and Granada because there were no indigenous peoples. State Communism and indigenous nations were fundamentally incompatible because every indigenous nation's economy was linked to self-determination over its own resource base. Because Amerindians lacked territorial rights as well as modern self-defense capabilities, their territories were used by outsiders for drug production and trafficking, environmentally destructive resource extraction and wars.

Nietschmann's "Firebreak Nation Theory" was based on four assumptions: (1) nations are structurally stronger and more resistant than the state because they are rooted in history, geography, and cultural traditions; (2) nations have the ability to withstand modern war; (3) many nations occupy strategic positions in explosive world regions; (4) nations serve as potential firebreaks against the spread of totalitarian state regimes, insurgencies, drugs and environmental destruction. The Miskitu nation, for example, blocked direct Cuban and Russian access to Nicaragua and Sandinista expansion into the Caribbean.²²

Joshua Muravchik, who was a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, DC, wrote a

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²² Idem, 50-55.
number of articles about U.S. foreign policy in Central America, which appeared quite frequently in the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* during the 1980s. Muravchik described Nicaragua as a country ruled by "Communists and solely by Communists, whose unanimous and unanswering goal [was] to turn it into a totalitarian state." His basic argument was that although the revolutionary government had allowed opposition newspapers, independent labor federations, and a human rights commission to operate in Nicaragua, the Sandinistas had already established a number of state organizations to parallel them in order to undermine the importance of independent organizations. The created MISATAN, for example, a pro-Sandinista organization of Miskitus as an alternative to militant Miskitu organizations such as MISURA and MISURASATA. The Sandinistas destroyed independent institutions and maintained the illusion of a pluralism in Nicaragua.

According to Muravchik, the civil war in Nicaragua was a result of Sandinista rule, which completely ruined the Nicaraguan economy. He claimed that journalists who worked for American newspapers such as the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* failed to educate the American people about

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the threat of Communism in Nicaragua, which reduced the Reagan Administration's chances for "more effective action to prevent Communism in Nicaragua."\(^{24}\) He concluded his book by stating that:

> Although American journalists understood that the Sandinistas were Communists and this worried them, but they had no good idea what to do about it. . . . The charge that can fairly be lodged against those journalists who misportrayed the Sandinistas is not that they "cost" America Nicaragua, but merely that they failed to give their audience as true a picture as was in their power to do. That is indictment enough.\(^{25}\)

John Norton Moore made similar remarks about the Sandinistas in his book entitled *The Secret War in Central America: Sandinista Assault on World Order*. He examined some legal issues in the Nicaraguan Revolution and identified three policies (the suppression of democratic pluralism, an ideologically aligned military buildup, and repeated human rights violations) adopted by the Sandinista National Directorate as the "root cause of the world order threat in Central America." According to Moore, Cuban assistance played a crucial role in the triumph of the


\(^{25}\) Ibid., 108.
Sandinistas although they "also rode a wave of popular resentment in Nicaragua against Somoza."²⁶

His principal argument was that the Sandinistas violated the core principles of world order defined by the Charters of the United Nations and the Organization of American States (OAS), prohibiting aggressive attacks of one country on another. However, by supplying substantial political and military support to the FMLN (Farabundo Marti National Liberation) insurgents in El Salvador to overthrow a democratically elected government, the Sandinistas destabilized the world order.²⁷

According to Norton Moore, the Sandinistas launched an extensive political campaign in the United States featuring propaganda trips for Americans to Nicaragua, propaganda films, and even direct phone lobbying by Daniel Ortega of individual American Congressmen before key Congressional votes in order to conceal their "secret war." Moore also claimed that the Sandinistas curtailed civil liberties in Nicaragua and killed Miskitu prisoners during anti-Contra operations, which was a direct violation of human rights.

²⁷ Ibid., 45.
1.1.4 A Critical Evaluation of Anti-Sandinista Narratives

Nietschmann, Muravchik, and Moore argued that the revolutionary government exercised control over its civilian population through coercive measures. While I recognize the importance of their criticism concerning Sandinista corruption, deception, abuse of power, denial of civil liberties, military aid to "Communist rebels" in El Salvador, and human rights violations on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua, I think it is equally important to point out the jarring right-wing tone in their arguments about indigenous self-determination. What is implicit in their narratives is that liberal democracy guarantees political pluralism, which protects and promotes the interest of ethnic minorities. But, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, among other radical democratic theorists, have already shown that liberal democracy is inherently anti-participatory because it reduces the participation of citizens to voting in a "market-like political system," where the voter merely chooses a candidate from existing political parties. Consequently, democracy becomes a game
in which political elites compete with one another for power to govern civil society.\textsuperscript{28}

In sum, I only wish Nietschmann, Muravchik, and Moore had addressed the following questions along with their criticisms of the Sandinista government. What was the Reagan Administration's conception of "open access" or "democracy"? Why did events in a poor Central American country like Nicaragua evoke such concern in the United States? What were some of the basic principles and objectives of U.S. foreign policy in Central America during the 1980s?; What did the ILRC and the Reagan Administration do to promote the interests of Native Americans or other ethnic minorities in the United States?

1.2 The Significance of My Research Strategy

My dissertation is an in-depth study of the discourse of revolutionary nationalism and critically examines the political aspirations and ideologies of Sandinista leaders.

However, my interest is not limited to developing a critique of *Sandinismo* or the historiography of the conflict on the Atlantic Coast; my aim is to show how Miskitu resistance became politicized in the context of the egalitarian claims of the revolution, which created the discursive conditions for Miskitu mobilization and collective action.

Marxist scholars (Carlos Vilas, Héctor Díaz Polanco and Gilberto López Rivas, Galio Gurdian) have provided a variety of conceptual tools to analyze questions about imperialism, revolutionary movements, nationalist resistance, and workers' struggles in Central America. Their basic argument was that Capitalism, by its very nature, systematically denies large sections of the population access to the resources necessary for self-determination. Those who are disempowered under Capitalism—workers and the unemployed who do not own the means of production—are locked in exploitative conditions because of institutionalized structures of inequality that are integral to the capitalist system. Thus, a class struggle to overcome Capitalist exploitation was a necessary condition for a democratic society. Consequently, Marxist scholars' "bottom up" approach to the study of the
Sandinista-Miskitu conflict relied quite heavily on analyses of political and economic practices and institutions.

My argument is that it is no longer possible to study the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict within the parameters of classical Marxist theories because of the following reasons: (1) Miskitu identity and collective action cut across class lines; (2) Miskitus should be recognized as subjects of their own history rather than as people who "lacked class consciousness"; (3) There is no doubt that Marxist scholars have shown the relationship between Capitalism and other forms of oppression, such as imperialism, sexism, racism, homophobia, but it is important to be note that many of these forms of oppression have remained intact even after a popular revolution in Nicaragua.

1.2.1 Why Subaltern Studies?

I think one of the best ways to understand Miskitu resistance is to develop a critique of the institutions and ideology of the revolutionary state. To a large extent the historiography of the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict has
focused on theorizing the relationship between indigenous peoples' rights and the power of the revolutionary state. Although several Marxist scholars such as Carlos Vilas, Héctor Díaz Polanco, Galio Gurdian, and Charles Hale attempted to contextualize and highlight the importance of indigenous peoples' struggle for self-determination in Nicaragua, their analyses failed to explain how revolutionary state created relations of hegemony and power on the Atlantic Coast.

In contrast to previous Marxist analyses, my dissertation focuses on the epistemology of the revolutionaries in order to highlight Miskitu agency. When the Sandinista government nationalized some natural resources on the Atlantic Coast, for example, they redefined the legal relationship of Miskitus to the resources of the nation-state. I believe an analysis of revolutionary nationalism from the perspective of a subordinate group can help us understand the dynamics as well as limitations of revolutionary politics. Subaltern studies does not provide a theoretical blueprint to resolve Nicaragua's social and economic problems, but it is a radical way of thinking about the hegemonic discourses of political and economic élites.
Scholars belonging to the South Asian and Latin American Subaltern Studies Collectives have already shown that nations are contested systems of cultural representation that limit and extend, legitimize and de-legitimize people's access to the resources of the nation-state. However "subaltern" is not a category, but a perspective that critically examines the organizational means by which dominant groups establish their authority and convince the masses to accept their political goals while proclaiming a rhetoric of equality and freedom.

The focus on subordinate groups has always been central to subaltern studies although the conception of subalternity has changed over time. At first, Ranajit Guha used the term "subaltern" to refer to people who were "subordinate in terms of class, caste, age, gender, and office, or in any other way." A few years later, Veena Das suggested that "subaltern" was not a category, but a perspective that counters "dominance without hegemony." Although Florencia Mallon condescendingly remarked that Subaltern Studies was just another way of "doing history

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with the people,"31 I believe that one of the main purposes of Subaltern Studies is to develop a critique of statist narratives. As Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued, Subaltern Studies aims to "write into the history of modernity and displace the central position of privileged groups and the nation-state as the subjects of discourse."32 Thus, the central issue for Latin Americanists inspired by the South Asian Subaltern Studies Collective is to reexamine ideas about nationalism and democracy in the context of revolutionary projects in Latin America. The Founding Statement of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group clearly states how and why Subaltern Studies is relevant to Latin America:

What is clear from the work of the South Asian Subaltern Studies Group is the axiom that the elites represented by the national bourgeoisie and/or the


colonial administration are responsible for inventing the ideology and reality of nationalism. Their way of looking at things is located within the parameters of the nation-state as constituted at points of intersection, and interest, between a formerly hegemonic colonial power and a future postcolonial system of new states, in which they will play key leadership roles. . . The new global political economy bring in its wake a conceptual movement to de-emphasize paradigms of nation and independence, a shift that accounts for the changes in terminology in the social sciences. Consensus, pluralism, democracy, subalternity, new global order are examples of this mutation. They have substituted terms such as modernization, dictatorship nationalism and revolution. One of our first tasks is to track the ways in which terms mutate, and what it means to use a given terminology.33

The Latin American Subaltern Studies Group was formed in the early 1990s, soon after the Sandinistas lost the national elections in Nicaragua, by a group of scholars whose primary orientation is in the field of Latin American literature. The excerpt from their founding statement illustrates that the Latin American subalternists were interested in theorizing the gap between the interests of the nation-state and the demands of the masses. I find their work useful to explore the problems and dilemmas of revolutionary projects and indigenous populations in Central America.

1.3 The Organization of Chapters

My dissertation consists of six chapters, each of which is further subdivided into smaller sections. The next chapter offers a political history of the most significant interactions among the Sandinistas, Miskitus, Contras, and the U.S. government from 1979 to 1990. Chapter 3 entitled "Contextualizing Ideologies Within Narratives of the Revolution" is a critical study of Sandinismo. I argue that Miskitu resistance can be best understood in the context of the historical origins and development of the Sandinista state, its ideology and policies for the Atlantic Coast. My criticism of Sandinismo is informed by the work of the South Asian and Latin American Subalternists and Postcolonial theorists, who analyze important questions of nation, nation-state, sovereignty, and hegemony.

The fourth chapter entitled "The Revolutionary State and Miskitu Identity" explores the relationship among economic grievances, identity construction processes, and political organizing among Miskitus. New Social Movement theorists (Alberto Melucci, Verta Taylor, Nancy Whittier) have suggested that political actors do not exist de facto by virtue of individuals sharing a common structural
location. In order to understand any politicized community, it is necessary to analyze the social and political struggle that created that identity. I use Taylor & Whittier's concept of "collective identity" to highlight the role of the revolutionary state in the construction of Miskitu collective identity.34

Chapter 5 entitled "Contextualizing American Press Coverage of the Sandinista-Miskitu Conflict" focuses on the epistemological question of how American reporters made sense of the revolutionary process in Nicaragua and represented Miskitus and Sandinistas in their stories and news reports.

Chapter 6 offers some concluding remarks about the epistemological limits of the socialist struggle against capitalist exploitation in Nicaragua in the context of Nicaragua's recent transition to liberal democracy.

1.4 Data and Research Methods

In Nicaragua, CIDCA is the principal repository of all Sandinista public policy documents relevant to my research. I spent two summers (1995 and 1998) doing archival research in Managua and Puerto Cabezas. Documents pertaining to Miskitu political organizations (MISATAN MISURASATA, YATAMA), transcripts of news broadcast from Radio 15 de Septiembre, as well as Sandinista government documents provided information about government projects. My conversations with researchers at CIDCA and Sandinista policymakers certainly helped me make sense of all the jumbled images of the Sandinistas, and understand Central American politics through the lives and perspectives of the revolutionaries. Consequently, I interviewed some prominent Miskitu political and community leaders, such as Hazel Lau and Jorge Frederick, as well as several ex-combatants in Puerto Cabezas.\(^{35}\) The insights I gained from these in-depth interviews enabled me to make sense of the stereotypical characterizations of Miskitus in the U.S. and Nicaraguan media.

\(^{35}\) I focused primarily on Miskitus in Puerto Cabezas for a couple of reasons. First, Puerto Cabezas was the principal zone of military action and Miskitu mobilization in the 1980s. Second, it is regarded as the center of Miskitu culture by the Miskitus.
I also tried to conduct a survey among Miskitu adults over the age of 30 on the basis of their experiences on the Atlantic Coast and interest in my research. I distributed over 200 questionnaires in Puerto Cabezas, but received only 40 responses. Puerto Cabezas was flooded with young, unemployed demobilized ex-combatants, who were involved in the counterrevolution during the 1980s. However, several Miskitu men and women refused to discuss their experiences and memories of the conflict on the Atlantic Coast or fill out my questionnaires. In retrospect, I feel that my own identity as a "foreigner" doing research at CIDCA may have posed some impediments to conduct survey research among Miskitus in Puerto Cabezas. Consequently, I returned to Managua and tried to distribute questionnaires among the Miskitus in the Moravian Church. I distributed 120 questionnaires, but received only 30 responses. Thus, my "sample" and analysis of the survey data do not aim at statistical representativeness. I consider my conclusions concerning Miskitu opinions exploratory, and used the data

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36 I think that the re-emergence of armed movements on the Atlantic Coast during the last couple of years is indicative of the failure of the autonomy process and demobilization of Contras. Thus, it was very difficult to conduct research in a town permeated by social injustice, poverty, violence, and drug-trafficking.
from the questionnaires for more in-depth explanatory accounts.


I also used several published collections of primary sources. Of all the collections I consulted the following were the most useful: The ten-volume *NIREX Collection: Nicaraguan Revolution Extracts* (1979-1990) compiled by Porfirio R. Solórzano contains over two-hundred-thousand documents taken from Sandinista government publications, newspaper clippings, and journals; *National Revolution and Indigenous Identity* edited by Klaudine Ohland and Robin
Schneider and published by the International Work group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) is a collection of documents, speeches, and interviews with Sandinista and Miskitu leaders; Sandinistas Speak, Nicaragua, the Sandinista People's Revolutions: Speeches by Sandinista Leaders, and Sandinistas: Key Documents are all excellent collections of documents and speeches pertaining to the revolutionary government.
CHAPTER 2

A CHRONOLOGY OF THE NEGOTIATIONS AMONG THE SANDINISTAS, MISKITUS, CONTRAS, AND THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

A democratic society might be defined as one... in which the majority is always prepared to put down a revolutionary minority.

Walter Lippmann

The political history of Nicaragua from 1979 to 1990 is very interesting because the revolutionary period marked the beginning of several fundamental economic and social reforms. In the United States, the Reagan Administration feared that the Sandinistas would convert Nicaragua into a "second Cuba." All these fears and uncertainties eventually led the revolutionary government's opponents to engage in a multifaceted program to hinder the revolutionary government's reconstruction efforts.

This chapter provides the political context for Sandinista policies for political organization and economic planning on the Atlantic Coast as well as Miskitu resistance to government policies. In this context, the Reagan Administration's efforts to destabilize the
Sandinista regime and disrupt peace talks between the revolutionary government and Miskitus cannot be ignored. From the very beginning, the Reagan Administration was determined to "contain Communism" in Central America. Subsequently, the U.S. government sponsored a prolonged low-intensity counterrevolution, imposed a trade embargo, and launched a massive campaign of disinformation about the revolutionary government's human rights violations and genocide of Miskitus. To some extent, the U.S. government was responsible for many of the human and economic losses experienced by both Miskitus as well as the Sandinistas. I believe that a serious analysis of the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict requires an account of the actual events and their underlying factors; the chronology of events becomes relevant in this context.

2.1 The Revolutionary Government and Miskitus

Immediately after the revolutionary triumph in July 1979, the Sandinistas took control of several productive enterprises on the Atlantic Coast previously owned by the Somoza family or foreign companies. Decree 56 of 24 August 1979, declared that the state had exclusive rights over the
natural resources, and in November 1979; Decree 137 nationalized all the mines. During the first few months of the revolution, neither the Sandinistas nor Miskitus had clear policies or ideas concerning political organization or economic planning for the Atlantic Coast. The revolutionary government's first chance to define its relation to the people of the Atlantic Coast came in October 1979, when ALPROMISU (Alliance for the Progress of Miskitus) held its fifth annual meeting organized by Miskitu leaders such as Hazel Lau, Brooklyn Rivera, and

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3 Carlos Vilas, State, Class, & Ethnicity in Nicaragua: Capitalist Modernization and Revolutionary Change on the Atlantic Coast (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1989), 63-64 and 89-90; Ernesto Richter, "De ALPROMISU a MISURASATA: Una Transición con Interrogantes," TMs [photocopy], n.d., CIDCA Archives in Managua.

4 Hazel Lau is a Miskitu intellectual from Bilwi. She began her political career as a student-member of ALPROMISU. In 1979, after the overthrow of the Somoza regime by the FSLN, she assumed a leadership role in the Miskitu community and helped organize the fifth annual meeting of ALPROMISU. Unlike Brooklyn Rivera and Steadman Fagoth, Hazel Lau remained in Nicaragua throughout the 1980s. She is one of the most prominent Miskitu leaders and played a very important role in the development and implementation of bilingual and bicultural programs on the Atlantic Coast. She also served as the Miskitu representative to the United Nations and Director of the Centro de Investigación y Documentación de la Costa Atlántica (CIDCA). Hazel Lau, "¿Qué Pasó en la Costa?" interview by Douglas Carcache, Envío 87 (September-October 1988): 21-29.

5 Brooklyn Rivera is a Miskitu leader from Puerto Cabezas. He is Moravian Christian by birth. He studied theology in a Baptist seminary (Colegio Bautista) and became a member of the Young Baptist Movement. In 1979, he became the Coordinator of MISURASATA. However, in 1982 he left Nicaragua and allied himself with Edén Pastora's counterrevolutionary group (ARDE) in Costa Rica, but he also received large amounts of money from the Indian Law Resource Center (ILRC) in
Steadman Fagoth in Puerto Cabezas (a.k.a. Bilwi). ALPROMISU was created under the Somoza regime in 1974 by Capuchin priests, Moravian pastors, and U.S. Peace Corps members. It was a non-governmental organization and its goal was to protect the loss of Indian communal lands on the Atlantic Coast to INFONAC (Institute for National Development), which was created in 1953 on the recommendation of a World Bank delegation. ALPROMISU was mainly concerned with issues related to reforestation, fire fighting, and the establishment of a wood pulp and paper processing plant in the pine forests between the Coco and Wawa Rivers.

Over 450 delegates from 187 indigenous communities attended the meeting. Figure 2.1 shows the ethnic distribution on the Atlantic Coast, and Figure 2.2 shows...
the geographical location of Puerto Cabezas, Waspam, Prinzalpolka, Rosita, Bonanza, and Siuna, the principal towns of the Atlantic Coast. The revolutionary government was represented by Daniel Ortega and Ernesto Cardenal, who supported the formation of grassroots organizations on the Coast but resisted Miskitu demands for an ethnic-based organization. After an initial attempt to convince the Miskitu delegates that an existing Sandinista peasant syndicate, the ATC (Association of Rural Workers), would

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7 Daniel Ortega was born in November 1945 in La Libertad in Chontales. His father was an accountant for a mining firm. During the 1940s, his parents had been arrested by Anastasio Somoza García for revolutionary activities. Daniel Ortega joined the FSLN guerrillas in 1963. In 1979, he became the Coordinator of the Governing Junta of National Reconstruction (JGRN) and served as the President of Nicaragua from 1984 to 1990. In July 1991, he was elected to be the General Secretary of the FSLN, and in September 1991, he became the leader of Sandinista Deputies in the National Assembly.

8 Ernesto Cardenal, priest, poet, and Sandinista Minister of Culture, believed that one of the main goals of the revolution was to construct a strong national identity. Consequently, under the Sandinista regime, cultural forms became important tools to mobilize the masses. Nicaraguan Artists, writers, and performers were organized by the Sandinista Association for Cultural Workers (ASTC) to support the rights of cultural workers and to analyze the role of culture in Nicaragua's social transformation. Ernesto Cardenal, "La Cultura de la Nueva Nicaragua: Un Cambio de Todo," in Hacia Una Política Cultural de la Revolución Popular Sandinista (Managua: Ministerio de Cultura, 1982), 272.

adequately represent them, Daniel Ortega acquiesced, and the revolutionary government created a new grassroots organization called MISURASATA (Miskitu Sumu Rama Sandinista Asla Takanka) in November 1979. At the beginning of 1980, MISURASATA issued its first public statement entitled *Lineamientos Generales* (General Guidelines) to outline the organization's goals and demands. Miskitu leaders recognized Spanish as the official language of Nicaragua and agreed to work toward the "integration" of Costeños into national life and simultaneously protect and promote the cultural, religious, economic, political, and linguistic interests of its members.¹⁰

In February 1980, the revolutionary government created the Nicaraguan Institute for the Atlantic Coast (INNICA) as a decentralized ministry-level public administration agency, under the direction of William Ramírez, to coordinate policies developed by other government organizations for the Atlantic Coast.¹¹ The creation of INNICA upset MISURASATA leaders because they were not given

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¹¹ Junta de Gobierno de Reconstrucción Nacional (JGRN), "Creación del Instituto Nicaragüense de la Costa Atlántica (INNICA)," 1980, CIDCA Archives in Managua; JGRN, "Programa Prioritario de la Revolución (PPR-Costa Atlántica)," n.d., CIDCA Archives in Managua.
any role within the new Ministry and Miskitu leaders viewed it as a competing organization. MISURASATA leaders complained that the revolutionary government's policies concerning land and natural resources on the Atlantic Coast adversely affected local lumbering and fishing concerns. Subsequently, in August 1980, MISURASATA, INNICA and IRENA (Institute for Natural Resources and the Environment) signed an agreement on wood-cutting. According to the terms of this agreement, IRENA was to pay for all wood cut on Indian communal lands but not for wood cut on government-owned lands; for wood cut on disputed lands, IRENA agreed to pay 80% of the total value of the wood. In an effort to reduce tensions concerning land ownership between the Sandinistas and Miskitus, the government asked MISURASATA to prepare maps of communal lands and government property on the Atlantic Coast.

Meanwhile in 1980, the Ministry of Education carried out a literacy crusade throughout the country. The

12 IRENA was created in 1979 by the Sandinista government to regulate national policies on natural resources and the environment. IRENA replaced INFONAC. "Acuerdo Entre INNICA, IRENA y MISURASATA," El Nuevo Diario, 15 February 1981; "IRENA Nos Remite Copia de Acuerdo Con MISURASATA," La Prensa, 15 February 1981.

Sandinistas constructed several schools and invested valuable resources to develop educational programs and materials. The literacy campaign was successful in most places, but during the summer of 1980 MISURASATA demanded that on the Atlantic Coast "teaching should be done in native languages in the first years, gradually changing to a bilingual system." Consequently, in conjunction with MISURASATA, the Ministry of Education developed special literacy programs in English, Miskitu, and Sumu. The Council of State passed a law promoting bilingual education in the languages of the Atlantic Coast. The law authorized kindergarten and basic primary education in Miskitu and Creole English and the gradual introduction of Spanish.

The concern with the literacy programs was a political issue because it involved the potential role of literacy within the revolutionary struggle. The Sandinistas argued that literacy, like all education, had to be understood within the ideological dynamics of Nicaragua's struggle against U.S. imperialism. Consequently, the revolutionary government used the literacy programs to educate people about the evils of Capitalism and involve the masses in the

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revolutionary process. Miskitu leaders feared that the government's literacy programs would eventually lead to the "assimilation" of indigenous populations. The Sandinistas and Miskitus had very different views about the literacy programs, which soon became a site of cultural struggle between the two groups. See Chapter 4 for a discussion of this issue.

In January 1981, MISURASATA submitted a map of communal lands and land rights on the Atlantic Coast to the government. In this document, better known as "Plan 81," MISURASATA demanded increased political and administrative control in the region. Miskitu leaders demanded a seat in the National Junta, the dissolution of INNICA, and the creation of several alternative grassroots organizations such as Juventud MISURASATA (MISURASATA's Youth


17 INNICA was replaced by the Centro de Investigación y Documentación de la Costa Atlántica (CIDCA) in July 1981. INNICA, "Creación del Centro de Investigación y Documentación de la Costa Atlántica," July 1981, CIDCA Archives in Managua.
Association) and Mujeres MISURASATA (MISURASATA's Association of Women), to represent indigenous peoples of the Coast. Miskitu leaders argued that the rights of the "Indian nation" were more important than the rights of the nation-state. For the first time, Miskitu leaders framed their demands in terms of "aboriginal rights" and rejected the importance of national development, which they had accepted in the 1980 General Guidelines. Several scholars, including Ileana Rodríguez and Carlos Vilas, have argued that the conflict between the Sandinistas and MISURASATA was, primarily, a conflict between two different political projects, each with its own organization.¹⁸

The revolutionary government refused to accept MISURASATA's "Plan 81" and accused Miskitu leaders of promoting a "separatist" movement against the sovereignty of the Nicaraguan state. Shortly thereafter, the State Security Service accused Steadman Fagoth of being a member of Somoza's security service during the 1970s.¹⁹ The consequence of this accusation and the increasing distrust between MISURASATA and the Sandinistas led to the arrest of

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the entire leadership of MISURASATA in February 1981 in Prinzapolka at the closing ceremony of the Miskitu Literacy Campaign. All the leaders except Steadman Fagoth were released after a few days. Steadman Fagoth was detained until May, when the government offered him a scholarship to study abroad. Initially Fagoth agreed to accept the scholarship, but he evaded government control by crossing the border to Honduras to join other dissident Miskitus. In Honduras, Fagoth set up several military training camps in Mocorón and other places along the Honduras-Nicaragua border, and used Radio 15 de Septiembre to recruit Miskitus from Nicaragua.

20 Barricada justified the FSLN's action by stating that "the arrest of the separatists was necessary for the defense and consolidation of the process by which peace and order are guaranteed to the population, to avoid bloodshed which only serves to injure the people, to avoid manipulation of a population, to avoid the preparation of the subjective conditions which would permit the invasion of our national territory." Barricada, 24 February 1981; "Campbell Revela Plan 81 de MISURASATA," La Prensa, 31 March 1981, 9; Lawrence A. Pezzullo, "GRN Releases Some MISURASATA Leaders, Fagoth to be Tried," confidential cable to U.S. Secretary of State, March 1981, Managua, in Nicaragua: The Making of U.S. Policy, 1978-1990. (Alexandria, VA: Chadwyck-Healey Inc.), microfiche (no. 0285).


Figure 2.1: Ethnic Distribution on the Atlantic Coast

Figure 2.2: Map Showing the Administrative Zones of Northeastern Nicaragua.

In March 1981, MISURASATA released a press communiqué, signed by Norman Campbell, rejecting the accusations that "Plan 81" was aimed at separatism; instead, MISURASATA declared that Miskitus would support the revolutionary government if their rights to participate in political decisions regarding the Atlantic Coast were guaranteed. However, increasing counterrevolutionary activities on the Coast and the subsequent militarization of the zone created an atmosphere of mutual suspicion between the Sandinista authorities and Miskitus. Gradually, the government disregarded MISURASATA as the legitimate representative of Amerindian populations and worked directly with indigenous communities through INNICA.

In August 1981, the revolutionary government issued its Declaration of Principles Regarding the Indigenous Communities. INNICA acted as the Coast Ministry for more than two years, but in 1982, as part of the process of political and administrative regionalization of the country, the Centro de Investigación y Documentación de la Costa Atlántica (CIDCA) replaced INNICA. CIDCA was created.

as an autonomous research institution with offices in Managua, Bilwi, and Bluefields to gather data and conduct research pertaining to the histories and cultures of Costeños, as well as the environment and natural resources of the Atlantic Coast. The government also created two special zones on the Atlantic Coast (a.k.a. Department of Zelaya), each with its own regional government. Special zone I corresponded to northern Zelaya with Rosita as the capital; Special Zone II corresponded to southern Zelaya with its capital in Bluefields.

During the first eighteen months of the revolution (July 1979-February 1981), Sandinista policy toward the Coast developed mainly as an expression of civilian politics. It is therefore important to separate this initial period from the subsequent one (February 1981-1985), when experiences of military conflict became the primary frame of reference both for state policy and Miskitu political decisions and mobilization. It was only after the February 1981 incidents that Miskitu opposition assumed a decidedly military character.
Between 1980 and 1982 domestic opposition to the Sandinistas emerged in a variety of forms. On the first anniversary of the revolution in July 1980, in the town of Quilalí near the Honduran border, Pedro Joaquín González (a.k.a. Dimas) organized a small group of farmers to oppose the government's agrarian policies. Dimas criticized Jaime Wheelock, Sandinista Minister of Agricultural Development and Agrarian Reform, and warned to set off a series of uprisings against the revolutionary government. A few months later, Dimas was killed by Mamerto Herrera, who worked as a double agent for the Sandinistas.²⁴

Meanwhile a number of other protest groups, such as the Chilotes, the Nicaraguan Democratic Union (UDN), and MILPAS (Milicias Populares Anti-Sandinistas)²⁵ were formed by people who had participated in the overthrow of Somoza, but were unhappy with the revolutionary government. By the end of 1981, most of the armed opposition in northern Nicaragua was organized by former members of Somoza's

National Guard under the banner of the Nicaraguan Democratic Force (FDN) under the leadership of Adolfo Calero Portocarrero. In southern Nicaragua, an opposition group called the Democratic Revolutionary Alliance (ARDE) was organized under the direction of Edén Pastora (a.k.a. Commandante Cero).

The National Directorate of the FDN consisted of seven people: Adolfo Calero Portocarrero, who was the manager of the Coca Cola franchise in Managua, and leader of the Conservative Party and Chamber of Commerce under Somoza; Edgar Chamorro Coronel, who served as the public relations representative for the wealthy Pellas family until 1979; Indalecio Rodriguez Alaniz, who had served as the vice-rector of la Universidad de Centro-America (la UCA); Enrique Bermudez Varela, former National Guard Coronel and military attaché in Washington under Tachito Somoza. Bermudez was the top military commander of the FDN; Lucia Cardenal de Salazar, widow of Jorge Salazar, a wealthy coffee grower killed in November 1980 after a dispute with the police; Marcos Zeledón Rosales, former leader of COSEP (Superior Council of Private Enterprises) and INDE (Nicaraguan Development Institute); Alfonso Callejas Deshon, Somoza's Vice President. The CIA spent at least $73 million on its war against the Sandinistas; most of these funds were used to train and support FDN troops. In 1984, the fighting force of the FDN was estimated as 10,000-12,000 troops. The February 1984 FDN Newsletter published in Washington, DC, described FDN members as "Nicaraguans who from within or outside of the national territory, now under the siege by the Sandinista regime, are tenaciously opposed to the Sovietization and Cubanization of the country and are now fighting in every way possible to free it from the tentacles of Marxist-Leninist imperialism." Central American Historical Institute, "Who's Who in Nicaragua's Military Opposition," in The Nirex Collection: Nicaraguan Revolution Extracts 1978-1990, Vol. X, comp., Porfirio R. Solórzano (Austin: Litex, Inc., 1997). Originally Published in the Central American Historical Institute's UPDATE 3, no. 24 (23 July 1984); U.S. Department of State, Documents on the Nicaraguan Resistance: Leaders, Military Personnel, and Program (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, 1986).

The ARDE was a coalition of six different organizations represented by the following people: Alfonso Robelo, who was the President of the Nicaraguan Democratic Movement (MDN) and former member of the JGRN from June 1979 to April 1980; Edén Pastora, who was one of the most popular heroes in the struggle against Somoza. Initially he served as the Deputy Defense Minister of the Sandinista government, but resigned in July 1981 and fled to Costa Rica and founded the ARDE in 1982; Fernando Chamorro Rappacioli of the Nicaraguan Democratic Union-Nicaraguan Revolutionary Armed Forces (UDN-FARN). He supported and worked with the Sandinistas in the overthrow of Somoza, but he defected
Meanwhile, MISURASATA split into three independent groups: (1) MISURA (Miskitús, Sumus and Ramas), under the leadership of Steadman Fagoth, who joined the FDN in Honduras; (2) MISURASATA under the leadership of Brooklyn Rivera, who joined the ARDE and collaborated with Sandinista dissidents such as Alfonso Robelo and Edén Pastora; (3) a third group, under the leadership of Hazel Lau, remained in Nicaragua and negotiated with the government. Figure 2.4 shows the areas of operation of each Contra group.

The Río Coco region in northern Nicaragua was the main theater of counterrevolutionary activities organized by MISURA and the FDN. Figure 2.3 shows the Contrabases in


MISURA worked very closely with the FDN and was also supported by funds from the CIA. But, the organization was also funded by a number of U.S.-based organizations such as the Christian Broadcasting Network, the Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress, Soldier of Fortune Magazine, Refugee Relief. Wycliffe Diego, a Moravian pastor and founder-member of ALPROMISU was the political coordinator of MISURA. Steadman Fagoth was MISURA's top military commander. Other prominent members of the organization included the following: Enrique López, a Sumu representative; Tilieeth Mullins from the Miskitu Council of Elders; Roger Hermann from MISURASATA's fishermen's union; Adán Artola who worked for a lumber company on the Atlantic Coast; and Teofilo Archibald, a Creole representative. Central American Historical Institute, "Who's Who in Nicaragua's Military Opposition," in The Nirex Collection: Nicaraguan Revolution Extracts 1978-1990, Vol. X,
Honduras. In December 1981, counterrevolutionary operations in the Río Coco region (along the Honduras-Nicaragua border) increased dramatically. On December 21st and 22nd Contra forces from Honduras crossed the border and entered Nicaragua to attack the Sandinista Popular Army (EPS). In this particular Contra attack, popularly known as "Operation Red Christmas," several Sandinista troops were killed and public property in the Río Coco region (hospitals, schools, bridges) was completely destroyed. Sandinista troops retaliated by killing several Miskitus in the Leimus area. Soon after that, in January 1982, the

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Steadman Fagoth, leader of MISURA, accused the Sandinista government of human rights violations. The FDN and MISURA accused the FSLN of genocide and even claimed that Sandinista troops invaded Honduras. For details of these accusations see transcripts of Radio 15 de Septiembre published in FBIS Daily Reports, 4 January 1982, 14-15. Subsequently the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR)
Sandinista government evacuated several Miskitu communities in the Río Coco region, which became the principal zone of military action during the 1980s.\(^\text{31}\)

The relocation of thousands of Miskitus from thirty-nine communities in the Río Coco region to protected resettlement camps in Tasba Pri was one of the most tragic incidents of the counterrevolution.\(^\text{32}\) The Sandinista wrongly assumed that most Miskitus living in Waspam and surrounding villages would want to leave the area because of war. Many Miskitus chose not to be relocated in the Tasba Pri camps, and crossed the Coco River into Honduras.

Tasba Pri consisted of five settlements (Sumubila, Sahsa, Wasminona, Santo Tomás de Umbra, and Columbus) in

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the area between Puerto Cabezas and Rosita (see Figure 2.3). People were organized into brigades by village of origin in each settlement to build houses and work in the fields. By the end of 1982, each settlement received a communal land title and civilians replaced Sandinista military leaders. A state-owned cacao production enterprise was set up and cooperatives were organized, but the experiment failed badly because Miskitus preferred wage-labor. The government tried to make the camps as livable as possible, but Miskitus never really adapted themselves because it involved a complete change in their habits and lifestyles. They could not raise pigs or grow vegetables in their backyards and detested the idea of working in state-owned enterprises. More important, the emotional trauma of separation from family members coupled with a scarcity of a number of products in the camps aroused anger and frustration among many Miskitus.33

The Tasba Pri incident was highly publicized by the international media. A flood of literature poured during

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33 INNICA, Tasba Pri: A Seis Meses de Trabajo (Managua: INNICA, 1982); CIDCA-INNICA, "Proyecto 'Wan Tasbaya'," April 1982, CIDCA Archives in Managua; Luis Carrion, "The Truth About the Atlantic Coast," Speech at the Conference of Latin American Intellectuals (7 March 1982 in Managua), in National Revolution and Indigenous Identity, eds. Klaudine Ohland and Robin Schneider (Copenhagen: IWGIA, 1983), 263; This section is also based on information I gathered through survey questionnaires distributed in Managua and Bilwi.
the 1980s. Chapter 5 discusses U.S. press coverage of the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict, but the excerpts quoted in the next few pages are representative of articles that frequently appeared in the mainstream media in the United States. For example, *Time Magazine* reported that:

> The forcible resettlement of the Miskitos was designed to prevent them from providing food, shelter and intelligence to the anti-Sandinistas. Whatever the reason, the Sandinista action against the Indian minority was being sharply criticized last week as an indefensible abridgment of human rights.\(^{34}\)

This excerpt shows that Nicaraguan counterrevolutionary groups and the Reagan Administration in the United States used the Tasba Pri incident to discredit the Sandinista government's attitude and policies toward Nicaragua's ethnic minorities. Jeane Kirkpatrick accused the Sandinistas of "genocide" of Amerindians:

> In the last months the Nicaraguan government has carried out a campaign of systematic violence against the Miskito Indians, burning their villages, destroying their institutions, forcing their evacuation and resettlement, killing those who resist, driving thousands into exile in Honduras. Of this campaign, Freedom House declared, 'Circumstantial evidence clearly suggests that the central government has

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embarked on a policy to eradicate the indigenous peoples of the coastal area.\textsuperscript{35}

Jeane Kirkpatrick used the Tasba Pri incident to condemn the relocation of Miskitós. And in June 1986, the United States Department of State released a document entitled *Dispossessed: The Miskito Indians in Sandinista Nicaragua*, which claimed that the Sandinistas were "Communists," who were unwilling to tolerate any kind of resistance to their government:

After Somoza's ouster, the FSLN placed Indian lands under state control, dismissed traditional claims to self-government, and moved to restructure Atlantic Coast society according to Marxist models. Widespread protests resulted, and the Sandinista response was immediate and harsh. . . Friction accelerated with the arrival of Communist-style 'mass organizations' such as the Sandinista Defense Committees (CDS) which disrupted existing political and social patterns. . . Before the development of large, organized resistance movements, the Sandinistas evacuated the northeastern border areas, citing 'security dangers.' In January 1982, about 10,000-12,000 east coast Indians were uprooted from their homes near the Coco River and marched into crowded relocation camps west of Puerto Cabezas and north of Jinotega and Matagalpa. The main complex was called Tasba Pri, which means, ironically, 'free land.' The Miskitós were often rousted out of bed late at night, then forced at gunpoint to begin the long march. Those who resisted were labeled 'counter-revolutionaries' and were often killed. In the wake of

their departure, belongings were confiscated, homes were razed, and cattle slaughtered to deter them from wanting to return.\textsuperscript{36}

However, a few years later The Nation's Latin America correspondent during the 1980s, Penny Lernoux, wrote:

The Reagan Administration has encouraged the Indian conflict in an effort to show that the Sandinistas are a totalitarian regime; the contras have tried to manipulate the Miskitos to obtain foreign funding and approval. Divided on the complex issue, the Nicaraguan government allowed its distrust of the Indians to degenerate into civil war, and with each spiral in the violence it became more difficult for the Sandinistas to understand that ethnicity cannot be squeezed into the mold of class struggle.\textsuperscript{37}

Counterrevolutionary activities and armed conflict between Miskitus and the Sandinistas increased dramatically in the Río Coco region after the Tasba Pri incident. Steadman Fagoth (MISURA) worked closely with the FDN and the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). This was also the period when the Sandinista government viewed all Miskitus as "counterrevolutionaries." Meanwhile, Brooklyn Rivera (MISURASATA) allied himself with the ARDE in Costa

\textsuperscript{36} United States Department of State, Dispossessed: The Miskito Indians in Sandinista Nicaragua (Department of State Publication 9478, 1986), 3.

Rica and organized Miskitu resistance against the Sandinistas from the southern front.

In December 1983, when it became clear to both the revolutionary government as well as Miskitus in Río Coco that they were being manipulated by the Contras, the government declared general amnesty for most Miskitus in prisons or in exile. In mid-1984, Sandinista leaders began negotiating with Miskitu representatives, and William Ramírez said that the government had a "historic commitment" to the indigenous people of Nicaragua. At a United Nations meeting in August 1984, Daniel Ortega invited Brooklyn Rivera and Miskitus living outside the country to return to the Atlantic Coast. Brooklyn Rivera returned to Nicaragua in late October and visited several Miskitu villages and the Tasba Pri settlements.

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Figure 2.3: Map Showing Contra Bases in Honduras and Tasba Pri Resettlement Camps for Miskitus in Nicaragua.

Source: United States Department of State, Dispossessed: The Miskito Indians in Sandinista Nicaragua (Department of State Publication 9478, 1986), ii.
Figure 2.4: Map Showing Contra Groups and Areas of Operation in Nicaragua.

2.3 Peace Negotiations With Miskitus

According to Charles Hale, Sandinistas decided to negotiate with Miskitus in 1984 because: (1) they believed that negotiations would increase their legitimacy in the 1985 elections; (2) the war was becoming prohibitively costly; (3) the change in policy arose from a genuinely self-critical evaluation of the revolution and the rights of ethnic minorities.40

I think it is equally important to point out that in April 1984, the U.S. Congress decided not to fund the Contras in Nicaragua. This decision had important consequences for Miskitu militants. For example, Brooklyn Rivera, leader of MISURASATA, immediately tried to distance himself from the ARDE and negotiate directly with the Sandinistas. Thus, starting in 1984, both Sandinistas and Miskitus engaged in multilevel peace negotiations. The first round of negotiations among MISURASATA, MISURA, and the Sandinistas was held in December 1984 in Bogotá, Colombia. The government delegation was headed by Luis Carrión, Vice Minister of the Interior.

The government proposed focusing on issues such as land and natural resources, education, health, housing, transportation, and multiculturalism, and even proposed establishing a three-month truce and repatriating refugees. MISURASATA presented a document entitled The Bogotá Accord, and demanded territorial sovereignty, demilitarization of the Coast, a war indemnity, formal recognition of MISURASATA, and a cease-fire after the replacement of government EPS (Sandinista Popular Army) troops by MISURASATA troops, and control over natural resources. Brooklyn Rivera also asked for the creation of a tripartite commission composed of two government delegates, two MISURASATA delegates, and three delegates from the foreign governments and observers that were present during the meeting.\(^{41}\)

The Sandinistas rejected most of MISURASATA's demands because of the following reasons: (1) MISURASATA demanded territorial sovereignty, not regional autonomy; (2) Brooklyn Rivera demanded the removal of EPS troops, which would have increased the threat of Contra attacks in the Río Coco region; (3) MISURASATA demanded control of natural

resources on the Coast, which was against the revolutionary government's planning policies that were designed to benefit the economy of Nicaragua, not the Miskitu community alone. Consequently, both Luis Carrión and Brooklyn Rivera left Bogotá without signing a peace accord.\footnote{American Embassy in Managua, "GRN-Rivera Talks on Miskitos End With No Progress Reported," text of telegram to U.S. Secretary of State, December 1984, Managua, in Nicaragua: The Making of U.S. Policy, 1978-1990, (Alexandria, VA: Chadwyck-Healey Inc.), microfiche (no. 02318); Martin Diskin, Thomas Bossert, Salomón Nahmad S. and Stéfano Varese, Peace and Autonomy on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua: A Report of the LASA Task Force on Human Rights and Academic Freedom (Pittsburgh: LASA, 1986), 30.}

Subsequent rounds of talks followed in April (Mexico City) and May of 1985 (Bogotá). In these meetings the government announced the formation of a National Autonomy Commission (NAC) under the direction of Luis Carrión, and agreed to resume sending medical supplies and food to the villages on the Atlantic Coast and to allow humanitarian agencies to work with government officials. MISURASATA, for its part, agreed to avoid offensive military operations.\footnote{Brooklyn Rivera, "Press Statement," in Nicaragua: The Making of U.S. Policy, 1978-1990, (Alexandria, VA: Chadwyck-Healey Inc.), microfiche (no. 02352).}

The government also agreed to broaden the December 1983 Amnesty Decree to include all Costeños who were still in prison because of their ties to MISURA and MISURASATA.\footnote{Barricada, 23 April 1985.} Although both sides agreed to a "cessation of offensive
activities" in April 1985, MISURASATA attacked Sandinista military posts in Bluefields after the agreement had been signed.

The May 1985 meetings erupted into a stormy exchange of mutual accusations and ended in an indefinite suspension of diplomatic contact. Brooklyn Rivera did not accept responsibility for the Bluefields attacks. In addition, MISURASATA sought unconditional government recognition of the principles of Amerindian self-determination as defined in the Bogotá Accord before the military question could be resolved. The Sandinistas demanded a cease-fire in order to discuss issues concerning Miskitu rights. Negotiations centered on a crucial question: should Amerindian rights be negotiated within the parameters of Nicaraguan national sovereignty? Conflicts followed directly from the two sides' very different conceptions of what autonomy would entail. It was at this time, in the context of the Iran-Contra arms scandal, that Contra leader, Adolfo Calero, admitted that Lt. Col. Oliver North from the U.S. National Security Council had given him some money to pay Brooklyn
Rivera to disrupt the peace negotiations between Miskitus and the Sandinista government.45

After the May 1985 talks failed, the Sandinistas concluded that Brooklyn Rivera was unwilling to break with the counterrevolution and viewed MISURASATA's position on autonomy as an extension of that intransigence. From that time on, the Sandinista-backed autonomy proposal evolved in constant antagonism with MISURASATA.46 After May 1985, Sandinista leaders demarcated the political space they had opened, making sure that MISURASATA's militant ethnic demands remained unambiguously outside the boundaries of the government's version of autonomy.47

In July 1984, the Sandinistas promoted the formation of another grassroots organization called MISATAN48 as a means to open a channel of communication with Miskitus. From the beginning, MISATAN adopted a pro-government stance. MISURA (Steadman Fagoth's group) tried to prevent


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the formation of MISATAN, and attacked and killed some Miskitus in Columbus, one of the Tasba Pri camps. However, MISATAN leaders confronted Miskitu militancy and worked with the revolutionary government on the following issues: (1) reunification of Miskitu families; (2) bilingual and bicultural education on the Atlantic Coast; (3) recognition of Miskitu as Nicaragua's second language; (4) formalization of Miskitu land rights and their control of natural resources on the Atlantic Coast.

In late-1985, MISATAN leaders presented the government with a petition that put forth a series of militant demands, including an end to military service for Miskitus, removal of the local FSLN representative, and de facto recognition of the anti-government Miskitu organizations. When it became clear to the Sandinistas that MISATAN had gone beyond the demarcated political space of autonomy, their response was swift and effective. There were no

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arrests or repression, but the government quickly cut off MISATAN's funds and eliminated its access to high levels of regional political power. Consequently, MISATAN leaders were left without a strong position either as representatives of the Miskitu people or as negotiators who had contacts with Sandinista officials. In mid-1986 MISATAN collapsed under the weight of its own unfulfilled promises and quietly became defunct.

The peace accords of May and September 1985 facilitated the return of Miskitus to their homes in Río Coco. In 1985, Tomás Borge replaced Luis Carrión as head of the National Autonomy Commission, and negotiated with Eduardo Pantin from MISURA. An agreement for a cease-fire was reached, and the government recognized the right of Miskitu combatants to keep their arms for the defense of their communities, travel freely in Nicaragua, and participate in the autonomy process. The peace accord between Eduardo Pantin and the Sandinistas undermined the CIA's (Central Intelligence Agency) efforts to unite all the Miskitu factions into a new organization called KISAN (Kus Indiaka Asla Takanka) under the direction of the FDN.

In 1985, the U.S. government tried to bring the various indigenous Contra forces together under an umbrella organization called KISAN (Union of Coastal Indians of Nicaragua). The organization received about $30,000 per month from the CIA to establish an office in
Consequently, MISURA labeled Eduardo Pantin as a traitor; a few months later Pantin was killed and the Sandinistas blamed the CIA for his death.

By the end of 1985, the government had negotiated with numerous Miskitu combatants, especially the KISAN For Peace combatants, who marched through the streets of Bilwi in September 1985. Religious organizations on the Coast also played an important role in the peace talks. After an initial period of open confrontation, several pastors made radio appeals to the armed Miskitus to put down their arms and return. In 1985, interdenominational commissions (Moravian, Catholic, Assembly of God, Church of the Word, Baptist, Maranathic, and Apostolic) were created to support the religious organizations in their efforts to establish communication with Miskitus in Honduran camps regarding the peace process and autonomy on the Atlantic Coast. The peace talks also allowed the government to resume an array of

Honduras. KISAN's objectives were manifold: to sabotage the peace plans of the Sandinista government; to recruit more Miskitus for dwindling Contra forces; and to make anti-Sandinista propaganda from the "refugee drama," which would sway U.S. Congress votes toward Contra aid. However, a few months later, six Contra commanders entered into cease-fire negotiations with the Sandinistas. This faction was called "KISAN For Peace" as opposed to the pro-war faction, which was called "KISAN For War" under the leadership of Wycliffe Diego. The CIA plan backfired because now it had to deal with four Contra groups, including "KISAN For Peace," which was negotiating with the government.
welfare services to outlying communities left destitute by the war.

In September 1985, the KISAN For War faction organized several Contra attacks in the Río Coco region and tried to sabotage the autonomy process. They blew up the only bridge across the Wawa River on the road to Río Coco and disrupted the flow of supplies. The government responded by tightening security and control in the region and this put a damper on the peace negotiations. In December 1985, the Moravian Church and MISATAN withdrew from the Autonomy Commission. They demanded a peace accord with all Miskitu factions, including KISAN and MISURASATA, before participating in the autonomy process.

Armed conflicts between KISAN and the Sandinistas increased in 1986. Over 10,000 Miskitus who managed to return from Tasba Pri and Honduras to their homes in the Río Coco region once again fled to Honduras. Apparently, the KISAN For War troops scared Miskitus by telling them that the Sandinistas had plans to kill them all. The provocative incident coincided with the vote on Contra aid in the U.S. Congress. Once again the Reagan Administration tried to accuse Sandinistas of genocide of Amerindians. Meanwhile in Nicaragua, CIDCA, CEPAD (Evangelical Aid and
Development Committee), and the Moravian Church formed a new organization called the Commission for Justice and Peace and the Unity of the Atlantic Coast. This was a non-governmental grassroots organization that tried to arrange for a cease-fire between KISAN and the government and help Miskitus return to their homes in the Río Coco region.\(^{51}\) The Sandinista government did not appreciate the efforts of this new organization because it did not want to negotiate with Contra forces outside Nicaragua.

In June 1987, the CIA made another attempt to unify all the Contra groups. The CIA negotiated with Wycliffe Diego (KISAN), Brooklyn Rivera (MISURASATA), and Steadman Fagoth (MISURA) and formed YATAMA (Yabti Tasba Masraka Nani Aslatakanaka). But, this effort also failed because thousands of Miskitu and Sumu ex-combatants accepted the government's offer of amnesty. In October 1987, 400 Miskitus under the leadership of Uriel Vanegas signed an accord and joined the Peace and Autonomy Commission. In February 1988, Brooklyn Rivera also re-entered into peace talks with the government.\(^{52}\)

\(^{51}\) CIDCA, "Documento Base Para la Formación de Una Comisión de Paz en la Costa Atlántica," 1986, TMs, CIDCA Archives in Managua.

Figure 2.5: Miskitu Political Organizations on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua, 1973-1990.
2.4 The Autonomy Statute

The political and institutional framework for the peace process and the return of Miskitu combatants and refugees was established by the development of an autonomy project for ethnic groups on the Atlantic Coast. In December 1984, the government created the National Autonomy Commission (NAC). The Sandinistas had been thinking about institutionalizing indigenous peoples' rights for a long time, but counterrevolutionary activities on the Coast had made it difficult to carry on peaceful negotiations with Miskitus. In the early 1980s, there was a broad consensus among Miskitus and Sandinistas that Costeños should manage their own affairs, but nobody had a clear concept of autonomy.  

In June 1985, an assembly of representatives of the ethnic groups of the Atlantic Coast, the FSLN, and the revolutionary government unanimously approved the document entitled Principles and Policies for the Exercise of Autonomy Rights of the Indian Peoples and Communities of

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53 Comisión Nacional de Autonomía, "El Derecho de Autonomía Para los Pueblos Indígenas y Comunidades de la Costa Atlántica de Nicaragua: Documento Auxiliar Elaborado Por el Comité Ejecutivo de la Comisión Nacional de Autonomía Para Apoyo de la Discusión Sobre Derechos de Autonomía Para los Pueblos Indígenas y Comunidades de la Costa Atlántica de Nicaragua, 1984, TMs, CIDCA Archives in Managua.
the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua. Issues related to regional autonomy were discussed widely by international indigenous leaders, Indian rights lawyers, anthropologists, and political leaders invited by the government to a symposium on "The State, Autonomy, and Indigenous Rights." People from northern Zelaya could not participate as actively as people from southern Zelaya in the autonomy discussions because of the war. Miskitu families were geographically scattered and the fear of being caught in a crossfire was constant. According to Judy Butler, for Miskitus autonomy "was not a philosophical debate about new forms of government but a political answer for their most immediate prayers. In 1985, it meant returning to Río Coco; in 1986 it was synonymous with peace; in 1987 with family reunification; in 1988 with rebuilding their communities and in 1989 with resuming economic activity." Only educated urban elites and the NAC members fought over the

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legal aspects of the statute concerning the functions of the regional and central governments.57

By April 1987, a draft of the Autonomy Statute was debated in a multiethnic assembly in Puerto Cabezas with 220 elected delegates from northern and southern Zelaya, an audience of 2,000 Costeños, foreign observers and press reporters.58 The most substantive debates centered on what would happen to earnings from the state's resource exploitation. Most delegates were dissatisfied with the relevant article which simply stated that natural resource use would benefit Costeños in "just proportions." They demanded a percentage fixed in law, but NAC Director, Ray Hooker, explained that the country's economic crisis and the destruction of the Coast's productive infrastructure by the war made it a bad moment to nail down this issue--Managua was still subsidizing the Coast, as it had from the first year of the revolution. His argument that it would be better to negotiate the exact percentages every year was accepted, although reluctantly.59

57 Ibid.
59 Ray Hooker, "La Autonomía Como Un Proceso de Liberación," interview by Instituto Historico Centroamericano, Envio Informe, 1986, [photocopy], CIDCA Archives in Managua. Original text in Spanish reads: Desde un punto de vista económico, ha habido quejas por el empleo que se daba a los recursos naturales de la región. Ahora ustedes van a manejar sus recursos naturales. Ustedes van a tener en sus manos los
There were also heated debates about whether to permanently divide the region and what to call it. Miskitus wanted to call it Yapti Tasba (meaning Mother Earth in Miskitu), but other ethnic groups opposed the idea. In the end, the NAC proposed two names: (1) the Autonomous Region of the North Atlantic (RAAN); (2) the Autonomous Region of the South Atlantic (RAAS).

The approved draft of the autonomy law pleased everyone somewhat and no one completely. Its language was vague, and details were left to be worked out with the newly elected autonomous governments in another law. Each group recognized issues it alone had pushed. The Sumus, for example, had been the only ones to propose environmental protection; women had fought virtually alone to promote their participation in all aspects of regional life. At the same time, most groups recognized that many of their ideas had either been modified or ignored. Tomás Borge assured

diferentes ministerios que actúan en la Costa Atlántica. El gobierno central los ayudará, pero ustedes serán los principales responsables. ... Pero no les estamos diciendo: queremos que ustedes se queden donde están, porque la vida cambia. La vida no es estancamiento. No los vamos a forzar a ir adelante pero se van a crear las condiciones para que si ustedes quieren lo hagan y nosotros los animamos a dar pasos hacia el futuro.

the assembly that the law was "just a port of entry." In September 1987, The National Assembly passed the bill almost unanimously and without major changes. Figure 2.6 shows a chart (prepared by Charles Hale) comparing the rights granted by the Sandinista government with the demands of Miskitu leaders.

By this time, Nicaragua's new Constitution had been approved as well. It contained thirteen articles concerning the Atlantic Coast and Costeños. Article 8 recognized (for the first time in the history of Nicaragua) that Nicaragua is a multiethnic nation, which guarantees Costeños the same rights and duties of citizenship as the rest of the population. However, some of those rights, such as bilingual education, are limited to the Autonomous Regions. These are not "special rights," but rights that the dominant culture had been historically denied to ethnic minorities.

In 1988, electoral laws were written and designed for the Autonomous Regions. Each autonomous government would

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consist of a regional council of 45 directly elected members from 15 districts, plus the National Assembly representatives from that region. The Council would then elect a regional coordinator from among its members. The concept is not a legislative-executive division of powers but a modern version of a traditional indigenous assembly; the coordinator (a.k.a. governor) also sits on the Council. Elections were scheduled to be held in 1989, but Hurricane Joan devastated the South Atlantic region, and the elections were postponed to February 1990.\textsuperscript{64}

In 1990, Sandinistas lost the national elections. The Chamorro government, which was opposed to the Autonomy Statute, refused to accept the regional government's lists of names to head ministry offices in both the regions, and stopped all the bilingual and multicultural education programs on the Coast.\textsuperscript{65} Miskitus and other ethnic groups are still upset because neither Violeta Chamorro nor Arnoldo Aleman have implement the Autonomy Statute. To this

\begin{footnotes}
\end{footnotes}
day, armed Miskitu groups (YATAMA) pose major security problems in the RAAN.66

66 Some YATAMA documents are available on the Internet. The URL for the Fourth World Documentation Project (FWDP) web site is <http://www.halcyon.com/pub/FWDP/Americas/yatpeace.txt>.
Miskitu Ethnic Militancy and the Autonomy Law Compared*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demand</th>
<th>Explanation of demand</th>
<th>Rights granted by autonomy law</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Territory</td>
<td>The Miskitu have rights to self-government in an immense territory of the Atlantic Coast.</td>
<td>All ethnic groups are guaranteed rights to the communal lands that have traditionally belonged to their communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic control</td>
<td>All natural resources in the territory belong to the Miskitu, who then would turn over part of the proceeds to the central government.</td>
<td>Apart from those on communal lands, all resources are administered jointly by the autonomous and central governments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political exclusivity</td>
<td>The territory would be governed by Miskitu leaders with a minimal role for the central government.</td>
<td>State powers are shared between the central government and an autonomous council comprised of delegates from all six ethnic groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural exclusivity</td>
<td>Miskitu cultural practices should prevail, defining the norms by which non-Miskitu inhabitants must abide.</td>
<td>Strict equality of rights and participation are provided for the six ethnic groups that live within the autonomous region.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These points inevitably involve simplifications, one of which is to gloss over the relationship between the Miskitu and the other Coast ethnic groups. Although some Miskitu would claim these rights for all three Indian peoples (thereby including Sumu and Rama), this usually conceals a lack of serious commitment to redress past Miskitu domination of the other two. For precisely this reason, Sumu people express nearly unanimous opposition to being subsumed in the category “Indians.” Another less common variation is for Miskitu to assign these rights to all Coast people, excluding only Mestizos from the Pacific. Though more easily reconciled with the autonomy law, this version still raises contradictions.

Figure 2.6: Chart Comparing the Rights Granted by the Sandinista Government’s Autonomy Statute With Miskitu Leaders’ Demands.

2.5 The Reagan Administration, Contras, and Central American Peace Talks

And finally, there is the latest partner of Iran, Libya, North Korea and Cuba in a campaign of international terror—the Communist regime in Nicaragua. . . [They are] a core group of radical and totalitarian governments, a new international version of Murder, Inc.


Beyond the national context, there was a distinct international dimension to the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict. Although the peace talks between the Sandinistas and the Contras (ARDE and FDN) were organized separately, the Contras often prevented Miskitu leaders from negotiating unilaterally with the Sandinistas. This section discusses the negotiations between the Reagan Administration, Sandinistas and Contras in the context of the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua from 1981 to 1990.

On July 31, 1980 at the Republican National Convention, U.S. presidential candidate, Ronald Reagan, said:

We deplore the Marxist Sandinista takeover of Nicaragua and the attempt to destabilize El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras . . . We do not support United
States assistance to any Marxist government in this hemisphere and we oppose the Carter Administration aid program for the government of Nicaragua. However, we will support the efforts of the Nicaraguan people to establish a free and independent government.67

Within few months of his inauguration, Ronald Reagan cancelled the "Food for Peace" and foreign aid credit lines to Nicaragua because of its alleged support and arms supply to guerrillas in El Salvador.68 In February 1981 the U.S. State Department put out a White Paper entitled Communist Interference in El Salvador, one of the earliest documents concerning the Reagan Administration's plans to organize a counterrevolution in Nicaragua.69 U.S. Ambassador to


Nicaragua, Lawrence Pezzullo, and US Ambassador to El Salvador, Robert White, pointed out that they did not have any evidence of the alleged flow of weapons from Nicaragua to El Salvador.\textsuperscript{70} In fact, Robert White suggested that the most important source of weapons for the Salvadoran guerrillas was the international black market centered in the United States. The exaggeration of the arms flow and the Marxist takeover of Nicaragua was meant for domestic public consumption. Between January and March 1981 Pezzullo held ten meetings with the Sandinistas, and he argued that diplomatic negotiations offered the best solution to the crisis in Central America.\textsuperscript{71}

By this time the CIA sent a covert action proposal to the U.S. State Department to "counter Cuban subversion in Central America." The CIA advocated a multi-front assault on the revolutionaries instead of direct military intervention. On 1 April 1981, U.S. economic assistance to Nicaragua was terminated, and the Reagan Administration began to allow anti-Sandinista paramilitary training camps


to operate openly in Florida, California, and the Southwest. Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, viewed Nicaragua as a "test case" in the struggle against international Communism. Haig's major concern was the guerrilla insurgency in El Salvador; his metaphor of "drawing the line" against Communism was apt because Haig believed that it was absolutely necessary to "go to the source" or to stop external logistical support to the insurgents in order to wipe out guerilla movements.

In August 1981, Thomas Enders, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, traveled to Managua to discuss the issue with the Sandinistas. He set forth two basic conditions for bilateral relations: Nicaragua must stop its support for the Salvadoran guerrillas; and it must curtail its own military buildup in Nicaragua. In exchange, the U.S. would stop training counterrevolutionary forces and restore economic aid to Nicaragua. Daniel Ortega denied supplying arms to the Salvadoran guerrillas and rejected any constraint on their internal affairs. Lawrence Pezzullo still believed that there was a possibility for negotiations, but hard-liners in Washington, such as Alexander Haig, forced Enders to resign on 18 August 1981.72

In October 1981, the Salvadoran guerrillas launched a major offensive against the government. Their success led Haig recommended direct military action against both Cuba and Nicaragua, if not El Salvador itself. In a series of National Security Council meetings in November, the National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) authorized the CIA to conduct covert paramilitary operations in Central America. In December 1981, President Reagan authorized an additional $19.8 million to create an exile paramilitary force in Honduras under the banner of the FDN (Nicaraguan Democratic Force) to harass the Sandinistas. The primary purpose of these forces was to attack Nicaragua's economic infrastructure in the hope that the resulting economic hardship would produce political destabilization.

Between 1981 and 1988, the Reagan Administration launched a program of low-intensity paramilitary attacks in

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Nicaragua. The CIA also paid Honduran and Argentine military officers to train the FDN to blow up bridges, oil-refining facilities, and other crucial infrastructure in Río Coco, Estelí, Nueva Segovia, Jinotega, and Matagalpa.

It is important to note that the first significant Contra attack took place in mid-March 1982. The timing of the first diplomatic initiative for 1982 is important because the Reagan Administration argued that covert action was undertaken to pressurize Sandinistas to negotiate. According to Arturo Cruz, Jr., U.S. foreign policy changed in 1982 from "containing" the Sandinistas to "overthrowing" them. On February 19th and 20th, Nicaragua hosted a meeting of the Permanent Conference of Political Parties in Latin America (COPPPAL), and demonstrated its commitment to political pluralism and non-alignment. However, in May

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1985 U.S. trade with Nicaragua was embargoed completely, and Washington used its central position in the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) to cut off the flow of multilateral loans to Nicaragua. In the following years, Nicaragua was dramatically militarized.

2.5.1 The Contadora Proposals

Well, I learned a lot... I went down [to Latin America] to find out from them and [learn] their views. You'd be surprised. They're all individual countries.

Ronald Reagan, Washington Post

The first effort by a Latin American government to reduce tensions between Nicaragua and the United States was Mexico. In 1982, President José López Portilla was invited by the National Directorate of Nicaragua to receive the prestigious Sandino Award. In his acceptance speech, the Mexican President talked about his three-point proposal to reduce the escalating conflict in Nicaragua. He suggested:

(1) the United States renounce threat or use of force

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against Nicaragua; (2) a reduction in the size of the Sandinista army and simultaneous disarming of Contra groups; and (3) a non-aggression pact to be signed by Nicaragua with its neighbors and the United States. Daniel Ortega responded with a counter-proposal, which suggested the following:

- Nicaragua would maintain a non-aligned foreign policy, a diversified economy, and promote political pluralism by holding general elections in 1985.
- Nicaragua would support treaties of non-aggression and mutual security with its Central American neighbors based on non-intervention and mutual respect.
- Nicaragua would support joint patrols at its borders with Honduras and Costa Rica
- Nicaragua would develop friendly relations with the U.S.

Meanwhile, the U.S. government and other Central American governments rejected the Mexican proposal because they felt that it failed to deal with some of the major issues such as Sandinista support for Central American guerrilla movements, Sandinista government's ties to the Russians, and the undemocratic nature of the revolutionary government. In March 1982, at a meeting of the Organization of American States, Honduras proposed another plan for peace negotiations, but neither the Sandinistas nor the United States found it appealing. Then, in October 1982 at
an Inter-American conference of democratic and semi-democratic governments hosted by Costa Rican President, Luis Alberto Monge, proposals were made for reduction of armaments and military establishments, elimination of military and security advisors, cessation of support for insurgents, and democratization. Daniel Ortega, who had not been invited to the conference in San José, criticized the Reagan Administration and other Central American presidents.\(^7^9\) Mexico refused to attend the conference to show its solidarity with the Sandinistas.\(^8^0\)

The Contadora peace process, which was launched in January 1983 by the presidents of Colombia, Mexico, Panama, and Venezuela, is usually considered to be the first serious regional effort to resolve the crisis. The meeting took place on the island of Contadora in the Gulf of Panama. The presidents produced a twenty-one-point Document of Objectives, which addressed three main issues: (1) the need to end U.S. intervention in Central American and the intervention of Central American countries in neighboring countries; (2) a shift away from political conflict and

\(^7^9\) Daniel Ortega, "¿Están a Favor O En Contra de la Paz?," in Combatiendo Por la Paz (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno,1988), 115-123.
toward a more constructive path of economic and social development; and (3) an end to the acquisition of arms or at least a freeze at existing levels. In other words, Contadora looked at the problem as a regional one at the economic, social, and political levels. The Contadora initiative was unanimously endorsed by the European Community and the Reagan Administration.

At first the Sandinistas opposed Contadora because they did not want a "solution" based on criteria that went beyond the Managua-Washington confrontation. For the Sandinistas the war in Nicaragua was a question of U.S. sponsored aggression, and Nicaragua's situation could not be compared to the civil war in El Salvador, which was an internal problem. The Sandinistas also feared that their acceptance of a multilateral resolution of the regional problem, at least tacitly, would mean recognition of the

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U.S. contention that Managua was involved in arming the guerrillas and stirring up the crisis in El Salvador. Nevertheless, the Sandinistas agreed to participate in the Contadora process only because they feared isolation and did not want the international community to conclude that they were boycotting the peace effort. In July 1983, the Sandinista response to Contadora was a peace proposal that included the following points:

- The commitment to end any prevailing situation of war through the immediate signing of a non-aggression pact between Nicaragua and Honduras.
- The absolute end to all supply of weapons by any country to the forces in conflict in El Salvador, thus allowing the people of that country to solve their own problems without any foreign interference.
- The absolute end to all military support in the form of supplies, use of territory to launch attacks, or any other form of aggression against any of the Central American governments.
- Commitment to ensure absolute respect for self-determination against any Central American country.
- The end to aggression and economic discrimination against any Central American country.
- No installation of foreign military bases on Central American territory, and the suspension of military exercises which include the participation of foreign armies in the region.  

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Two months later, Nicaragua added four more drafts of accords to the Document of Objectives, and was the first country to accept the revised September 7 Contadora Draft Treaty (a.k.a. First Contadora Act For Peace and Cooperation in Central America) "in its entirety" without any modifications. By accepting the Contadora Act, Nicaragua would have had to request all Russian advisors to leave Nicaragua (U.S. State Department's estimate was at 3,500 people), begin negotiations with the Contras, and reduce the size of its army. Daniel Ortega said his government was willing to abide by all the rules of Contadora if Washington signed an additional protocol prohibiting further Contra aid. However, Ronald Reagan and the U.S. National Security Council rejected the Contadora Act because it did not meet "the criteria for a genuine political settlement." Soon after that the presidents of El Salvador and Honduras also rejected the peace proposal because of pressure from the Reagan Administration. The U.S. State Department released a report entitled Revolution Beyond Our Borders: Sandinista Intervention in Central America.

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America to further discredit the "Communist regime" of the Sandinistas.  

In February 1984 national elections were held in Nicaragua. The elections offered a potential for the Sandinistas to gain further legitimacy in the international arena because the 1984 elections were supervised by international observers, including the Latin American Studies Association (LASA). The Sandinistas won sixty-seven percent of the valid votes.

The prospects of a negotiated settlement for peace in Nicaragua seemed remote in 1985, when the Reagan Administration imposed an economic embargo against Nicaragua and increased Contra aid. Meanwhile, a second draft of the Contadora Act was released on September 12, 1985 as a compromise between the First Contadora Act, which Nicaragua had agreed to sign and the demands of the Reagan Administration. However, Nicaragua rejected the second draft of the Contadora Act. At first, the Sandinistas

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86 U.S. Department of State, 'Revolution Beyond Our Borders': Sandinista Intervention in Central America (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, 1985). The title of the report was taken from a speech by Tomás Borge in which he said "the revolution goes beyond our borders." What Tomás Borge mean to tell the Nicaraguan people was that Nicaragua cannot export its revolution, but it could export its example to other countries. However, the U.S. State Department used this speech to discredit the Sandinistas.

refused to reduce the size of their armed forces without security guarantees from the Reagan Administration. But, with the increasing military pressure and the threat of its escalation, Daniel Ortega entered into bilateral talks with U.S. Secretary of State, George Schultz. A few months later, in January 1986, the Contadora Group met in Caraballeda, Venezuela, to defuse the conflict in Nicaragua. The Caraballeda Resolution For Peace, Security and Democracy in Central America made it clear that the Central American crisis required a "Central American solution," "non-interference" of third parties in their affairs, and the "full exercise of human rights and individual liberties." But, the Reagan Administration, rejected the Caraballeda Declaration, and declared that the U.S. would resume bilateral talks with Nicaragua only if the Sandinistas began talks with the Contras. Ronald Reagan appealed to the American people to support his government's foreign policy in Nicaragua; subsequently, the U.S. Congress approved another $100 million as Contra aid:

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The young men and women of the democratic resistance fight inside Nicaragua today in grueling mountain and jungle warfare. They confront a Soviet-equipped army, trained and led by Cuban officers. . . The Sandinistas call these freedom fighters contras—for 'counterrevolutionaries.' But the real counterrevolutionaries are the Sandinista comandantes, who betrayed the hopes of the Nicaraguan revolution and sold out their country to the Soviet empire.\(^90\)

\(\text{2.5.2 The Arias Plan, Esquipulas II, Sapoá, Tela Summit, and the 1990 Elections}\)

The next big step in the peace process came in early 1987 with the peace plan launched by Costa Rican President Oscar Arias. The "Arias Plan" is a term that is used to cover three different peace proposals. The first plan supported the Reagan Administration's foreign policy objectives. Costa Rican foreign Minister, Madrigal Nieto met with U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, Elliott Abrams and his assistant, William Walker, and U.S. Special Envoy to Central America, Philip Habib in Miami on 7 January 1987. Nicaragua rejected this

plan because the U.S. proposed to stop military aid to the Contras if the Sandinistas held national elections. In some ways the Arias plan was similar to Contadora. From the beginning, Arias had stressed that the main obstacle to peace in Central America was the government in Managua. Thus, it was not surprising that when Arias called for a preliminary meeting of Central American presidents in San José in February 1987, he did not invite the Sandinistas. The Sandinistas accused Arias of being a puppet in the hands of the U.S. State Department. But, as the peace process proceeded it became evident that the Sandinistas could not be left out. Ninety days later, the Sandinistas were invited to a Central American Presidents' meeting in Esquipulas, Guatemala, in May 1987. Arias's plan was to implement Washington's diplomatic position: the Contras would be maintained while the Sandinistas democratized. Nicaragua rejected the plan because it mirrored U.S. foreign policy objectives.


At a Central American Presidents' Summit meeting in Esquipulas in August 1987 (a.k.a. Esquipulas II), all the Central American governments signed a peace agreement that pledged democratic pluralism, free elections, a concerted effort to end internal fighting by seeking cease-fire agreements, instituting an amnesty for them, and initiating a process of reconciliation and dialogue. The U.N. General Assembly expressed its support for Esquipulas II; Cuba and the Soviet Union also praised the plan and promised to abide by it, but the Reagan Administration felt trapped because it reduced its chances for continued Contra aid.

Esquipulas II did not focus on the issue of indigenous peoples' rights in Nicaragua, but Brooklyn Rivera and other Miskitu leaders took advantage of these peace talks to negotiate directly with the Sandinistas. Central American presidents were reluctant to discuss the issue of Miskitus' rights in Nicaragua because that would have forced all other Central American countries to negotiate with indigenous communities in their own countries. However, President Arias met with Brooklyn Rivera and arranged several meetings between Miskitu and Sandinista leaders. Brooklyn Rivera agreed to stop manipulating and mobilizing Miskitus against the government, but he also informed the
government that the war would not end unless Indian rights were guaranteed.\(^3\)

In late October and early November 1987, most of the Miskitu leaders returned to Honduras, where they were admonished by U.S. government and Honduran officials for trying to negotiate "unilaterally" with the Sandinistas. Several Miskitu leaders, including Brooklyn Rivera and Wiggins Armstrong, were deported from Honduras and denied permission for reentry.\(^4\)

After Esquipulas II, the Sandinistas entered into indirect talks with the Contras with Cardinal Obando y Bravo as an intermediary, but the Contras demanded direct negotiations. With the January 1988 Central American presidents' summit fast approaching, little progress had been made toward ending the Nicaraguan war, and the Sandinistas were being cast as the intransigent party. Consequently in late December 1987, Daniel Ortega suggested that the Sandinistas was willing to open direct low-level technical talks with the Contras, but pressure from the Sandinista hard-liners forced him to back away from the proposal. But, when the Central American presidents met in


\(^4\) Ibid.
Costa Rica on January 15 1988, Daniel Ortega agreed to open direct talks with the Contras. He also said that the Sandinistas would lift the state of emergency limiting the opposition's political liberties, hold free elections, and give up political power if they lost.  

By early 1988, the Contras' top priority was winning renewal of military aid from the United States. When Daniel Ortega agreed to negotiate with the Contras, the Sandinistas fulfilled the principal demand that everyone—the Reagan Administration, Congressional Democrats, Western European social democrats, and the other Central American governments—had been making of them since the Esquipulas II Agreement was signed. However, peace talks between the Sandinistas and the Contras also reduced the chances of Congress approving further military aid, and the Reagan Administration was not happy with Daniel Ortega's concessions.  

The January and February 1988 peace talks between the Contras and the Sandinistas did not produce any significant results. In late February, Cardinal Obando, in his role as mediator, submitted a surprise peace proposal that

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essentially incorporated the Contras' negotiating position. When the Sandinistas refused to accept it on the spot, Obando y Bravo denounced them for intransigence and suspended the talks. This threatened to derail negotiations, which took place on the eve of the vote on Contra aid in the U.S. Congress. The coincidence of events made the Sandinistas suspicious about Obando y Bravo's motives. Tired of dealing with Obando y Bravo, the Sandinistas invited the Contras to meet directly (without a mediator) with top Sandinista officials, including Defense Minister Humberto Ortega. The meeting was scheduled for March 21st in a town called Sapoá.

The Contras went to Sapoá intent upon an agenda of political reforms--issues the Sandinistas had repeatedly said they would never discuss. The Sandinistas insisted that the only agenda at Sapoá would be the mechanics of the cease-fire. After two days of talks, on March 23rd, Humberto Ortega and Contra leaders, Adolfo Calero, Alfredo César, and Aristedes Sánchez, signed a comprehensive cease-fire agreement. The 1988 Sapoá Agreement satisfied most of the demands of the Contras. The Sandinistas agreed to a general amnesty for both the Contras and the remaining members of Somoza's National Guard, who were still in prison for war
crimes. Exiles were allowed to return to Nicaragua without fear of persecution and to participate in Nicaragua's politics. The Sandinistas renewed their pledge to abide by the Esquipulas Accord.

In exchange, the Contras recognized the legitimacy of the Sandinista government, agreed to a sixty-day cease-fire, and pledged to move their combatants into mutually agreed upon cease-fire zones. They also pledged to solicit no outside assistance other than "exclusively humanitarian aid channeled through neutral organizations." Significantly, the Contras did not agree to disarm; that, along with a final cease-fire, became the subject of further talks.

A YATAMA military commander, Osorno Coleman (a.k.a. Comandante Blas), also attended the Sapoá peace talks to show his support for the Contras and the Nicaraguan Resistance forces. There were rumors that his trip had been sponsored by the U.S. government to disrupt the peace talks. However, the Sandinistas did not recognize his authority at the Sapoá talks mainly because they had
already negotiated with several Miskitu leaders about their ties with the Contras.  

In February 1989, the five Central American presidents held another summit in Tesoro Beach, El Salvador. In a new accord, the Sandinistas agreed to change their constitution and advance the date of national elections from November to February 1990. They also promised complete freedom for the opposition to organize and campaign, along with extensive international observation to guarantee the fairness of the process. In return, the other presidents called, yet again for the demobilization of the Contras.

The Sandinistas signed a sweeping accord with their internal opponents, settling almost all the major disputes over the upcoming elections. In exchange for Sandinista concessions, the opposition endorsed the government's call for demobilization of the Contras and repudiated any CIA interference in the election campaign.

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With the issue of election procedures resolved, the Tela summit focused entirely on the Contras. Consequently, the Reagan Administration shifted its attention to the civic opposition inside Nicaragua or, as the Sandinistas called it, the "internal front" in Washington's war. In November 1988, George Bush won the presidency, and he was against Contra demobilization although he told the U.S. Congress that he was willing to support the peace process in Nicaragua. Bush resolved this contradiction by declaring his support for the Tela Accord with a caveat that he disagreed with the demobilization deadline. When United Nations officials visited Contra camps Honduras to supervise the demobilization, they were denounced by the Bush Administration. The Contras did not demobilize; in fact, in many areas Contras disrupted the election registration process. At this point, Daniel Ortega lifted the cease-fire and warned the Central American presidents that the concessions made by his government in the past were reversible.

The final element in U.S. policy was support for a new unified anti-Sandinista coalition called the National Opposition Union (UNO) with Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, widow of La Prensa's editor Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, as the
presidential candidate. The Bush Administration warned the Nicaraguan electorate that a Sandinista victory would only mean more war and economic misery. The bulk of U.S. aid to the UNO coalition was overt, but it was channeled through the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), which had been providing aid to anti-Sandinista trade unions and media since 1985. On February 25, 1990, eighty-six percent of Nicaragua’s registered voters cast their ballots. The Nicaraguan election was conducted under close international supervision by the Organization of American States (OAS), the United Nations, and former U.S. President, Jimmy Carter’s Council of Freely Elected Heads of Government. Violeta Chamorro and the UNO coalition won a stunning victory. Violeta Chamorro won 54.7 percent of the popular vote for president, and UNO won fifty-one seats in the ninety-three member National Assembly.

After the elections, Washington's first priority was to ensure that the Sandinistas honored the elections and transferred power to Violeta Chamorro. The transition proceeded smoothly. On 25 April 25 1990, Violeta Chamorro

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was inaugurated as Nicaragua's President in the national stadium. Immediately after that, the Bush Administration lifted the economic embargo imposed by Ronald Reagan in 1985, and asked the U.S. Congress to provide $300 million in economic assistance for the new government in 1990.\textsuperscript{101}

The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory. It is important therefore to make an inventory.

Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*

Most nationalist narratives of the Sandinista revolution and regional autonomy on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua represent an assumed unity called the "Nicaraguan people" that is always split into two--the modernizing Sandinistas and the yet-to-be-modernized Amerindians. Furthermore, they speak from within a metanarrative whose theoretical subjects are U.S. imperialism and revolutionary nationalism. Nationalist narratives are taken to mean writing concerned with revolutionary perceptions and experiences, written mainly by Sandinista leaders and policy makers. The main purpose of this chapter is to show
that most nationalist accounts of the revolution and the Miskitu demand for autonomy on the Atlantic Coast are replete with paradox that allow for conflicting readings and voices that challenged the authority of the revolutionary state.

During the 1980s, nationalist narratives became very prominent in the consciousness of the Mestizo populations of Nicaragua, while resistance discourses that challenged the authority of the revolutionary government influenced the thinking of Amerindians on the Atlantic Coast. In some cases, recurrent versions of these authoritative narratives not only empowered the storytellers, but also enabled them to fix meanings. However, taken together, these various interpretations draw attention to the continuing political struggle for self-representation in Nicaragua. Texts form part of this politics, but the struggle over meanings is not confined to texts. For Miskitus in Nicaragua, self-determination remains a political imperative. However, my interest is not limited to deconstructing master narratives; rather the purpose is to present a wide variety of Nicaraguan voices in order to show how meanings are
chosen and how they compete because texts and contexts force us to rethink the "logics of causality."\footnote{Homi Bhabha, \textit{The Location of Culture} (London: Routledge, 1994), 23.}

This chapter addresses two central questions: (1) To what extent did the discourse of revolutionary nationalism drown Miskitu voices that challenged the hegemony of the revolutionary state? (2) In what voices did Miskitus articulate their demands and resistance? Such questions have been discussed widely by several postcolonial theorists. I have taken their ideas about language and writing and applied them to narratives of the revolution and autonomy in Nicaragua to highlight the ensemble of assumptions of the storytellers in each of these narratives. Such an analysis shows that no account can ever be "the" story. The wider significance of such an analysis lies in the awareness that the epistemological limits of each discourse were also the enunciative boundaries of a range of dissident histories and voices—women, ethnic and religious minority groups, peasants, and workers.

The following pages provide an overview of the major works in English and Spanish by Sandinista and Miskitu leaders about the revolution and autonomy on the Atlantic
Coast of Nicaragua. This chapter is organized as follows: Section 3.1 discusses the historical, intellectual, and ideological context within which Sandinistas tried to explain Nicaragua's political and economic problems in the twentieth century. Drawing on the work of the Latin American and South Asian Subaltern Studies Collectives, Section 3.2 problematizes the idea of Miskitu representation in statist narratives. Section 3.3 examines and locates Miskitu allegations and testimonies against the Sandinista government in the context of counterrevolutionary activities on the Atlantic Coast. Finally, Section 3.4 provides a summary and some concluding remarks.

3.1 Revolutionary Ideologies and Narratives

Immediately after the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) took power in July 1979, the revolutionary government implemented land reform and tried to extend education and health care to all workers, peasants, and women. In the early years of the revolution, Sandinista narratives focused on reconstituting the nation from the
position of oppressed peoples, and developed a vocabulary that was recognizably Marxist in the context of revolutionary movements in Central America. In addition, they dramatized selected moments of the revolutionary struggle because these narratives were fundamental in the process of nationalist self-imagining because every stage in the revolutionary process required the nation to be reconstructed in the collective imagination. This chapter provides an analytical framework in which the ideological history of Sandinismo can be studied. My goal is to locate, within a historical context of the revolution, Sandinista nationalist thought as a discourse of power.

Sandinista revolutionary ideology developed over an extended period of time. Instead of tracing the constitution of Sandinismo in chronological stages, I focus on the writings and speeches of Augusto César Sandino, and prominent Sandinista leaders, such as, Carlos Fonseca, Tomás Borge, Ricardo Morales Avilés, Jaime Wheelock, and Daniel Ortega to show how each discourse constituted a logical step toward the formation of the ideological

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history of the revolutionary state.

3.1.1 Sandino's Patriotism

Augusto César Sandino's political philosophy was an essential part of Sandinista revolutionary discourse. During the 1980s, Sandinistas constantly reinforced his memory through Sandino's images on flags, Córdoba bills, billboards, posters, fences, walls, murals, etc. Sandino was portrayed as Nicaragua's most revered political and cultural hero. Sandino wrote a great deal on Nicaragua's social and political questions. I will focus on some of his writings dealing directly with the issues of U.S. imperialism and Nicaraguan patriotism in order to fix the location of Sandino's political philosophy within my frame of analysis of the Sandinista government's ideology during the 1980s. My aim is to show how Sandinista leaders later used Sandino's ideas to articulate their own ideas of revolutionary nationalism and establish their hegemony in Nicaraguan politics. Such an approach to the ideological history of Sandinismo can help us look at the ways in which

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Sandinista nationalist thought associated culture with power in the particular context of the revolution in Nicaragua.

Sandino was born in 1894 in Niquinohomo, near Managua. He was the illegitimate son of a small but moderately prosperous landowner of Spanish descent and an Amerindian woman who worked for his father's family. Sandino's childhood experiences contributed to the shaping of his political thoughts as an adult. For example, poverty, debt, and consequent imprisonment and mistreatment of his mother in an unhygienic prison cell, where she almost died due to hemorrhage, led him to raise fundamental questions concerning power in Nicaraguan politics and society at a very young age.⁵

Although Anastasio Somoza García discredited Sandino by describing him as a bandit surrounded by criminal elements, Sandino tried to portray himself as a folk hero, a defender of law, justice, and morality, or a new Bolívar.⁶

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Sandino's father was a prominent figure in the Nicaraguan Liberal party, and Sandino identified himself as a Liberal too until General José María Moncada and other Liberals abandoned him in 1928. Sandino believed in constitutional government, the rule of law, and government by the consent of the governed through a freely elected legislative body. The concept of patriotism is central to understanding Sandino's mass appeal. He equated patriotism with nationalism or defense of "national honor." According to Sandino, a nation's right to sovereignty or independence was a sacred right. In other words, it meant defending Nicaragua against domestic and foreign usurpers. His first political manifesto of July 1, 1927 stated:

The man who does not (even) ask his country for even a handful of earth for his grave deserves to be heard, and not only to be heard but also to be believed. I am a Nicaraguan and I feel proud that the blood of the Indian race flows in my veins, which by some atavism envelops the mystery of being a loyal and sincere patriot (translation mine).
Like Flores Magón, leader of the Mexican Liberal Party, Sandino also defined patriotism as love for one’s homeland rather than loyalty to the state. His political slogans, "Homeland and Liberty!" (Patria y Libertad) was a minor variation of Flores Magón's "Land and Liberty!" Sandino's 1927 Manifesto called for a Liberal revolution and Nicaragua's industrial development with Latin American capital. However, it also contained allusions to the eventual political unification of the Indo-Hispanic peoples, and its class symbolism aimed at mobilizing workers and peasants in their struggle against poverty and exploitation:

My greatest honor is that I come from the lap of the oppressed, the soul and spirit of our race, those who have lived, ignored, and forgotten at the mercy of the shameless hired assassins who have committed the crime of high treason forgetful of the pain and misery of the Liberal cause that they pitilessly persecuted as if we did not belong to some nation.¹⁰

From this passage it is evident that Sandino was very proud of his Indian heritage and his past occupation as a


mechanic; The two symbols were closely connected. In February 1928, Sandino declared that his immediate objective was to expel the U.S. Marines from Nicaragua.\textsuperscript{11} His final objective was to make a social revolution and his 1927 Manifesto was a call to begin fighting against the Marines.\textsuperscript{12} However, Sandino realized that the expulsion of the Marines and the abrogation of the Bryan-Chamorro Treaty could restore his country's political sovereignty, but that alone would not change Nicaragua's economic dependence on the United States.\textsuperscript{13}

Sandino's solution to the social and economic evils of imperialism in Nicaragua was a social revolution. He demanded that the peasants be free to cultivate and export tobacco for their own as well as their country's benefit, that workers be paid cash instead of coupons redeemable at company stores, and that the government take steps toward establishing a Union of Central American Republics.\textsuperscript{14} A change in his political views also meant a change in his public image from that of a defender of the Liberal party

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., "Message to Senator William E. Borah," February 1928, 184.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., "Carta al Congreso Anti-Imperialista Reunido en Francfort," in El Sandinismo: Documentos Básicos, 34-38; Augusto C. Sandino, Sandino: Testimony of a Nicaraguan Patriot, 268.
\textsuperscript{13} Augusto C. Sandino, "Communiqué: January 9, 1930," in Sandino: Testimony of a Nicaraguan Patriot, 290.

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to that of a champion of the people's right to well being.\footnote{Ibid., 309.}

Sandino did not find any viable political means to actualize his desire, but it became a dream for the Sandinistas: to build a utopian political community against the coercive structures of imperialism. It was within this framework of Marxist theoretical discourse that Sandinistas mobilized popular elements of Nicaragua and articulated their discourse of revolutionary nationalism.

3.1.2 \textit{From Sandino to Sandinismo}

During the 1970s, the FSLN's guerrilla warfare was guided by a set of theoretical guidelines--the principles of scientific socialism--for interpreting what was happening in Nicaragua. Initially the FSLN relied on Carlos Fonseca's efforts to update Sandino's account of war in Nicaragua, but Fonseca's interpretation was based on Che Guevara's version of neocolonialism as the final stage of imperialism. Subsequently, Ricardo Morales Avilés developed an alternative assessment based on Antonio Gramsci's concept of political hegemony. However, this interpretation too was challenged by Jaime Wheelock's application of neo-Marxist dependency theory to Nicaragua. Finally, Daniel
Ortega and Tomás Borge presented a composite picture of Nicaraguan reality influenced by Fidel Castro's perception of the revolutionary process in Latin America.\(^{16}\)

Carlos Fonseca, one of the founders of the FSLN, was probably the first systematic expounder of Sandino's thoughts. Sandino's sketch of U.S. interventions in Nicaragua covered the period from Nicaragua's independence from Spain in 1821 to the final withdrawal of the U.S. Marines in 1933. In *Nicaragua: Hora Cero*, Fonseca took up the story where Sandino left off, and combined Sandino's ideas with Marxist-Leninist thought.\(^{17}\) As early as 1957, Fonseca was selected as a delegate to the Fourth World Congress of Democratic Youth in Kiev and to the Sixth World Youth Festival in Moscow. He arrived in the Soviet Union during the first week in August and remained there as a guest until November, and traveled to some other socialist countries. He recorded his impressions of life under socialism in a pamphlet entitled *Un Nicaragüense en Moscú*.\(^{18}\) Fonseca identified the Marxist component of Sandinismo with


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Marx's and Lenin's guidelines to revolution. In a proclamation broadcast on a Nicaraguan radio station in 1970, he declared that the Sandinista popular revolution had a dual objective: to overthrow the Somoza dictatorship, and then establish socialism. In November that year, he declared "we recognize that socialism is the people's only hope of achieving a profound change in their conditions of life . . . the fundamental guide must be the principles of scientific socialism." 

Fonseca located the source of Nicaragua's political and economic problems since Sandino's death in the country's neocolonial status in relation to the United States. The withdrawal of the Marines in 1933 did not substantially change Nicaragua's exploitation by U.S. multinational companies. From having directly occupied and dominated Nicaragua for more than two decades, the United States entered a new phase in which its intervention in Nicaragua's affairs took place indirectly through economic

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concessions. In return, Somoza collaborated with U.S. designs for suppressing popular resistance movements in Nicaragua and national liberation movements in Central America and the Caribbean region. According to Fonseca, the Somozas betrayed national interests by transforming Nicaragua into a base for U.S. military aggression in Central America. In 1948, Anastasio Somoza García intervened in Costa Rica's civil war. The war culminated in the repression of the labor movement in that country. In 1954, his government helped the CIA to overthrow Jacobo Arbenz's democratic government in Guatemala. In 1961, Luis Somoza offered Nicaragua as a base for training the anti-Castro forces that embarked from Puerto Cabezas, but were defeated at the Bay of Pigs. In 1965, troops of the National Guard captained by U.S. Marines occupied Santo Domingo and crushed the Constitutionalist movement in the Dominican Republic, and in 1967, Anastasio Somoza Debayle announced his decision to send contingents of the National Guard to support U.S. forces in Vietnam.

Carlos Fonseca's methods, concepts, and modes of reasoning about Nicaragua's economic "underdevelopment" and

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21 Ibid., "Reseña de la Secular Intervención Norteamericana en Nicaragua," 231-239.
the role of the "national bourgeoisie" can be located within the framework of Che Guevarian thought. For Sandino, the United States was both the fundamental and immediate enemy of the Nicaraguan people. According to Fonseca, with the transformation of old-style imperialism into neo-imperialism, Nicaragua's immediate enemy was the Somoza dictatorship representing U.S. interests. Influenced by Che Guevara's ideas concerning the national bourgeoisie in Latin America, Fonseca argued that the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie was not part of the masses because the bourgeoisie feared popular revolution even more than imperialist exploitation. Che Guevara characterized Latin American governments as "oligarchic dictatorships" because the bourgeoisie violated the constitution when it was in their interest. By collaborating with foreign capitalists, the bourgeoisie betrayed national interests:

The national bourgeoisies have, in the majority, banded together with U.S. imperialism; thus their fate and that of imperialism will be the same in each country. Even when a contradiction develops with U.S. imperialism, this occurs within the boundaries of a more fundamental conflict . . . [involving] all the exploited and all the exploiters. This polarization of classes into antagonistic forces has so far been more

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rapid than the development of contradictions over the division of spoils.²⁴

Drawing on the ideas of Che Guevara, Carlos Fonseca explained the subjection of Nicaragua in economic terms. The theoretical position that recurred in much of his writing focused on two issues: (1) the economy of Central American countries was controlled by U.S. multinationals; (2) the main purpose of regional integration was to reduce the status of Central American countries to political satellites of the U.S. government. Fonseca's work provided the foundation for Sandinista studies of Nicaragua's socioeconomic and political conditions, and addressed two central issues: the nature and causes of the political crisis under the Somozas, as well as, the class character of the Somoza dictatorship.

One of the earliest studies of this kind was by Ricardo Morales Avilés, who viewed the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie as puppets in the hands of U.S. imperialists who exploited Nicaraguan workers. Given this fundamental premise, Ricardo Morales tried to explain the crisis of hegemony of the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie. He argued that with the development of cotton production during the 1950s

and the accompanying industrialization process, Nicaragua managed to bypass a Mexican-type confrontation with the traditional landowners. The result was an interlocking of the interests of the old Conservative cattle and coffee oligarchy with those of the Liberal modernizing bourgeoisie. The capitalization of agricultural production impeded agrarian reform, and prevented small and medium enterprises from sharing profits from the new agribusinesses. Since the dynamic sector of the economy was the export sector penetrated by foreign capital, the structure of native bourgeois domination was inextricably linked to the structure of imperialist domination. In other words, the crisis of hegemony for the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie emerged from this new structure of domination, and this caused a crisis of legitimacy because the working class, the peasantry, and the middle sectors rejected the values that the bourgeoisie wanted to impose on the nation.\textsuperscript{25}

Ricardo Morales argued that unlike some other Latin American countries, where the traditional landed oligarchy had been replaced by a new national bourgeoisie producing

\textsuperscript{25} Ricardo Avilés Morales, \textit{La Dominación Imperialista en Nicaragua} (Managua: Secretaría Nacional de Propaganda y Educación Política del FSLN, 1980).

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for the local market, the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie depended heavily on foreign investment, as well as, commercial profits from the marketing of foreign products in Nicaragua. According to Morales, the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie consisted of three groups: a Liberal sector consisting of political and military bureaucrats who had used state power to modernize the economy and to transform themselves into big capitalists, a Conservative sector consisting of the established landholding families who had adapted to the process of modernization, and a third sector of small and medium capitalists excluded from a privileged share of the spoils.

The issue of legitimacy arose whenever the differences between the state bourgeoisie and the opposition bourgeoisie came to a head. The structure of domination collapsed whenever the Conservative sector of the oligarchy supported the bourgeois opposition in order to defend the interests of the capitalist class against the destabilizing effects of the dictatorship and the threat posed by the popular forces. This polarization of the bourgeoisie into two camps created a national political crisis. Morales characterized the political crisis of domination as a crisis within the ruling class resulting from its
monopolization of the economic surplus. As perceived by the bourgeois opposition, these so-called inequities were the fault of the bourgeoisie and of the Somoza clique in particular. Through its privileged access to the flow of U.S. capital, credit, and government aid, the Somoza family not only made huge profits, but also provided privileges for other big capitalists in their role as associates of American business. At the same time, there were rifts within the bourgeoisie because the Somoza clique had access to most of the foreign credit and shared in the economic surplus disproportionately to its assets. Through its control of the national bank and its role as the political representative of American business interests in Nicaragua, it collaborated with foreign banks in regulating the flow of credit to the comparative disadvantage of some big and most medium and small capitalists.  

This analysis led Morales to characterize the Somoza regime as a bourgeois military dictatorship whose political hegemony was the fundamental source of its economic privileges. The dictatorship was not the armed power of the bourgeoisie, but rather "the armed bourgeoisie in power." In other words, the state was not simply an executive organ for managing the common affairs of the

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26 Ibid. 136
bourgeoisie, but rather a monopoly of bureaucrats who had become capitalists through their abuse of political power. Since most of the bourgeoisie was excluded from this Liberal party monopoly controlled by the state bourgeoisie, the Somoza regime was basically unstable. Morales concluded that intra-bourgeois antagonisms were more important than the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the popular forces in explaining the crisis of a political hegemony. Consequently, socialism could not be on the immediate agenda because the objective conditions of revolution had yet to mature in Nicaragua.27

Jaime Wheelock joined the FSLN in 1969, when Morales became a member of its National Directorate. Wheelock's analysis was based on the premises of Latin American dependency theory. Unlike Morales, Wheelock argued that Nicaragua's economic dependence had resulted in a weakening of the bourgeoisie. Morales played down the unity of the bourgeoisie vis-à-vis the proletariat by emphasizing their respective internal contradictions, but Wheelock stressed the internal unity of both classes and their immediate, as well as, fundamental opposition. What united the various sectors of the business class was their lack of independence, political power, or even a government they

27 Ibid. 137
could call their own. Because the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie had to serve American interests to advance its own, Wheelock defined it as a "consular bourgeoisie." Since the Somoza regime represented mainly the interests of the U.S. State Department and U.S. multinationals, Wheelock characterized it as a military dictatorship." However, neither the Somozas nor the bourgeoisie held political hegemony.28

Wheelock located the crisis within the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie in the impediments to economic development resulting from the dependent character of Nicaraguan capitalism.29 Besides the fetters on economic growth imposed by the structure of dependency, two contradictions with U.S. imperialism undermined the local hegemony of Nicaragua's bourgeoisie. First, financial resources were under tight control by the U.S. banks and their local branches; and native enterprises could not compete with the subsidiaries of the multinationals that were making inroads into the domestic market. Second, there was no feasible

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alternative to imperialist hegemony because the native bourgeoisie depended on the Somoza regime to maintain political stability that would guarantee foreign investment in Nicaragua. However, Wheelock argued that this problem of economic dependency could be resolved if the struggle against imperialism took on the character of a confrontation with the Somoza military dictatorship.

3.1.3 Ideology of the Revolutionary State

The most mature ideological form of Sandinismo was clearly demonstrated in the writings of Tomás Borge, the only surviving founder of the FSLN and Sandinista Minister of the Interior during the 1980s, as well as Daniel Ortega, Coordinator of the JGRN and President of Nicaragua from 1984 to 1990. Tomás Borge's main argument regarding Nicaragua's economic and social problems was as follows: social justice for all Nicaraguans could not be provided under the Somoza regime because it was corrupt, oppressive, and decadent. To achieve social justice in Nicaragua, it

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was necessary to create a new framework of institutions, which would stand above the narrow interests of classes in society, and plan and direct the economic resources in order to ensure welfare and justice for all. This argument was the main constitutive principle of the ideology of the Sandinista regime during the 1980s. It was an ideology in which the central organizing principle was the revolutionary state, and its legitimizing principle was a conception of social justice.\footnote{32} Consider the following excerpt from Tomás Borge's speech:

This revolution was made, not to reform the old society, but to create a new society. [Applause]

Well, now this struggle, which is fundamentally a task of the working class, has special characteristics stemming from the economic, historical, and cultural conditions in Nicaragua. When imperialism emerged as the highest stage of capitalism, a struggle for world markets was initiated by the large capitalist countries, and during that first division of the world, Nicaragua, together with other Latin American countries, suffered the terrible fate of falling into the hands of the U.S. imperialists. Our economy, therefore, developed as a dependent economy. This forced our people to struggle for their national liberation, and this struggle took on a specific form, which is nationalism.

This also explains why our country, ferociously subjected to the United States, never produced a true national bourgeoisie. The dominant force in our country was never the local bourgeoisie: it was imperialism, through its brutal local instruments. The

\footnote{32 Tomás Borge, "Una Sociología al Servicio de la Sociedad," Inaugural Lecture at the Latin American Sociology Congress, March 1986, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, [photocopy], CIDCA Archives in Managua.}
development of Nicaragua took place through investments and loans administered by an overseer named Anastasio Somoza, as in the past there had been, to mention only a couple of names, Chamorro and Moncada.

When Sandino's army of peasants and workers kicked the Yankee invaders out of our homeland, the astute invaders established a docile army which had the characteristics of an army of occupation, and which was the foundation not only of the Somoza dynasty but of the power of the oligarchy as a whole. That is why the struggle of our people took the form of a struggle against the Somocista dictatorship, which was, in its essence, a struggle against imperialism. And through this dialectical link between national liberation and the anti-Somoza struggle, victory was reached, a victory that took the form of the overthrow of the Somocista tyranny, but whose content was a victory of national liberation.

Who was capable of deciphering this historical synthesis? It was the Sandinista National Liberation Front, it was Sandinismo that knew how to apply the theory of revolution to the concrete reality of Nicaragua. Therefore, the Sandinista Front was the living instrument for the conquest of power by the workers, and the living instrument for the consolidation of the power of the workers.

What does this mean? Just like the human body needs vitamins and proteins to nourish itself and develop, the Sandinista Front needs to draw its sustenance from the working class. The vitamins and proteins of the Sandinista Front are the Nicaraguan workers and peasants. The intellectuals, professionals, and other sectors of society who want to identify with the Sandinista people's revolution must identify with the interests of workers and peasants. And the capitalists, regardless of their ideological conceptions of the Nicaraguan workers and peasants, have to identify with the patriotism of the peasants and workers if they are to remain in Nicaragua.

The Sandinista Front is the vanguard of the revolution.

The Sandinista Front is the vanguard of all Nicaraguan patriots.

The Sandinista Front is the vanguard of national liberation.
The Sandinista Front is the vanguard of the workers and peasants, and is the vanguard of these social sectors.

The Sandinista Front is the living instrument of the revolutionary classes, the guide leading toward a new society [Applause].

As is evident from Tomás Borge’s speech, Sandinista leaders claimed that their main aim was to reorganize the political and economic order of the country. They tried to demonstrate the falsity of the argument that agroexports would actually bring "development" to Central America. Tomás Borge claimed that the revolution had created, for the first time in the country’s history, necessary conditions for a successful struggle against economic dependency and racism. The revolutionary government was committed to the development of policy on various levels—economic, political, cultural, and ideological—in order to establish an egalitarian society. Economic development was one of the principal ways to combat social inequalities because if every Nicaraguan had access to a decent living standard, the material basis for racism could be

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destroyed. In working toward this goal, the revolutionary state had adopted a policy of anti-imperialism.

Sandinista ideas of independent economic development, free from the imposition of foreign interests, were exemplified by government measures, such as the nationalization of the mines and natural resources on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua. The government implemented agrarian reform on the Pacific Coast and extended credit to small scale producers, nationalized the banking system, and oriented the economy toward workers' needs. In the political realm, the revolutionary government tried to project Sandinismo as something going beyond the interests of the revolutionary state by giving it the form of a "national" struggle. Consequently, Sandinista leaders resorted to a "war of position," and convinced the masses, especially peasants, that their political program was designed to improve their living conditions. Sandinistas intertwined political and ideological questions with cultural issues by associating the structural "underdevelopment" of the agrarian economy with the cultural "backwardness" of the peasantry--its localism.

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immobility, resistance to change, and subjection to a variety of capitalist forms of domination.\textsuperscript{35}

Daniel Ortega and Tomás Borge argued that the Somoza regime was illegitimate because it stood for a form of economic exploitation of the nation. The revolutionary government was legitimate because it represented the legitimate form of exercise of power, and was a necessary condition for national development.\textsuperscript{36} In other words, the economic critique of imperialism and a developmental ideology became constituent parts of the self-definition of the revolutionary state.\textsuperscript{37} Thus, by claiming to represent the "national-popular" and directly entering the domain of production as a manager of economic resources, the revolutionary state tried to establish its hegemony. In this way, the economic dimension of Marxist analyses emerged as the master narrative of the revolutionary state.

It was "accountability" that determined the attitude of the new revolutionary state's leadership towards the masses. This feeling of responsibility was mediated by a


whole series of concepts, scientific, and theoretical, about politics and the state, about principles of political organization, about relations between leaders and the masses in political movements, about strategies and tactics. The masses had to be "represented," and the leaders "acted on their behalf and in their true interests." Thus, Sandinismo constituted itself into a state ideology by transforming the life of the nation into the life of the state.

Sandinistas argued that the revolutionary state, unlike the Somoza government, connected the sovereign powers of the state directly with the economic welfare of the people. Under the Somoza regime, people were able to choose their political representatives, but this did not guarantee their economic welfare because the state did not act in the interests of the people. Such an argument concerning representativeness and legitimacy later produced contradictory implications for Sandinista state policy. The contradiction stemmed from the very manner in which the Sandinistas envisioned their state as the principal vehicle for the national development. For the revolutionary government, "development" implied a linear path, directed toward a series of goals. It implied the fixing of
priorities between long-term and short-term goals and conscious choices between alternative paths. As a process affecting the whole of society, it was understood particular interests needed to be made consistent with the revolutionary interest. Thus, it was within this ideological framework that the Sandinistas created MISURASATA as a grassroots organization to represent the concerns and demands of ethnic groups on the Atlantic Coast.

3.2 Locating and Problematizing Nationalist Narratives

In narratives, as in nationalist politics, one of the most significant aspects of Sandinista self-projection was its representation of the peoples of the Atlantic Coast, especially Miskitus, who did not participate in the overthrow of the Somoza regime. Miskitu actions too were interpreted from the perspective of revolutionary nationalism, and nationalist vocabulary marked the differences between Miskitus of the Atlantic Coast and Mestizos of the Pacific region. Postcolonial and Postmodern theorists offer some useful starting points to situate
nationalist narratives by examining their historical location and the importance of cultural representations. To understand more fully what lay behind revolutionary perceptions of Miskitus, we need to place those representations in historical perspective because Sandinista classifications of difference and cultural superiority lead back to classical Marxist theory.

Consider the following excerpt from Tomás Borge's speech:

It is very difficult to fight against backwardness, and this is an extremely backward zone. The Revolution is making extraordinary efforts: for the first time in history, and in less than two years, they have made them a road, which communicated them with the rest of the country. If you look at a map, you will notice that practically-speaking, it is another country, another geography, other customs. They don’t speak Spanish there, but Miskito or English. They were always marginated. They were always a kind of colony of the Pacific region. We are decolonizing them. So we are taking roads to them, telephones, medical care, literacy, television, but two years is a very short time in which to overcome the prejudices, the religious fanaticism, the ignorance, the apathy of centuries. They feel as though they have lived within a separate civilization. So, the Revolution arrives and they believe that is attacking their civilization; they are afraid that we will put an end to their national traditions. Of course, the Revolution has no intention of doing this, rather the contrary: in conserving their language and also incorporating Spanish, certainly; to preserve their songs, their dances, their traditions. It is logical that the Revolution seeks to preserve it as a cultural wealth for the country. But they are fearful that the Revolution attacks their own backward civil life and they adopt a defensive attitude. But it has advanced a lot; and things have changed, have improved; and the problems are not so acute, because we
have been very careful and generous, because they have murdered our people, and we have pardoned those same assassins, having kept in mind the origin of the whole situation, of the whole problem.38

What is being dramatized in Tomás Borge's speech is a separation--between races, cultures, and histories--a separation between "before" and "after" the revolution. My intention is not to undermine the importance of economic factors or the revolutionary government's argument about imperialist exploitation of the masses. Rather, my principal aim is to show how economic planning became an instrument of Sandinista politics.39 My argument is that this discourse of separation and difference, which denied Miskitus the capacity of self-government or revolutionary modes of civility, eventually helped the revolutionaries to establish their hegemony on the Atlantic Coast. The construction of Miskitus as a population of degenerate types on the basis of cultural traditions seemed to justify the revolutionary government's systems of administration. Therefore, despite the populist goals of the revolution, which was crucial to its existence of power, revolutionary

39 Chapter four discusses why it was necessary for the Sandinistas to devise such a modality of power that could operate both inside and outside the political structure constructed by the revolutionary state.
discourse represented the Atlantic Coast as a social reality which was at once an "other" and yet entirely knowable and visible.

It is ironical that Sandinismo produced a discourse in which, even as it challenged U.S. imperialism and economic domination, the revolutionary government created and used economic and cultural dichotomies to establish their hegemony on the Atlantic Coast. For example, Sandinista narratives of modern medicine, public health, and personal hygiene claimed that control of disease was carried out entirely for the benefit of Amerindians on the Atlantic Coast. But, it was through the establishment of health care centers and educational institutions that the culture of the revolutionaries was celebrated as superior. In this way, those who participated in the revolutionary project were named "integrated," while those who resisted were named "marginal" or "backward."

In this context, Edward Said's analysis of European discourses, which constituted the "Orient" as a unified racial, geographical, political, and cultural zone, is relevant to my analysis of Sandinista revolutionary discourse:

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I myself believe that Orientalism is more particularly valuable as a sign of European-Atlantic power over the Orient than it is as a veridic discourse about the Orient (which is what, in its academic or scholarly form, it claims to be). Nevertheless, what we must respect and try to grasp is the sheer knitted-together strength of Orientalist discourse, its very close ties to the enabling socio-economic and political institutions, and its redoubtable durability. After all, any system of ideas that can remain unchanged as teachable wisdom (in academies, books, congresses, universities, foreign-service institutes) from the period of Ernest Renan in the late 1840s until the present in the United States must be something more formidable than a mere collection of lies. Orientalism, therefore, is not an airy European fantasy about the Orient, but a created body of theory and practice in which, for many generations, there has been a considerable material investment. Continued investment made Orientalism, as a system of knowledge about the Orient, an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness, just as that same investment multiplied--indeed, made truly productive--the statements proliferating out from Orientalism into the general culture. 42

My main point is that racist stereotypical representations of Miskitus in nationalist discourses inscribed a form of "governmentality" in which "ideological" space functioned in collaborative ways with political and economic exigencies. 42 Sandinistas viewed Miskitu culture as the cause and the effect of British colonialism and U.S. imperialism. The Sandinista discourse of economic development portrayed Miskitus as "backward"

peoples, and they claimed that this "problem" could be resolved through their economic development programs, such as literacy campaigns, birth control, basic needs, and rural development projects. By redefining the legal relationship of Miskitus and the nation-state to natural resources and land, Sandinistas institutionalized a set of dualities: men's hegemony over women, and Mestizos over Amerindians.43

In The Wretched of the Earth, Frantz Fanon discussed the problems of subaltern representation in nationalist narratives.44 Instead of historicizing events, he focused on the time of cultural representation by exploring the space of the nation without immediately identifying it with the history of nationalist movements. Fanon's critique of the fixed and stable forms of the nationalist narrative makes it imperative to question theories of "national" cultures. Fanon's critique forces us to rethink the question of community and stereotypes of minority groups. In Black Skins, White Masks, he despairs, "the Negro remains a Negro... For not only must the black man be

42 Frantz Fanon, Black Skins, White Masks (New York: Grove Press, 1967).
44 Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (New York: Grove Press, 1963).
black; he must be black in relation to the white man.\textsuperscript{45} In other words, the Negro's race becomes the ineradicable sign of "negative difference" in colonial discourses because the stereotype impedes the articulation of the signifier of "race" as anything other than its fixity as racism. This explains why a number of ethnocentric Europeans believe all Negroes are licentious or all Asians are duplicitous. In keeping with Fanon's argument, I would argue that Miskitu stereotypes in revolutionary discourses were also points of subjectification. The Miskitu stereotype was a fixated form of representation because it denied Miskitus agency and cultural identity.

\textsuperscript{45} Frantz Fanon, \textit{Black Skins, White Masks}, 110.
Territorial Demarcations in Atlantic Coast History

- British Protectorate (1820's to 1860)
- Mosquito Reserve, established by the Treaty of Managua (1860)
- Department of Zelaya, established after the Reincorporation (1894)
- Territorial Claim of Misurasata (1981)

Figure 3.1: Map Showing Territorial Demarcations in Atlantic Coast History.

* Evacuated Villages

5. Sumubila

Figure 3.2: Map Showing Miskitu Villages That Were Evacuated in 1982 by the Sandinista Government

3.3 Miskitu Testimonies

An Indian without land is not an Indian!
Brooklyn Rivera

Sandinistas exercised their authority by constituting Miskitus as their inverse image. In response, Miskitus put pressure on the Sandinistas to clarify the goals of their revolution. Miskitu allegations of the Sandinistas are usually classified into two broad categories: (1) Sandinista disrespect for Miskitu cultural and land rights; (2) gross human rights violations in the Río Coco area. The central figures who made the allegations were Miskitu leaders such as Armstrong Wiggins and Brooklyn Rivera. They claimed that the Sandinista government had an assimilationist policy toward Miskitus. Rather than contextualizing or analyzing individual testimonies, I would like to discuss Miskitu demands and allegations in an expanded discussion of counterrevolutionary activities in the Río Coco region.

Armstrong Wiggins was a member of the MISURASATA directorate, and he represented the organization in the Casa Gobierno, the executive branch of the Sandinista government. Wiggins was arrested at the same time as Fagoth and other MISURASATA leaders in late February 1981, but he was released after fourteen days. Soon after that he left Nicaragua and joined the staff of the Indian Law Resource Center (ILRC) in Washington, DC. In April 1982 Brooklyn Rivera joined Wiggins on the staff of the ILRC.
The first clash between the revolutionary government and MISURASATA occurred in August 1980, when the Sandinistas created the BOSAWAS (Bocay, Saalaya, Waspuk) Forest Reserve on the Atlantic Coast. The revolutionary government (in conjunction with the Mexican government) decided to invest $56 million on a project designed to cut and process lumber on the Atlantic Coast. However, this decision to create the BOSAWAS Forest Reserve came right after INNICA, MISURASATA, and IRENA signed an agreement on wood-cutting. According to the terms of that agreement, IRENA was to pay for all wood cut on government owned lands, and for wood cut on disputed lands IRENA agreed to pay 80% of the total value of the wood. Miskitu leaders objected to the nationalization of natural resources on the Coast because they feared government control over Indian lands. Meanwhile, the revolutionary government authorized Miskitu leaders to carry out a survey and prepare maps of communal lands on which MISURASATA's land claims were

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based. Figure 3.1 shows the territorial demarcations in Atlantic Coast history and the area claimed by MISURASATA. Cultural Survival, a Boston-based non-government organization, provided MISURASATA the funds for this study. However, the survey results came as a rude shock for Miskitu leaders, such as Brooklyn Rivera, who had been promoting the idea that Miskitus, Sumus, and Ramas were "nations" with aboriginal rights to an immense territory on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua. Consider the following excerpt from Brooklyn Rivera's speech:

Our biggest problem is that we don't have power where we are living. Others are trying to control us. So we are still margimated by the rest of the people and the past government. We have no good living. Together with the Creoles them and the same Spanish speaking people we are trying to conquer again our land. The Government don't support us. We want to get the power, we don't have to wait, we ourselves, we try it. Real freedom is what we need. So we are fighting for our riches, Indian riches, not resources, riches that the Lord gave us in our own land. We live in a communal way and that is to conserve!

The Government don't want problem with the Indians and the are real worry about the Indian land. INFONAC, INRA have problems with Miskito and Creoles. We have to defend our land with machetes and sticks. The Government has understood that: An Indian without land is not an Indian! (Emphasis mine).49

As Charles Hale has pointed out, the survey revealed that, in strictly legal terms, Miskitus had rights only to community lands, a tiny portion of the Atlantic Coast's total territory. Consequently, they promoted the idea that Miskitu people were a "nation" with aboriginal rights.\(^5^0\) The idea of a Miskitu "nation" was both convenient and feasible because a similar discourse already existed (with sophisticated historical and theoretical grounding).\(^5^1\)

Beginning in 1981, Miskitu leaders started pushing the idea of a Miskitu "kingdom" and claimed that Miskitus had owned their lands from "time "immemorial." MISURASATA leaders argued that unless the issue of land rights was resolved, cultural rights could not be addressed because land was fundamental to their lifestyle and religious beliefs.\(^5^2\)

Several Miskitu men and women I spoke with in Bilwi told me that the revolution had a negative impact on their living conditions and the land rights. The Tasba Pri


\(^{52}\) The issue of land rights was first considered internationally from an indigenous perspective at the 1977 Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) Conference in Geneva. The areas discussed were land rights, indigenous philosophy, the impact of multinational corporations on indigenous peoples, and the impact of nuclear arms and nuclear testing. The Indigenous Voice in World Politics, 131-132.
relocation incident was very traumatic because they were forcibly removed from the land owned by their ancestors:

Before the revolution, there was harmony and prosperity in Río Coco. They were the descendants of Miskitu kings, and land, Yapti Tasba (Mother Earth), had been handed to them since 'time immemorial' from their ancestors (Translation mine).\(^{53}\)

By promoting the idea of a Miskitu "nation" and by asserting that Miskitus had "aboriginal rights" to almost one-third of Nicaragua's national territory, MISURASATA challenged the sovereignty of the revolutionary state. In August 1981, the government responded to MISURASATA's demands by issuing its own Declaration of Principles concerning indigenous peoples' rights:

1. The government will end the vicious exploitation that the Atlantic Coast has suffered throughout its history by the foreign monopolies, particularly by Yankee imperialism.
2. It will prepare lands of the zone deemed apt for the development of agriculture and cattle.
3. It will take advantage of favorable conditions for the development of fishing and forestry.
4. It will stimulate the blossoming of local cultural values of this region, growing out of the original aspects of its historical tradition.

\(^{53}\) YATAMA Ex-Combatants, interview by author, August 1998, Bilwi, tape recording. A phrase that is commonly used by young YATAMA-Miskitus to describe themselves is that they are the descendants of Miskitu kings and are fighting for their "lost" rights (Somos los hijos de los reyes de la Mosquitia... y lucharemos hasta el último momento para nuestros derechos).
5. It will do way with the hateful discrimination to which the Miskitus, Sumus, Ramas, and Creoles of this region have been subject.

6. However, all natural resources were to be the property of the state although coastal communities could benefit indirectly through national projects. 54

The Declaration promised to protect and promote indigenous peoples' rights, but Articles 5 and 6 made it explicit that the government would not grant any special rights to Miskitus. The implication was that the state had the exclusive right to exploit natural resources. The government maintained its position on this issue throughout all the peace talks and autonomy discussions. Thus, the Autonomy statute guarantees Indian rights only to "the communal lands, waters, and forests that have "traditionally belonged to the communities."

Miskitu leaders also accused the Sandinistas of human rights violations in the Río Coco region. Figure 3.2 shows Miskitu villages along the Río Coco, which runs along the Nicaragua-Honduras border, that were evacuated in 1982 by the Sandinista government. The general line of Miskitu allegations are reflected in Armstrong Wiggins' testimony before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. The

ILRC distributed this statement widely. Armstrong Wiggins said:

Although there has been difficulty in obtaining factual information from that area, we have now received much reliable information which leads us to conclude that the Indians of the east coast are presently suffering a gross violation of their most basic human rights.

Thousands of Indians have been forcibly relocated by the Sandinista Government and are now interned in concentration camps far from their home villages. Many have been killed and injured. An unknown number have been imprisoned. Many Indian villages have been burned. Indian livestock and some Indian religious leaders have been imprisoned and others have been forced to leave the country. There are reports of forced labor by those held in these camps. The frontier area from which the Indians have been removed has been completely militarized, and almost all other Indian villages have been placed under direct control by military authorities (Emphasis mine).  

Several Miskitu men and women I interviewed in Bilwi and Managua had been affected by the relocation, and told me horror stories. A Miskitu woman from Waspam told me that:

Sandinista soldiers raped Miskitu women, tortured and killed unarmed Miskitu men. Living conditions in Tasba Pri were terrible. They could not travel freely and did not have access basic health care. . . . the only good Mission hospital in Río Coco had been destroyed during the war . . . . Miskitu children suffered because

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there were no schools. . . families were separated and it was a very traumatic experience (Translation mine).\textsuperscript{56}

Essentially, Miskitu allegations regarding human rights violations by the Sandinista government emphasized three aspects: (1) they were relocated against their will; (2) the relocation was a pretext to suppress Miskitu resistance; (3) Miskitus have suffered more than any other ethnic group because of the revolution.

I also interviewed several Sandinista policymakers and leaders, who insisted repeatedly that they evacuated Miskitu communities from the Río Coco area because of Contra attacks. The Sandinistas burned down houses and entire villages to ensure that Miskitus did not return to their homes in Río Coco and that the evacuated villages could not be used by the Contras. However, all of them acknowledged that the Tasba Pri relocation "was a mistake" (Sí, eso fue un error de la revolución).

As stated in Chapter 2, the Reagan Administration used the Tasba Pri incident to discredit the Sandinistas.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{56} Miskitu woman from Waspam, interview by author, July 1995, Managua, tape recording.

Ronald Reagan depicted the Tasba Pri incident as a holocaust by saying that Miskitus "are trapped in a totalitarian dungeon." In 1982, U.S. Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, even showed press reporters a photograph of burning bodies as evidence of mass slaughter of Miskitus. However, this act became particularly embarrassing to Alexander Haig because reporters discovered that the photograph had already been published in a French newspaper, Le Figaro, during the Somoza regime.

During this period, the OAS-Inter American Commision on Human Rights (IAHCR), CIDCA, Amnesty International, and Americas Watch carried out separate investigations of human rights abuses after MISURASATA lodged a complaint that included charges of detentions, trials, imprisonment, disappearances, and relocation. The IACHR expressed concern about conditions of detention, lack of charges, and disappearances; but, the Commission also recognized the difficulties of the government to protect all its citizens in the context of counterrevolutionary activities. The Commission concluded that peace in Central America was

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absolutely necessary to improve living conditions on the Coast. The IACHR Report concluded that:

Forces in opposition to the Nicaraguan government crossed the Coco River from Honduras and occupied the town of San Carlos, on the bank of that river in December 1981, where they set up an ambush, mutilated and killed six Nicaraguan soldiers. The Government of Nicaragua denounced this incident as part of a massive uprising planned to begin in the villages along the Coco River during the Christmas week, 1981. In turn, forces of the Sandinista Army killed Miskitos during these border confrontations, and the Commission had sufficient information to hold that the Government of Nicaragua illegally killed a considerable number of Miskitos in Leimus, in retaliation for the killings in San Carlos, in violation of Article 4 of the American Convention on Human Rights.

. . . . The Commission acknowledges that an overall solution to the difficulties of the Government of Nicaragua with a considerable number of Nicaraguans of Miskito origin to some extent will depend on the achievement of peace throughout Central America, and in particular on an agreement between Honduras and Nicaragua which guarantees peace along the border, thus avoiding detentions that have prevailed until now in these border zones. In that sense, the Commission can only urge the so-called Contadora Group to continue to make its valuable and important contribution to the achievement of peace. At the same time, it is confident that the governments concerned, including that of the United States of America, will conduct themselves in a way compatible with the above mentioned purpose of establishing a stable and lasting peace in this region.\footnote{OAS-IACHR, \textit{Report on the Situation of Human Rights of a Segment of the Nicaraguan Population of Miskito Origin}, comp. Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (Washington, DC: Organization of American States, 1984), 129-133; Amnesty International, \textit{Nicaragua: The Human Rights Record} (London: Amnesty International Publications, 1986).}
In separate reports on human rights and Miskitus, Americas Watch and CIDCA found no evidence of widespread disappearances or alleged torture and killing of Miskitos during the relocation. However, Americas Watch concluded that although the relocation itself was consistent with prerogatives of countries under military threat, Sandinistas should have informed Miskitus about their relocation plans before hand.\(^{61}\) The relocation itself was a regrettable policy that even the Sandinistas now call an "error." It was, however, consistent with the rights of states to defend their national integrity and was carried out with minimal violations of the human rights of the Miskitus. It occurred in a context of war during which the Sandinistas committed human rights violations. Many of them were punished and there was certainly no policy of massive abuse or genocide.\(^{62}\)


3.4 **Summary**

A study of nationalist ideologies and narratives of the revolution from a subaltern perspective shows that there is a great disjuncture between the Sandinista history of the revolution and the Miskitu history of the Atlantic Coast. Although, both Sandinistas and Miskitus reconstructed their histories in the form of a collage made up of fragments of cultural memory, Miskitu narratives of never assumed the sovereignty of a single state. In fact, they raised doubts about the singularity of a history of Nicaragua and questioned the concept of a national identity.  

Sandinistas and Miskitus presented conflicting definitions of land rights, which rested on two irreconcilable historical narratives. On the one hand, MISURTASATA leaders claimed that Indian "nations" had existed "from time immemorial" and that Miskitus had maintained enduring spiritual and economic ties to their land. On the other hand, Sandinista narratives revolved around a sovereign nation-state.

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The question is: can these two competing forms of history--one, a history of the revolution revolving around Sandino and revolutionary nationalism, and the other of Amerindian rights--coexist? And, if we find many such challenging histories for the different regions of Nicaragua, then should the center of the revolution in Nicaragua remain confined to Sandino and the Sandinistas? The question is not one of "national" and "regional" histories, but about the nature of the relation between parts and the whole.
CHAPTER 4

REVOLUTIONARY NATIONALISM AND MISKITU COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

Democracy is like love in this: it cannot be brought to life by others in command.

Sidney Hook

Despite all the controversial debates regarding revolutionary changes in Nicaragua, I still agree with Thomas W. Walker and Ileana Rodríguez that Sandinismo was, essentially, an idea that expressed the desire for social equality in Nicaragua.\footnote{Ileana Rodríguez, *House/Garden/Nation*: Space, Gender, and Ethnicity in Postcolonial Latin American Literatures by Women (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994); Thomas W. Walker, *Nicaragua: The Land of Sandino* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991).} However, my principal argument is that by pitting itself against the reality of U.S. imperialism in Nicaragua, Sandinistas asserted the feasibility of entirely new political, social, and economic possibilities. It was precisely through this innovative thinking about new possibilities that they tried to establish their hegemony in Nicaraguan politics. Consequently, the revolutionary government’s claims about
what political, economic, and social changes were possible and what was legitimate or beneficial for Nicaragua resulted in the construction of ideological, political, and cultural boundaries between the revolutionaries and Miskitus.

This chapter discusses how and why the concept of collective identity can be used to analyze Miskitu mobilization and collective action. Over the last twenty years, Postcolonial, Postmodern, and New Social Movement theorists have developed a variety of perspectives for analyzing collective action by focusing on the relationship among economic grievances, identity construction processes, and political organizing. My central research questions in this chapter are: (1) Why did Miskitus mobilize to challenge or subvert a revolutionary government's institutions and programs?; (2) Why did everything positive from the Sandinista point of view look so negative from the

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Miskitu point of view? The theoretical importance of these questions lies in the argument that the construction of Miskitu collective identity took place prior to other processes and factors, such as resource mobilization, manipulation by Miskitu leaders, Anglo-affinity, and CIA recruitment and training, which many scholars regarded as central to their analyses of Miskitu resistance. While I recognize the importance of such factors, I argue that Miskitus calculated the costs and benefits of their resistance after a sense of collective identity had been established.

4.1 Past Research

In the past, theories concerning collective action, riots, strikes, and mass gatherings were grouped under a broad category known as collective behavior. Generally speaking, collective behavior theorists viewed any kind of


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collective action as something spontaneous that disrupted routine social interaction, but there were many versions of this basic assumption. Theorists of collective behavior fell into two subgroups. One group of theorists (Ralph Turner and Lewis Killian) focused on how processes of social interaction and cultural interpretation produced episodes of collective behavior. The second group of theorists (Neil Smelser) viewed collective behavior as an irrational response to social strains and deprivations.

During the 1970s, many sociologists questioned the validity of the arguments and assumptions of collective behavior theorists. The 1970s generation of sociologists argued that collective behavior was not an "irrational" response to social strains, and social movement participants were not "dangerous" people. Many of the sociologists who questioned the basic assumptions underlying theories of collective behavior had participated in the civil rights movement of the 1960s in the United States, and their work represents a major divide in social

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movement theory between traditional and contemporary approaches to the field.⁵

Contemporary approaches view social movements as analytical categories rather than as a subcategories of collective behavior. This makes it easier to study certain aspects of social movements that had been obscured by collective behavior theory: their organizational dimensions, their long-term persistence, and their "rational" qualities. These features define the focus of the resource mobilization perspective, which broke most sharply with the collective behavior tradition and which remains the most prominent contemporary perspective in the study of social movements. Resource mobilization approaches claim that resources and opportunities are more important than grievances and deprivation in causing movements to emerge. This explains why only groups with access to resources usually engage in collective action. This perspective also argues that movements tend to emerge out of pre-existing social networks among people that serve as channels of mobilization. Thus, in contrast to traditional approaches, resource mobilization theory holds that the most "connected" individuals--not the most alienated--are

⁵ Steven M. Buechler and F. Kurt Cylke, Jr., Social Movements: Perspectives and Issues, 59.
likely to become active in social movements. Finally resource mobilization approaches propose that both individuals and organizations are best understood as "rational actors" who calculate the costs and benefits of engaging in certain lines of action and make strategic decisions accordingly.⁶

Building on these core assumptions, several variations of the resource mobilization perspective have become prominent. The political process model is a modified version of the resource mobilization approach and it considers three sets of factors to be crucial in the generation of social insurgency. The first is the level of organization within the aggrieved population; the second, the collective assessment of the prospects for successful insurgency within that same population; and third, the political alignment of groups within the larger political environment. Basically, rather than focusing on factors internal or external to the movement, the model describes insurgency as a product of both. Thus, the resource mobilization perspective is not a unified theory as much as

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a common core of assumptions that supports differing versions of the perspective.\textsuperscript{7}

During the 1980s, resource mobilization approaches were challenged by social constructionism and new social movement theories. Social constructionism analyzes the use of symbols by activists in the course of movement activity. This perspective views movements as ongoing and fluid processes rather than as rigid structures or unified actors. Theorists have used the concept of "framing" or sense-making to examine how individuals interact with one another, negotiate meanings, manipulate symbols, and construct their activity as a social movement. Framing refers to how activists identify and articulate certain ideas and beliefs as grievances that can motivate people to act in a collective fashion. Since the mass media are important sources of such frames, some theorists in this tradition have been especially attentive to the positive and negative impact of mass media frames on social movement outcomes.\textsuperscript{8}

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{7} Doug McAdam, "The Political Process Model," in \textit{Social Movements: Perspectives and Issues}, 172-192.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
The other challenge to the resource mobilization perspective came from new social movement theorists. New social movement theory emerged out of a critical encounter with the Marxist tradition. Marxist theorists argued that Capitalism would produce its own gravediggers in the form of a revolutionary working class that would overthrow Capitalism. But, new social movement theorists argue that contemporary society has changed in important ways that have eclipsed the "old" social movement of the working class with a variety of "new" social movements that do not derive from class exploitation or invoke working-class identities. These new social movements are rooted in other identities like race, gender, sexuality, age, and they give rise to other kinds of movements like the civil rights, women's, gay and lesbian, and youth movements. New social movements tend to be issue-oriented and focus on questions related to peace, justice, and ecology. In any case, these movements are typically analyzed as responses to advanced capitalist society in which profit-seeking corporations and power-hungry bureaucracies threaten to dominate all aspects of social life. New social movements argue that collective identities and group memberships are somewhat fragile and temporary in nature. New social movement theories have made
significant contributions to our understanding of contemporary social movements and collective identities. Whereas resource mobilization approaches are better at describing how movements operate, New Social Movement theories are better at analyzing why they emerge than how they emerge.⁹

4.2 The Concept of Collective Identity

Verta Taylor and Nancy Whittier have used the concept of "collective identity," which is loosely grouped under the rubric of "new social movement theory," to explain how social and economic grievances transform people into political actors. I use their definition of collective identity to explain the construction of Miskitu collective identity because the concept is broad enough to encompass identities ranging from those based on gender, sexuality, and ethnicity, to explain how identity construction processes were crucial to grievance interpretation.

New social movement theorists have argued that political organizing around a common identity is what distinguishes recent social movements from class-based movements; they consider collective identity to be an important factor in contemporary resistance movements.\textsuperscript{10} Taylor and Whittier proposed three factors (i.e. boundaries, consciousness, and negotiation) as analytical tools to explain the construction of collective identity. The following sections of this chapter will explain the significance of each of these factors in the context of the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict.

4.2.1 Establishing Boundaries

The concept of boundaries refers to the social, psychological, and physical structures that establish differences between the challenging and dominant groups. It is usually the dominant group that erects social, political, economic, and cultural boundaries to accentuate the differences between itself and the subordinate group. Paradoxically, however, for subordinate groups, the process

of asserting "who we are" often involves a kind of reverse affirmation of the characteristics attributed to it by dominant groups. Therefore, boundary markers are central to the formation of collective identity because they promote a heightened awareness of a group's commonalties and differences between members of the "in-group" and "out-group." The construction of positive identity requires both withdrawal from the values and structures of the dominant group, as well as the creation of new self-affirming values.

My analysis of the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict suggests that the first area where the revolutionaries drew the boundaries between themselves and the Miskitus was that of education. In 1980, the revolutionary government carried out the National Literacy Crusade. The metaphors and terminology of the literacy campaign were purposefully military (although the term "crusade" also had a religious connotation--a "war against ignorance"). The "literacy warriors" were divided into "brigades, columns, and squadrons" that were located in six "battlefronts." The teachers (brigadistas) worked with the "urban literacy guerrillas" and each battlefront chose the name of a fallen Sandinista combatant to honor his/her memory. The military
metaphors used by the Sandinistas were supposed to instill the ideals of sacrifice, dedication, and faith in the revolutionary struggle.\footnote{11}

The literacy campaign was a political project. Father Fernando Cardenal, the Jesuit director of the program and former professor of Philosophy at the Catholic University in Managua, said that the "National Literacy Crusade [was] not a pedagogical program with political implications, but rather, it [was] a political project with pedagogical implications."\footnote{12} The Sandinistas believed that all education

\footnote{11 The literacy crusade was not an afterthought of the FSLN's victory. The Sandinistas had always viewed popular education as a strategic political project. FSLN, "Programa Sandinista (Reivindicaciones)," in Sandinistas: Key Documents/Documentos Claves, eds. Dennis Gilbert and David Block (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1990), 3-21. Article 9 (d-i) of the original document reads: "Eliminará el analfabetismo. Atenderá el progreso de la enseñanza en los distintos niveles (primaria, media, técnica, universitaria); será gratuita la enseñanza en los distintos niveles (lo gratuito incluye útiles escolares, alimentación, transporte). Concederá becas a los escolares y a los estudiantes de distintos niveles con escasos recursos económicos. Promoverá todos los maestros que necesite la población escolar, poniendo fin a la absurda situación de alumnos sin amestros y de maestros sin alumnos; asimismo promoverá la construcción e instalación de los centros escolares necesarios. Nacionalizará los centros de enseñanza convertidos inmoralmente en industria por mercaderes que hipócritamente invocan principios religiosos. Adoptará los programas e coenseñanza experimentales y científicos. Extirpará la penetración neocolonial de los programas de enseñanza, superando el ocultamiento de las luchas nacionales y universales a facvor de la justicia y la libertad, orientando a la juventud en el espíritu de los más nobles ideales, contra la explotación y la opresión. The 1969 Political Program of the FSLN discussed the need to introduce a "massive campaign" to wipe out illiteracy in Nicaragua. Deborah Barndt, "Popular Education," chap. in Nicaragua: The First Five Years, ed. Thomas W. Walker (New York: Praeger, 1985), 317-345.}

was political. They argued that in capitalist societies educational institutions support the interests of the wealthy and promote their vision of the world in order to protect the power bases of the dominant classes. Father Fernando Cardenal explained the aims of the national literacy crusade in a 1980 document concerning the training of teachers:

[This] is a political project that can only be carried out after there has been a revolution. If there were no revolution it would not be possible to undertake such a literacy crusade because in a country where there is no revolution and where the capitalist system of exploitation prevails, it is highly suitable to maintain illiteracy.

All these masses that will be made literate in Nicaragua will not only learn to read and write; we also have other goals. Our people will learn to read through a process of conscientization and politicization. They will learn to take a free, lucid and effective part in national life, national reconstruction, and the Sandinista revolutionary process.13

As is evident from the above passage, the literacy crusade had multiple objectives: teaching reading and writing was a necessary part of the program; at the same time, the

politicalization of the masses (conscientization) was an integral part of the Sandinista literacy crusade.\textsuperscript{14}

The work of the teachers (brigadistas) was not limited to teaching the workers and peasants to read and write in Spanish. The volunteers distributed anti-malaria pills, conducted agricultural surveys, gathered oral histories of guerrilleros, etc. Such activities changed the relationship between student and teacher, as well as educational methodology. The teachers were given three types of books: an arithmetic workbook, a writing workbook, and a teacher's manual, which allowed teachers and students to discuss the history of Nicaragua and the social programs introduced by the revolutionary government. Figures 4.1 and 4.2 provide samples from the literacy primer. These sample pages clearly show that the Sandinistas used pedagogical methods and educational institutions to politicize the masses. In fact, Carlos Tünnermann, Sandinista Minister of Education,

\textsuperscript{14} JGRN, "Fines, Objetivos y Principios de la Nueva Educación," in Key Documents/Documentos Claves, 243-244. Originally published in El Nuevo Diario, 1 March 1983, 7. The very first paragraph of the document reads: "Fines: Formar plena e integralmente la personalidad del Hombre Nuevo, permanente en construcción, apto para promover y contribuir al proceso de transformación que edifica día a día la Nueva Sociedad. Ester Hombre Nuevo nicaragüense que viene construyéndose desde el inicio del proceso de liberación de nuestro pueblo, se forma a partir de nuestra realidad, el trabajo creador y de las circunstancias históricas que vivimos. La educación deberá desarrollar las capacidades intelectuales, físicas, morales, estéticas y espirituales de ese Hombre Nuevo."
stated that the principal aim of the educational system was to create a "New Man" (and "New Woman") who could contribute to the social transformation of Nicaragua.\textsuperscript{15}

Carlos Tùnnermann's ideas about education were very similar to Che Guevara's ideas about the revolutionary state's educational apparatus. Che Guevara believed that education was a crucial instrument for mobilizing the masses in the struggle against Capitalism. In an article published in an Uruguayan weekly, he wrote:

Man under Socialism, despite his apparent standardization, is more complete. Despite the lack of a perfect mechanism for it, his opportunities for expressing himself and making himself felt in the social organism are infinitely greater. . . It is still necessary to deepen his conscious participation, individual and collective, in all the mechanisms of management and production, and to link this to the idea of the need for technical and ideological education, so that he sees how closely interdependent these processes are and how their advancement is parallel.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{15} Carlos Tùnnermann Bernheim, Hacia Una Nueva Educación en Nicaragua, (Managua: El Ministerio de Educación, 1980), 136. In October 1980 at a UNESCO meeting, he outlined the principal objectives of the literacy crusade. The text in Spanish reads: "Será el primer diagnóstico para diseñar el perfil del NUEVO NICARAGÜENSE, de los futuros hijos de Sandino del HOMBRE NUEVO, que pregon a la Revolución y que gracias a la Cruzada de Alfabetización comenzó a forjarse en nuestras montañas.

This passage illustrates that Che Guevara believed that one of the main goals of educational institutions in socialist countries was to create an awareness among the masses about revolutionary struggles. For Che Guevara education was a crucial factor in the development of a new economic model and in the ideological conception of a revolutionary society. Because Sandinista leaders such as Carlos Tünnermann drew heavily from Che Guevara's ideas, Sandinista educational planning and institutions were based on the philosophical foundation that the FSLN would serve as the vanguard of the Nicaraguan people. The Sandinistas claimed that their mission was to empower the proletariat by educating workers in a way that would enable them to understand the need for a struggle against Capitalism.

The reason the vanguard could do what the common people could not lay in the vanguard's anti-systemic nature, as well as its ability to understand the true desires of the people better than the people themselves. This is precisely what distinguished the FSLN from other political parties. The Sandinistas also tried to keep the vanguard ideologically pure by making "the Sandinista struggle massive without massifying the FSLN" (1977
All Sandinista cadres were trained in Marxism-Leninism as well as military tactics because a disciplined life centered around proletarian ideology based on respect and obedience to the vanguard was a requirement for every Sandinista. Ideological "correctness" was centrally defined by the National Directorate, which claimed to reflect the opinions of the revolutionaries. Dissidents were defined as those who lacked the revolutionary consciousness.

In Los Primeros Pasos Tomás Borge identified the "lack of deep revolutionary consciousness" on the part of the masses as one of the major obstacles (along with U.S. imperialism, the Somocistas, and the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie) to the revolutionary process in Nicaragua. He argued that Nicaraguans had never advanced beyond the stage of conservative resistance to oppression because potentially revolutionary groups such as students, urban

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18 Tomás Borge, Los Primeros Pasos: La Revolución Popular Sandinista (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1981), 167. Che Guevara also stressed the importance of the vanguard party. He believed that the "vanguard group is ideologically more advanced than the masses; the latter understands the new values, but not sufficiently. While among the former there has been a qualitative change that enabled them to make sacrifices in their capacity as an advance guard, the latter see only part of the picture and must be subjected to incentives and pressures of a certain intensity. This is the dictatorship of the proletariat operating not only on the defeated class but also on individuals of the victorious class. Che Guevara, "Socialism and Man in Cuba," in Che Guevara and the Cuban Revolution, 252.
workers, and campesinos simply did not have the class-consciousness to make their own revolution. Borge believed that objective class inequality alone would not lead to a popular revolution. In Nicaragua, a "true" revolution would never have taken place without a vanguard party or the FSLN. His theory was based on the argument that a "bourgeois mentality" was the basis of the Somoza dictatorship. A successful revolution could take place only after the masses had been educated to get rid of their "bourgeois mentality" in order to become proletarians. During the first few years of the revolution, the Sandinistas used schools and training centers (institutional space) to educate the masses in revolutionary theory and justify the need establish a social order, where the rights of persons would be valued over those of capital.

19 The Sandinistas defined a "bourgeois" person as someone who was more concerned with his individual material needs than with the problems of the masses. A bourgeois was apolitical and apathetic unless something threatened his own selfish interests, mainly because he lacked social consciousness. A person was bourgeois because of his attitude and not because of his class position. For example, a poor vegetable vendor from Managua favoring a liberal democracy was far more bourgeois than a wealthy European who joined the Sandinista guerrilleros to construct an egalitarian society. For the FSLN, armed struggle against the Somoza dictatorship itself was the means by which Nicaraguans could transcend their bourgeois past and establish their identity as members of the proletarian community. See Tomás Borge, Ibid.
However, the political-ideological discourse developed by the Sandinistas was not limited to a negative assessment of the Somoza dictatorship and U.S. imperialism. It was also a positive discourse that promised the establishment of an egalitarian society, and those promises had to be justified by appeal to logical, epistemological, and ethical principles. Consequently, along with its claims, Sandinismo developed its own structures of moral justification.

It is important to understand the objectives of the literacy crusade and MISURASATA's objections to it in the context of the revolutionary struggle and social transformation in Nicaragua. In my opinion, Miskitu resistance stemmed from the manner in which Sandinismo was implemented on the Atlantic Coast. Miskitu leaders feared that Sandinista control of the educational system would lead to the "assimilation" of Amerindians. Consequently MISURASATA argued vigorously for literacy programs in indigenous languages on the Coast to promote the intellectual and cultural development of Miskitus and other indigenous groups. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that MISURASATA's first official statement issued in 1979 promised collaboration with the revolutionary
government's literacy program and recognized Spanish as the official language of Nicaragua. Seen in this way, it is easy to understand how identity politics and Miskitu resistance discourses promoted a kind of cultural endogamy that paradoxically, contributed to the construction and maintenance of boundaries between Miskitus and the revolutionary government. In September 1981, Brooklyn Rivera, on behalf of MISURASATA, (after he had fled to Honduras) wrote a letter addressed to "indigenous people of the whole world" and sent it to the Word Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP) and other international organizations, in which he said:

It is true that the FSLN allowed the literacy campaign in indigenous languages, and approved the project of Law if Education in Native Language, but this is fundamentally due to the initiative and work of MISURASATA to which the FSLN gave reluctant support after much insistence on the part of the communities. Therefore, the fact that the first part of the literacy campaign was concluded, is purely thanks to the sacrifice and courage of the indigenous brigadists, whom the FSLN, in 'recognition' of their completed labour, put in prison for several days; this was on seeing that these young people rejected their affiliation to the Sandinista Youth JS 19. They have also put obstacles to the implementation of the said project Law of Education in Native Languages.

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20 See Barricada, 27 November 1979.
Brooklyn Rivera's argument in the above mentioned letter and my conversations with Miskitus in Bilwi sometimes make me wonder if the Sandinistas failed to convince the Miskitus about the significance of their project by defining what the people needed in order to establish an egalitarian society without much regard for what the Amerindians themselves might have wanted to say or do.

Similar arguments have been made by a number of Central American feminists, including Ileana Rodríguez, and Sofía Montenegro, about women's rights and roles in revolutionary Nicaragua. My dissertation does not focus on women's issues, but I thought it might be interesting to use feminist critiques to highlight the ideological limitations of Sandinismo toward women and, by extension, indigenous peoples of the Atlantic Coast. In addition, a comparison between the revolutionary government's attitudes toward women and indigenous people is helpful to show that the Sandinistas did not single out Miskitus in order to exterminate indigenous peoples. In my opinion, the greatest

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Atlantic Coast, eds. Klaudine Ohland and Robin Schneider (Copenhagen: IWGIA, 1983), 203-217.

flaw in revolutionary thought lay in its assumption that the leaders knew what was best for the masses.

AMNLAE (Luisa Amanda Espinosa Association of Nicaraguan Women), like MISURASATA, was set up as a grassroots organization by the Sandinistas to promote the participation of women in the revolutionary process. During the first five years of the revolution, AMNLAE tried to promote women's rights and participation in government programs by demanding special child care services for working women, questioning institutionalized gender inequalities, and encouraging women's entry into areas of employment traditionally reserved for men. However, the Sandinistas wrongly assumed that the interests of the nation were either identical to or paralleled women's interests. The FSLN believed that that gender equality would increase as the goals of the revolution were realized. And as counterrevolutionary activities increased in Nicaragua, the revolutionary government argued that the defense of the country (la patria) was more important than issues related to women's rights.

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24 Sofía Montenegro, Interview by author, 4 September 1998, Managua, tape recording; Ileana Rodríguez, Registradas en la Historia: 10 Años del Quehacer Feminista en Nicaragua (Managua: Centro de 189
Many militant feminists denounced the sexist attitudes of Sandinista men, especially some members of the National Directorate, who always demanded sexual favors from women who worked in the army or in the police department. Nicaraguan feminists have repeatedly claimed that the issue of women's rights should go beyond the liberal demands for political equality and socialist demands for economic equality. Women want rights over their own bodies, rights that have been denied by social customs rather than civil law or economics. The slogan of contemporary Central American feminists is: "Free bodies or death!," which is a modified version of the Sandinista slogan of "Free homeland or death!" In the Introduction to her book entitled Women, Guerrillas, and Love, Ileana Rodríguez wrote:

In closing, I want to invoke a revolutionary song by Pablo Milanés that we women particularly liked: 'I prefer to have her shared rather than see her lost; she is not perfect, but comes closest to what I have always dreamt of.' There is no way of guessing what men dreamt, but what we women still dream of is a sincere acceptance of our sexuality and freedom of choice, expressed mainly as our possession of our bodies—womb, vagina, and brains.  

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Investigación y Acción Para la Promoción de los Derechos de la Mujer, 1990), 80-86.  
25 Ileana Rodríguez, Women, Guerrillas, and Love, xx-xxi.  
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Ejercicio A

1. Leamos la oración:

1980, año de la guerra contra el analfabetismo.

2.- Leamos la palabra:

año

3.- Separamos la palabra en sílabas:

año

4.- Leamos las sílabas:

ño, ne, ni, nu, ña

ño, ñe, ñi, ñu, ña

5.- Leamos y escribamos las sílabas:

ño, ne, ni, nu, ña

ño, ñe, ñi, ñu, ña

6.- Formemos y escribamos palabras combinando las sílabas conocidas:

Figure 4.1: Copy of a Page from the Writing Workbook

The Atlantic Coast is rich in natural resources. During Somoza's dictatorship, roads were built only to exploit these resources. The Atlantic Coast did not have enough health centers nor schools. Social welfare was also lacking. The FSLN considers the Atlantic Coast a very important region. It promotes the formation of a new society. It gives back to the people what was taken from them. The Ministry of the Atlantic Coast is establishing revolutionary justice in this area.
4.2.2 Consciousness

Boundaries locate persons as members of a group, but it is group consciousness that imparts a larger significance to a collectivity. Consciousness refers to the interpretive frameworks that emerge from a group's struggle to define and realize members' common interests in opposition to the dominant order. But, how do collective actors attribute their discontent to structural, cultural, or systemic causes rather than to personal failings or individual deviance? According to Taylor and Whittier consciousness is imparted through a formal body of writings, speeches, and documents, and it provides socially and politically marginalized groups with an understanding of their structural position. When a group develops an account that challenges dominant understandings, their consciousness can be called oppositional consciousness. A dominated group's own explanation of its position for political action not only influences mobilizational possibilities and directions but determines the types of
individual and collective actions a group pursues to challenge dominant arrangements.\textsuperscript{26}

The concept of consciousness can be used to show how MISURASATA used the discourse on indigenous self-determination to organize a social movement on the Atlantic Coast. Miskitu leaders promoted the idea that Miskitus were the most oppressed group, whose lands were being usurped by the Sandinistas.\textsuperscript{27} The Somozas and the Sandinistas exploited the natural resources of the Coast in ways that did not benefit Miskitus. After the land survey in 1981, MISURASATA leaders promoted the idea that after 1894, when President Zelaya distributed large areas of land to his military commanders, indigenous lands were consistently usurped by all Nicaraguan governments, including the Sandinista government. Consider the following excerpt from MISURASATA's \textit{Lineamientos Generales}:

\begin{quote}
We declare that, as indigenous people, we are an entity with our own ethnic consciousness, and that we inherit and live by the ethnic values of our millenial people. We affirm the cultural values and human potentiality of our peoples. We emphasize the following as being of importance for our brothers: Christian
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{26} Taylor and Whittier, "Collective Identity in Social Movement Communities," chap. in \textit{Social Movements}, eds. Steven M. Buechler and F. Kurt Cylke, Jr., 512-514.

\textsuperscript{27} Steadman Fagoth (MISURASATA), "Unity and Fraternity Between MISURASATA and FSLN," in \textit{National Revolution and Indigenous Identity}, 73-78.
society, communal property, family-oriented society, unity of feeling and unyielding will power. We are noble, fair, reserved, respectful, and deeply religious.\(^{28}\)

As is evident from the above excerpt, Miskitu leaders stressed the economic, political, and cultural rights of indigenous peoples in their speeches to raise the political consciousness of Miskitus. MISURASATA leaders traveled throughout the Coast, held meetings in villages, and explained how indigenous peoples could achieve their full historic rights to the land.\(^{29}\) Thus, group consciousness is an important concept to understand collective action because it was through the discourses of Miskitu leaders such as Brooklyn Rivera and Steadman Fagoth that Miskitus tried to make sense of themselves and their situation during the first few years of the revolution.

4.2.3 Negotiation

Taylor and Whittier's theoretical framework recognizes that identity can be a fundamental focus of political work. The concept of negotiation encompasses the symbols and


everyday actions subaltern groups use to resist and restructure existing systems of domination. For example, identity negotiations can be explicit, involving open and direct attempts to free the group from dominant representations, or implicit political messages that undermine the status quo.

In Nicaragua, soon after the Sandinistas took power, the political order was reorganized in two ways. On the one hand, Sandinistas transformed the institutional structures of authority set up in the period of the Somoza dictatorship. On the other hand, they tried to neutralize all challenging groups by making them subsidiary allies within a revolutionary state structure. Sandinistas tried to convince the Costeños of their revolutionary ideology and establish their hegemony by acting as managers of resources and services (interventionist state). In this process, Sandinistas asserted their cultural superiority and used the discourse of nationalism to rationalize all social, political, and economic changes they made.

Antonio Gramsci has talked of the "passive revolution" as one in which the new claimants to power, lacking the social strength to launch a full-scale assault on the old dominant classes, opt for a path in which the demands on a new society are "satisfied in small doses, legally, in a reformist manner"—in such a way that the political and economic position of the old feudal classes is not destroyed, agrarian reform is avoided, and the popular masses especially are prevented from going through the political experience of a fundamental social transformation.
On the Atlantic Coast, the struggle for control of natural resources, land, and symbolic capitals was staged, in part, through efforts to mark the distinction between the "modernizing" Sandinistas and "traditional" Miskitus. Thus, the point is no longer one of simply demarcating and identifying Sandinista and Miskitu domains of politics in their separateness because both Sandinistas and Miskitus competed for legitimacy of cultural practices, control over resources, and symbolic recognition.

Consequently, identity negotiation among the Miskitus involved a direct attempt to challenge Sandinista notions of cultural superiority. Miskitus challenged Sandinista notions of "culture" and constructed a positive image of themselves. The following excerpt from a communiqué from the leadership of MISURASATA to the Sandinista government in October 1980 clearly shows that Miskitus did not totally reject Sandinista programs or engage stage boycotts. In fact, Miskitus actively participated in some of the government's programs such as the literacy crusade, road construction projects, and health care programs:

Through this letter we ask the authorities of the revolutionary government to interpret more accurately the true feelings of the brothers in the Atlantic Coast and become thoroughly aware of their roots, their historical-backgrounds, traditions and cultural
values and their socioeconomic reality as a way of being able to understand and evaluate in a revolutionary way, the anxieties and behavior of these Nicaraguan brothers. In the same way, we ask those in charge of information that a true, full, realistic, and serious picture be made available to the peoples of the Pacific Coast with respect to those on the Atlantic Coast. That we are no longer branded as racists, separatists, counter-revolutionaries or Somocistas (Emphasis mine). 31

This excerpt demonstrates that negotiations between Miskitos and Sandinistas, especially during the first few years of the revolution, were very sinuous and subtle. On the one hand, Sandinistas interpreted the establishment of health care centers and schools as the "triumph" of the revolution and established their hegemony. On the other hand, MISURASATA viewed the revolution as an opportunity to "modernize" the Atlantic Coast and demand recognition for indigenous peoples' cultural and land rights. 32

In Hybrid Cultures, Néstor García Canclini made a similar argument about contemporary struggles in Latin America between dominant and subaltern groups. According to Canclini, conflicts between modernizers and traditionalists

31 MISURASATA, "We Ask For Understanding," in National Revolution and Indigenous Identity, 71.
32 Basically, hegemony is power achieved through a combination of coercion and consent. Gramsci argued that the leaders achieve domination not by force or coercion alone, but also by creating subjects who "willingly" submit to being ruled. Ideology is crucial in creating consent, and hegemony is achieved not only by direct manipulation or indoctrination, but by playing upon the common sense of people.
rarely appear to be confrontational. This is mainly because subaltern groups are interested in modernizing and this enables hegemonic sectors to maintain their power. As is evident from the passage below, there is an intrinsic interest on the part of the hegemonic sectors to promote modernity because the discourse of modernization enables them to adopt assimilationist policies even as they condemn the discrimination and exploitation" of indigenous peoples:

Faced with this reciprocal necessity, both are connected by means of a game of uses involving the other in both directions. ... Power would not function if it were exercised only by bourgeoisie over proletarians, whites over indigenous peoples, parents over children, the media over receivers. Since all these relations are interwoven with each other, each one achieves an effectiveness that it would never be able to by itself. But it is not simply a question of some forms of domination being superimposed on others and thereby being strengthened. What gives them their efficacy is the obliqueness that is established in the fabric.  

Modern = Cultured = Hegemonic  
↓    ↓    ↓  
Traditional = Popular = Subaltern

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García Canclini's work is helpful to understand the limitations of Marxist approaches to the study of ethnic conflict. Drawing from his argument, my work suggests that analyses of the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict cannot be presented in terms of confrontation alone. The interactions between Sandinistas and Miskitus were confrontational, but both groups dramatized their experiences and demands. This is precisely why no amount of economic reasoning or evidence of state repression is sufficient to explain Miskitu resistance.

4.3 Summary

The reference to a "Miskitu problem" on the Atlantic Coast in the works of Sandinistas is an index of the failure of the revolution to include effectively within its discourse all Nicaraguans that it claimed to represent. The epistemological limitations of Sandinismo become evident when we note that the ideals of freedom, equality, and cultural refinement went hand in hand with a set of dichotomies that systematically excluded Amerindians from the revolutionary framework. I have used the concepts of
boundaries, consciousness, and negotiation to show how Sandinista leaders and organizations claimed to represent and lead the Costeños, who were never culturally integrated within the revolutionary framework.\^{34}

My analysis of Miskitu collective action differs from past research by showing that Miskitu collective identity was not a reaction to an economic crisis. It is important to make a distinction between crisis and conflict because conflicts are conceptually distinct from crises.\^{35} Furthermore, if working-class struggle, in the history of capitalism, had been nothing more than a reaction to economic exploitation and cyclic crises, it would have been over as soon as the workers won better pay and improved working conditions. But the conflictual character of the workers' movement derived rather from the fact that it was a struggle against the very logic of industrial production under capitalist conditions.

\^{34} Partha Chatterjee, The Nation and Its Fragments, 134.
\^{35} A crisis is usually a reaction or a response to certain social dysfunctions in the mechanisms of adaptation within a social system. A crisis provokes the reaction of those who seek to redress the balance, whereas a conflict arises when there is a clash over the control and allocation of crucial resources. It is important to distinguish between a crisis and a conflict because dominant groups always tend to define movements as simple reactions to crises. Admitting that they are something else would entail recognition of collective demands that challenge the legitimacy of power and the current deployment of social resources. Steven Buechler and F. Kurt Cylke, Jr., eds. Social Movements.
CHAPTER 5

HOW THE AMERICAN PRESS FRAMED THE SANDINISTA-MISKITU CONFLICT IN NICARAGUA

It is almost universally felt that when we call a country democratic we are praising it: consequently the defenders of every kind of regime claim that it is a democracy, and fear that they might have to stop using the word if it were tied to any one meaning.

George Orwell, Politics and the English Language

Sandinismo in Nicaragua provoked expressions of anxiety and fear in the Reagan Administration about the spread of Communism in Central America. This chapter focuses on the epistemological question of how American journalists made sense of the revolutionary process in Nicaragua and represented Miskitus and Sandinistas in their stories and news reports. I think it is important to analyze the cultural representations of both Sandinistas and Miskitus in leading American newspapers such as the New York Times and Washington Post because the U.S. government was a key player in the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict, and these two newspapers were the primary sources of
information for most Americans, especially politicians and policymakers in Washington, DC.\textsuperscript{1} In addition, historical accounts and research reports published in the United States during the 1980s about the Sandinista regime, Miskitu resistance as well as counterrevolutionary activities in Nicaragua relied quite heavily on information published in the New York Times and Washington Post. It is therefore very important to identify the ideological, historical, and cultural factors that influenced American journalists' representations of the Sandinistas and Miskitus.

Although several scholars have acknowledged the problematic status of newspapers as "authentic and reliable" sources of information and questioned the notion that one can understand international politics by reading newspapers alone, few studies have examined the contingent factors that influenced journalists' accounts of the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua. Newspaper reports are similar to modern ethnographies and can be deconstructed in similar ways. James Clifford and George Marcus have shown how contingent

factors such as, language, rhetoric, power, and history influence ethnographic writing, and, by extension, newspaper reports.²

Chapters 3 and 4 of my dissertation focus on the cultural representations of both Sandinistas and Miskitus in public discourses in Nicaragua. Chapter 3 shows that the Sandinistas tried to establish their hegemony on the Atlantic Coast not only by exerting political power but also by popularizing the ideology of revolutionary nationalism. In this process, images of Sandinismo's cultural, political, and economic sophistication became very important. Similarly, Chapter 4 explains how Miskitu leaders used cultural symbols to mobilize indigenous peoples on the Atlantic Coast to challenge the revolutionary government's hegemony. Nevertheless, in order to better understand Sandinismo as well as Miskitu resistance to the revolutionary government, it seems imperative to me that scholars discuss the ways in which the American press framed the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict in Nicaragua.

My principal argument is that American press coverage of the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict embodied certain ideological convictions concerning liberal democracy and citizenship, such as regular political elections and a small government, which I will discuss in greater detail in Section 5.4. of this chapter. Although opinions differ even among liberal democrats over the role of the state, political parties, and religious organizations, I found that several press reports of the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict were permeated by the liberal logic that representative or "democratic" governments usually assume a regulatory function as guarantor of services, rather than acting as their provider.

In sharp contrast to the liberal model, the Sandinistas located Nicaragua's economic and social problems in the economic mandates of Capitalism. Rather than serving as an overseer of the common good, the revolutionary state nationalized the country's natural resources and productive enterprises, and took on the responsibility of providing for all its citizens. I do believe that like liberal democracy, many revolutionary goals and principles suffered in practical application and my critique of Sandinismo in Chapter 3 illustrates the
elusiveness of the Sandinistas' utopian goals. But, my point is that despite their utopian aspirations (or perhaps because of them), Sandinista prescriptions for participatory democracy in Nicaragua were severely criticized by liberal journalists in the United States. Thus, this chapter deals with the ways in which some liberal journalists told the story of the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict and persuaded readers to accept the authenticity, plausibility and significance of their representations of the Sandinistas, Miskitus, and the Reagan Administration.

The following section provides an overview of the major arguments on the topic of media images of international events. The purpose of a brief literature review on the topic of press coverage of international events is twofold. First, I wish to provide an overview of the major trends in the field of news analysis. Although the research questions and focus of each work discussed in the following section is somewhat different, I have identified some major lines of convergence. Second, I wish to highlight the significance of my own approach by pointing out the limitations of past research, which was largely based on content analysis of news reports. In
contrast to previous research, this chapter provides a qualitative analysis of media discourses, and Sections 5.3 and 5.4 discuss the contingent factors that shaped reporters' accounts of the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict. My goal is to explain why some journalists viewed revolutionary organizations and policies for social transformation as antidemocratic projects.

5.1 News Analysis

Americans live in a world of advanced telecommunication and information systems. Over 1,700 newspapers (with a combined circulation of 60 million) are published daily in the United States. In addition, more than 7,000 weekly newspapers published by college students, foreign immigrants, religious organizations, and business groups are available. The broadcast media are equally prolific--there are nearly 4,500 AM radio channels, 3,000 commercial FM stations, over 1,100 educational FM bands, 750 commercial television stations, and nearly 400 educational TV channels.³

Much academic work in the field of mass communication has focused on the economic and political aspects of news reporting and processing. For example, in *News: The Politics of Illusion*, W. Lance Bennett examined the political effects of personalized news in the U.S. media.\(^4\) His principal argument was that the American public is unable to comprehend international events and politics because journalists personalize their political narratives with images of fear, violence, and catastrophe; such stories fail to explain political processes, economic structures, or power relations to the public because they do not present the "big picture" surrounding important issues and events. In other words, journalists represent social forces through private experiences, reduce economic analyses to reports of isolated financial successes and failures, and allow individual political actors to overshadow the political and social issues they represent.

According to Bennett, the American public finds it difficult to recognize that the media present distorted images of the world because of their close connections with powerful politicians and businesspersons. Bennett argued that the average middle-class American will never support a politician who does not claim to promote the ideals of

\(^4\) Ibid.
democracy. Consequently, both politicians and journalists work together to maintain the myth of a "free press and a free people." Although, the ideal civics book of American democracy claims that power rests with the people, politicians use the media to generate support for their projects. In other words, the media reinforce and legitimize the power of the political and economic élites and simultaneously diffuse popular resistance and demands of the people from below.

Bennett's book on media reporting addresses important questions concerning ideological and political interpretations of events as well as business/political élites' control over public communication systems in a democracy. I agree with Bennett's views and believe that news reports should be based on facts and written from the perspective of social responsibility rather than in defense of the press' self-interests. Often times events in Third World countries become news in the American press only when American political or business interests are threatened. Thus, it is important to contextualize news reports and examine how the press framed events. A good case in point

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is the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict in Nicaragua and Section 5.2 of this chapter explains why "framing" was a crucial component in press coverage of the Tasba Pri relocation story.

In the past, several scholars analyzed U.S. press coverage of international events, but Bernard C. Cohen's path-breaking study entitled *The Press and Foreign Policy* is particularly useful to understand how reporters recorded, interpreted, and explained U.S. foreign policy. Cohen explained the role of the press in foreign policy decisions in terms "of competing demands of diplomacy and democracy." According to him, American journalists believe that disclosure of facts and freedom of information best serve the "national interest." All journalists like to exercise their own judgment and publish their interpretations of events that they consider to be newsworthy. However, government official and policymakers regard the press as a disturbing intruder that violates the "necessary security of the administrative process." The result of this difference of viewpoints is that both journalists and policymakers become suspicious of each

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other. Consequently, press coverage of international events and U.S. foreign policy is spasmodic and oversimplified.

As is evident from Cohen's book, the production of foreign news in the press is contingent upon several contextual factors that either directly or indirectly impinge on its content. Arguing along similar lines, Leon Sigal's *Reporters and Officials* showed that well over half of the sources for political reporting in *The New York Times* came from routine contact with government officials. His basic argument was that news depends very much on the nature of its sources.\(^7\) Similarly, Tom Wicker's *On Press* showed that the press rarely challenged the official consensus because "it mirror[ed] rather well the character of the American community."\(^8\) He also pointed out that a reporter could lose his access to government officials if he/she became overly critical of them or government policies. He attributed the "distortion" in news reports to reporters' lack of knowledge and the pressure of deadlines. He concluded by stating that:

The overwhelming conclusion I have drawn from my life in journalism--nearly thirty years so far, from the *Sandhill Citizen* to the *New York Times*--is that the

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American Press, powerful as it unquestionably is and protected though it may be by the Constitution and the laws, is not often 'robust and uninhibited' but is usually timid and anxious--for respectability at least as much as for profitability.\(^9\)

From the above passage and discussion it is clear that several writers such as Tom Wicker were concerned about the constraints upon the content and structures of foreign news in the American press. In my view, their critiques of the imbalances in the control, content, and distribution of world news shows that in democratic societies the concept of "freedom of press" is not only a basic civil right but an ideological banner that demands freedom to write about social, political, and economic issues without interference from economic and political powers.

Another direction of research that was important for the development of news analysis was inspired by the work of Charles Press and Kenneth Verburg. In a book entitled American Politicians and Journalists, these two authors claimed that politicians and journalists cooperate in order to advance their careers.\(^10\) Their study found that American foreign-news editors favor stories that emphasize crisis events and conflicts. Thus, the most popular topics are:

\(^9\) Ibid., 259.

(1) American activities in foreign countries, including visits by presidents and hostage stories; (2) events that directly affect Americans, such as arms-control negotiations and summits; (3) Communist-menace stories; (4) European royalty and changes in leaders of nations; (5) dramatic political conflicts such as wars or revolutions; (6) catastrophic events such as mass killings, earthquakes, airplane, bus, and train accidents, or devastating hurricanes and storms; (7) the excesses of dictators. The authors' basic argument is that foreign policy reporting includes the issue of national security interests, which is not crucial to domestic reporting. Thus, the relationship between politicians and journalists is one of "competition and guarded cooperation, characterized by skepticism on both sides."¹¹ In other words, news production about foreign affairs and events involves more than just the selection of events. Since security and government officials are concerned about disclosing vital information to reporters concerning U.S. foreign policy, journalists find it extremely difficult to gather sufficient information about events in other countries. The net result is that news reports about foreign affairs focus on special dimensions.

¹¹ Ibid., 284.
of the events in ways that are concurrent with U.S. foreign policy.

A somewhat similar approach to the topic of press coverage of foreign affairs may be found in Nicholas O. Berry's book entitled *Foreign Policy and the Press* in which he suggested that the inability of reporters to analyze U.S. foreign policy during the formulation and execution stage did not come from inhibitions derived from either professional ethics or a narrow job description.\(^{12}\) In journalism schools, reporters are taught that their primary task is to gather the facts. In the foreign policy formulation stage, reporters interview U.S. officials, identify the major issues, and write up their stories based on what they learn from government officials about the nature of foreign threats and U.S. interests. According to Berry, patriotism makes journalists congenial to foreign policies designed to meet the nation's problems. Thus, the press is unable to conduct a debate on foreign policy issues even when they have opportunities to separate fact from fiction. Basically, reporting is consistent with U.S.

foreign policy because the setting and the facts are largely consistent with that policy.

However, at the outcome stage, reporters rely less on what U.S. officials say because they know a lot more about foreign policy and become critical when foreign policy fails to achieve its stated goals or its costs are too high. When policy fails, government officials try to minimize the loss of domestic support by manipulating news reports. However, according to Berry, when policy fails, no matter how much the administration in Washington attempts to manipulate news reports, reporters are professional enough to question foreign policy. Unfortunately, journalists become competent evaluators only after they gather all the facts.

Teun A. Van Dijk has suggested that "one of the central propositions in the news ideology of many journalists, especially in Western countries, is that fact and opinion should not be mixed."¹³ Since this approach to news reporting is based on the assumption that descriptions of news events can be value-free and editorials are the preferred place for opinions, reporters do not always critically evaluate their sources of information. But, my

question is: Don't some of the most factual news reports carry strong ideological messages? In fact, the very selection of events reflects the context of production and the epistemology of the reporters. I discuss this issue in greater detail in Section 5.3 in the context of the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict.

Perhaps a more radical version of my argument can be found in Noam Chomsky's works, who has repeatedly suggested that American journalists limit their discussions of domestic and international political events to the opinions of the political and business élites in the United States mainly because the media represent the same interests that control the state and private economy. According to him, the media are corporations that cater to the needs of advertisers and investors.14 Their top management (especially editors) is drawn from the ranks of wealthy professionals, who by virtue of their business associations, class status and aspirations share the perceptions of the rich and the powerful. Consequently, the selection of what counts as "news" falls well within the range that conforms to the needs of the nexus of state-

private power that controls the economy and the political system. According to Chomsky, journalists have the choice of either conforming to the "rules of the game" or being excluded, but the rewards for conformity are always better! He does not accuse journalists of dishonest behavior; rather he blames the institutional structure of the capitalist system for discouraging independent thinking.

Scholars such as Shanto Iyengar and Todd Gitlin have examined news formats or "frames" and their ramifications for political elites. In *The Whole World is Watching*, Gitlin made a powerful statement that the "media are mobile spotlights, not passive mirrors of the society; selectivity is the instrument of their action. A news story adopts a certain frame and rejects or downplays material that is discrepant." He used the example of a news report in the *New York Times* regarding a public demonstration in Washington, DC. to end the war in Vietnam to show how reporters undermined the importance of anti-war protests. By stating that the "principal occupant of the White House was at his ranch in Texas" at the time of the demonstration

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organized by a "handful of adults" and students, reporters downplayed the significance of a meaningful protest. Consider the following excerpt from the news report that Gitlin examined and criticized:

More than 15,000 students and a handful of adults picketed the White house in warm spring sunshine today, calling for an end of the fighting in Vietnam. Walking three and four abreast in orderly rows and carrying printed white signs, the students clogged the sidewalk. The principal occupant of the White House was at his ranch in Texas.17

This excerpt illustrates how the New York Times relayed a hegemonic frame by packaging information in ways that concealed and protected the interests of the political and economic élites. Thus, Gitlin concluded that all analytical approaches to journalism must examine the frames used by the media because news reports are seldom neutral in the sense that readers may choose to form an independent opinion about the demonstration described.

In sum, several economic, political, and cultural constraints of news production favor élite definitions of reality. Although the United States has a very rich history of radical democratic protests and journalism, I would hesitate to agree with liberal journalists that the

17 Ibid. 49
American press is independent and "free" from government control and censorship. For example, in August 1982, the Miami Herald published an article lamenting the loss of one of Nicaragua's greatest journalists, Pedro Joaquín Chamorro. In that article entitled "Sandinista Tyranny Grows," Jack Anderson claimed that:

Pedro Joaquin Chamorro was an editor who championed the aggrieved and plagued the malefactors in his native Nicaragua. He became an inspirational presence that was intimidating to the tyrant Anastasio Somoza. The dictator ended the annoyance by dispatching a death squad to gun Chamorro down.

We in the United States do not have, nor need we rely upon, a newsman of Chamorro's stature. In our historic good fortune, we have evolved an entire institution to undertake the mission that in a tyranny falls to the lonely hero.

Not all our neighbors to the south have been so fortunate. The flow of information is choked off by government censors who invoke high-sounding phrases about national security. But the real purpose is to keep the people from learning the truth about their corrupt, self-serving rulers (Emphasis mine).  

I disagree with Jack Anderson's claims because I do not believe that the concept of a free press can be limited to the freedom to gather and report news. If the press is unable to present political views and debates on issues that could threaten its own self-interest, it cannot be referred to as a "free" press. Liberal newspapers that

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18 Miami Herald, 29 August 1982.
report incidents of crime, violence, human rights abuses, or foreign policy without any comments on social or political responsibility cannot qualify to be "free."

5.2. Covering the Nicaraguan Revolution

Against the background of the issues discussed in the previous section, the following sections of this chapter aim to show that the American press was not independent of political ideologies such as liberal democracy. In fact, journalists' representations of the Sandinistas were primarily associated with the fear of Communist activities in Central America. Journalists constantly emphasized two issues in their reports of the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict: human rights abuses and the spread of Communism in Central America.

During the 1980s, several articles and books were published about U.S. press coverage of the Nicaraguan Revolution. For example, Joshua Muravchik's book entitled News Coverage of the Sandinista Revolution blamed American journalists for their inability to identify the Sandinistas
as Communists during the early years of the revolution.\(^{19}\) He examined news reports published in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, and argued that American journalists failed to detect the Communist aspirations of the Sandinistas mainly because of "their campaign of deception that was an integral part of Sandinista strategy."\(^{20}\)

Muravchik's concerns about U.S. press coverage of the Nicaraguan Revolution demonstrate that the debate over the threat of Communism in Central America during the 1980s was waged, at least partially, through the media and the American press. However, in my opinion, the dispute over the danger of Communism was only one of the major considerations that defined the issues in academic debates concerning revolutionary changes in Nicaragua. Thus, in opposition to Joshua Muravchik's view, I want to argue that the greatest flaw in American press coverage of the Nicaraguan Revolution, especially the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict, was that reporters failed to contextualize events in Nicaragua by separating ethnic issues from the revolutionary struggle against U.S. imperialism. This is not an argument for a leftist critique of liberal

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\(^{20}\) Ibid., 107.
journalism. On the contrary, my dissertation challenges both Marxist and liberal political discourses and perspectives by raising questions about ways to empower people by giving them full access to information so that they may fight for human equality in all aspects of daily life.

To support my general argument, I will draw some points from the works of the following content analytical studies of U.S. press coverage of the Nicaraguan Revolution. For example, in an article entitled "The U.S. Intervention in Nicaraguan and Other Latin American Media," Angharad Valdivia documented the continuous and extensive U.S. funding of the mass media in Nicaragua to discredit the Sandinistas.\textsuperscript{21} She argued that the U.S. government spent exorbitant amounts of money to organize a massive misinformation campaign against the closure of \textit{La Prensa}, Nicaragua's only opposition paper. Ironically, the Sandinistas failed to gain total control over the mass media even after closing the opposition newspaper because \textit{La Prensa} was never considered to be a "real" opposition paper in the sense that it never reflected the demands and

concerns of the Nicaraguan masses who were unhappy with the revolutionary government; La Prensa "was externally manipulated and full of half-truths."22

Press censorship in Nicaragua under the Sandinistas was contested heavily both in Nicaragua and the United States. It is undeniable that the Sandinistas closed down La Prensa several times during the 1980s. In Nicaragua, the Sandinistas claimed that press censorship was a result of intensified pressure from the Contras who were funded by the Reagan Administration to overthrow the revolutionary government. They accused the Reagan Administration of using La Prensa as a political weapon to discredit the revolutionary government. Meanwhile, in the United States, the Reagan Administration articulated itself in liberal terms by arguing that press censorship was one of the greatest indicators of a totalitarian regime. I agree that the Sandinista policy of press censorship was "misconceived and dangerous,"23 but I wish to point out that liberal democratic institutions do not guarantee complete freedom of speech and expression either. Central to any notion of a "free" press is the relationship between power and

22 Ibid., 363.
knowledge, and past research has shown that the American press is somewhat involved in the "struggle to control and contribute to the social circulation and uses of meanings, knowledges, pleasures, and values."\textsuperscript{24}

Another article that focuses on a similar topic is Sandra Dickson's article in \textit{Journalism Quarterly}. She examined the relationship between the American press and the U.S. government.\textsuperscript{25} Her content analysis of reports published in the \textit{New York Times} and \textit{Washington Post} from 1983 to 1987 showed that journalists supported and justified government policy toward the Sandinistas. She concluded that over fifty-percent of the reports in both newspapers were based on information gathered from government officials who were either directly or indirectly involved policymaking. In other words, the Reagan Administration's views dominated press coverage of Nicaraguan politics during the 1980s.

Similarly, Jack Spence's article entitled "The U.S. Media: Covering (Over) Nicaragua" suggested that the press focused primarily on issues concerning Sandinista civil rights abuses, U.S. military aid to the Contras (Ronald

Reagan referred to them as Nicaragua's "freedom fighters),
and Sandinista support for the guerrillas in El Salvador. 26
Spence's principal argument was that the press replicated
the Reagan Administration's biases by "covering over" or
distorting the internal and external dynamics of Nicaraguan
politics. Journalists neither questioned the objectives of
U.S. foreign policy in Central America nor did they analyze
the CIA's involvement with the Contras. Discussions about
Contra aid revolved around issues of Congressional voting,
which was a domestic issue.

Unlike Jack Spence, I would certainly hesitate to
suggest that American journalists were not skeptical or
critical of U.S. foreign policy, but journalists' heavy
reliance on U.S. State Department officials for information
definitely put them in a weak position to understand and
evaluate the views/ideology of the Sandinistas or
understand the relationship between the Reagan
Administration's human rights rhetoric and the preservation
of U.S. economic interests in Central America.

in Reagan Versus the Sandinistas: The Undeclared War on Nicaragua, ed.

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5.3 Framing the Sandinistas and Miskitus

Having reviewed U.S. press coverage of foreign affairs, especially the Nicaraguan Revolution, in very broad terms, I now turn to look more carefully at headlines and news reports in the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* about the Sandinistas and Miskitus. Press coverage of Nicaragua during the 1980s focused on the following topics: (1) the nature of the political system under the Sandinistas; (2) Nicaragua's relations with Cuba and the former Soviet Union; (3) the Reagan Administration's support for the Contras; (4) the revolutionary government's policies toward indigenous peoples of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua. However, my analysis of U.S. press coverage of the Nicaraguan Revolution is limited to the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict. I wish to clarify that my main goal in this section is to show how journalists framed events and issues concerning the revolutionaries and Miskitus in Nicaragua. The focus, therefore, is more on how journalists described events and less on the events themselves.

In Chapter 2, I outlined some of the general characteristics of U.S. press coverage of the Sandinista-Miskitu Conflict during the 1980s. To clarify some of the
general remarks I made in that chapter, and to show how journalists constructed their stories, this chapter focuses on the topic of news frames. Erving Goffman was one of the first scholars to offer a systematic theory of media frames.\(^2\) In his view, frames are organizational tools that help journalists to process, interpret, and present their data. In addition, frames offer perspective and they suggest meanings. Thus, in contrast to previous studies of media coverage of international politics, my analysis of American press coverage of the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict focuses on media frames and the epistemology of the reporters themselves.

Soon after the revolutionary triumph in July 1979, Nicaragua hit the headlines in North American newspapers. Several articles, editorials, and op-ed articles in the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* focused on the revolutionary government's policies toward ethnic minorities, and many of these stories carried a reference to Miskitus. I examined all the news reports, editorials, op-ed articles, and letters concerning Miskitus published in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* between 19 July

1979 and 30 January 1990. Table 5.1 lists the frequencies of news reports and articles concerning Nicaragua and the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict by years and newspapers. The data in this table is based on information I gathered from the published indexes of the newspapers.

U.S. Press coverage of the Nicaraguan Revolution was very extensive, but I selected these two newspapers for a couple of reasons. First, they have reputations of providing in-depth and thoughtful opinion on world affairs and are read by a large number of educated and influential people living in the United States and in other countries. Second, these two newspapers are the primary sources of information for historians. It is important to point out that although other North American newspapers such as the Miami Herald, Los Angeles Times, and The Nation carried more articles about Nicaragua, most academic and political analyses rely on information published in the New York Times and Washington Post because there is a widespread belief that these newspapers "set a standard for the entire

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journalistic community, a major component of the nation's
democratic system."^{29}

The overall content of Miskitu coverage in the New
York Times and Washington Post was partly reflected in the
different topics of the articles and news reports. The most
prominent feature of any article is the headline. As my
first step in the analysis of Miskitu coverage, I examined
the headlines of all articles, news reports, and letters to
the editor. I found that a majority of the headlines
portrayed a negative image of the Sandinistas. Typical
examples include the following headlines:

1. Sandinist Rulers Chided on Rights
   New York Based Group Terms Managua's Treatment of
   Miskito Indians Harsh^{30}

2. Report Says Nicaragua Killed Some Indians^{31}

3. U.N. Envoy Says Nicaragua's 'Assault' on Miskitos is
   Massive Rights Violation^{32}

4. The Use and Abuse of the Miskito Indians^{33}

5. Nicaraguan Bishops Assail Resettlement of Indians^{34}

6. Nicaraguan Exiles Wary of Sandinista Invitation to
   Return
   None Has Left Costa Rica After Offer of Safe Conduct^{35}

^{29} Karetsky and Frankel, ed., 104.
^{31} Ibid., 8 June 1984, 5:1.
^{33} Ibid., 28 March 1982, C7a.
^{34} Ibid., 20 February 1982, A19.
^{35} Ibid., 18 December 1983, A27a.
7. Reagan Asserts Sandinistas Use 'Stalin's Tactic'\textsuperscript{36}

8. Nicaragua Indians Begin to Return
Sandinistas Allow Move After Driving Miskitos Out in '81\textsuperscript{37}

9. Sandinista War on Indians\textsuperscript{38}

10. Sandinistas Said to Encircle Group\textsuperscript{39}

This is not a comprehensive list of headlines concerning the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict, but I consider it to be a representative sample. The ideological implications of these headlines were complex. On the one hand, journalists presented a very negative image of the revolutionary government in ways that could generate public outrage and anger against the Sandinistas, and pressure U.S. policymakers to adopt measures against the revolutionary government. In the United States, public opinion is an important issue because public sympathy and anger can be translated into government policy.\textsuperscript{40}

We all know the negative connotations and implications of Stalinist Communism conveyed in liberal democratic discourses, and the use of terms such as "Stalin's Tactic"

\textsuperscript{36} The New York Times, 26 March 1985, 10:3.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 27 July 1985, 1:5.
\textsuperscript{38} Washington Post, 25 April 1982, C7a.
\textsuperscript{40} Gabriel Weimann and Conrad Winn, The Theater of Terror: Mass Media and International Terrorism (New York: Longman, 1994), 144.
in example 7 were, of course, far from innocent and carried a strong message about the danger of Communist activities in Nicaragua. Similarly, the use of terms such as "massive rights violation" (example 3) and "killing of Miskitos" (example 2) evoked images of a racist, totalitarian regime that wanted to "kill" all the indigenous people of Nicaragua. Sections 5.3.1 and 5.4 discuss the implications of such representations in greater detail.

Headlines also implied that Miskitus were innocent victims of Sandinista genocide. By portraying Miskitus as people who fled a civil war in Nicaragua (examples 6, 8, 9 and 10) or became victims of an oppressive regime (examples 3 and 4), journalists suggested that Miskitus never had a chance to participate in revolutionary programs and all Miskitus were united in their opposition against the Sandinistas. In reality, there was both resistance and cooperation. As I pointed out in Chapter 2, MISURASATA split into three factions in 1981. One group under the leadership of Brooklyn Rivera fled to Costa Rica and joined the ARDE in its struggle against the Sandinistas. A second group of Miskitus fled to Honduras under the leadership of Steadman Fagoth and worked closely with the FDN to overthrow the revolutionary government. But, several
Miskitus under the leadership of Hazel Lau remained in Nicaragua and tried to collaborate and work with the revolutionary government. And yet, news reports of the Miskitus were littered with images of war, misery, trauma, and violence. In sum, the expressions and terms used by journalists in their headlines to describe the Sandinistas contributed to the construction of a negative public opinion against the Sandinistas.

The syntactic style of the headlines also reflected journalists' negative biases against the Sandinistas. Miskitus were often mentioned in the headlines (examples 3, 4 and 9), but in passive roles. My point is that most of the headlines were about who the Sandinistas were and what they did to Miskitus. Clearly, such writing declared an intention to use the issue of indigenous rights to condemn the revolutionary struggle in Nicaragua. Expressions in the headlines also defined the topics in the texts. A good case in point is a news report by Michael Getler, a Washington Post staff writer.\footnote{\textit{Washington Post}, 2 March 1982, A4.} The headline, "U.N. Envoy Says Nicaragua's 'Assault' on Miskitos is Massive Rights Violation," topped a report that in its lead accused the Sandinistas of "systematic violence against Indians who
resisted incorporation into the leftist revolution." This allegation was based on U.N. Ambassador Jeane J. Kirkpatrick's testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs.

I think the emphasis on the topic of human rights violations served to conceal revolutionary efforts to combat U.S. intervention in Nicaraguan political, economic, and cultural affairs. Journalists refrained from showing the connection between the Contras and Miskitu resistance to the revolutionary government. In other words, journalists presented the issue of ethnic conflict in Nicaragua from the point of view of the Reagan Administration, and in so doing they denied both Sandinistas and Miskitus agency. Essentially, headlines highlighted two main dimensions of the press accounts about ethnic conflict in Nicaragua: human rights violations in the Río Coco area and the Tasba Pri relocation incident. As indicated earlier, terms and expressions in the headlines often defined the content of the articles.

The following section offers an analysis of the thematic structures of news reports concerning the relocation of the Río Coco Miskitus. It is important to point out that the Tasba Pri incident was highly publicized

\[42\] Ibid.

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by the international media. As suggested in Chapter 2, the Reagan Administration used the incident to discredit the Sandinistas and accused them of "genocide" of indigenous peoples. And as I indicated in Chapter 1, some scholars such as Bernard Nietschmann, who testified against the Sandinistas before the OAS Commission on Human Rights and occasionally contributed articles to the Washington Post, supported the government's accusations. Thus, it is important to examine how the U.S. press framed the Tasba Pri incident because it was analogous to the general nature of press coverage of the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict.

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Press Coverage of the Nicaraguan Revolution and the Sandinista-Miskitu Conflict, 1979-1990

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>New York Times</th>
<th>Washington Post</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Miskitus</td>
<td>Nicaragua</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>5066</td>
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Table 5.1: Table Showing Number of News Reports Concerning Miskitus and Nicaragua Published in the New York Times and Washington Post Between 19 July 1979 and 31 January 1990.
5.3.1 Reporting the Tasba Pri Incident

In January 1982, the revolutionary government relocated thousands of Miskitus from the Río Coco region to government resettlement camps in Tasba Pri. As indicated in Table 5.1, between January 1982 and January 1987, the *New York Times* published 2817 stories about Nicaragua of which 87 stories dealt primarily with Miskitus; During the same period the *Washington Post* published 1821 stories about Nicaragua in general of which 38 stories focused on the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict.

It is remarkable that almost all news reports from this period--of which the Tasba Pri relocation stories are outstanding examples--were confined to discussions about poor living conditions in prisons and resettlement camps, physical torture and abuse of Miskitus, and the imposition of Marxist/Communist ideas on the "religious" Miskitus. In other words, human rights violations of indigenous peoples and the Communist threat in Central America were the two rubrics under which the American press retailed the events of the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict on the Atlantic Coast. A good case in point is the *New York Times* editorial, which was published soon after the Tasba Pri incident. The editors claimed that:
What is happening in Nicaragua is a familiar variation of a cruel pattern: an unoffending people with a distinctive culture is being cut up in a larger quarrel.

The Miskitos inhabit land contested by the supposedly civilized, on Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast, and smack in the path of a border war between Nicaraguan leftists and Honduras-based rightists.

The Indians have certainly been abused. All too typically, the Sandinist revolutionaries felt they had to "integrate" them into the dominant culture by teaching them Spanish and Marxism and giving them pills against diseases spread by non-Indians. When the Miskitos resisted--their second language is English, and they are devout Moravians--the rightists took up their cause. Then the Managua regime blundered again, by sealing the region to visitors.

By all means defend the rights of this innocent people. But why stop there? No defense of human rights can be credible if confined to the violations of only hostile regimes.

No offense against human rights is so persistent as the mistreatment of native Americans. They have been butchered and enslaved for centuries; their lands have been stolen, their bodies infected and their cultures trampled. In the United States, of all places, this should be a sensitive issue (Emphasis mine)."}

The Tasba Pri relocation incident was highly publicized by the international media and there were at least two versions of the story. On the one hand, the Sandinistas claimed that they evacuated Miskitu communities in the Río Coco area because of Contra attacks. On the other hand, Miskitu leaders such as Brooklyn Rivera and Armstrong Wiggins accused the Sandinistas of human rights violations.

In the United States, the Reagan Administration used the Tasba Pri incident to accuse the Sandinistas of "genocide" of indigenous peoples. My main criticism of American press coverage of the Tasba Pri incident is that reporters failed to mention that there was more than one version of the story. Instead, journalists presented their interpretation as the most authentic version.

In analyzing and reporting the Tasba Pri incident the American press subscribed to the Reagan Administration's version and used terms such as "integrate" (the concept of "integration" of indigenous peoples has a rather distasteful implication and is explained in detail in chapter 4) and images of cultural genocide ("by teaching them Spanish and Marxism and giving them pills against diseases spread by non-Indians") to describe Sandinista policies toward indigenous peoples. Obviously these images contained a very negative message and completely tarnished the international image of the Sandinistas. In other words, journalists not only described the real events (i.e. the actual relocation of Miskitus from the Río Coco region to government resettlement camps), but also made powerful moral and ideological statements about the Sandinistas in
ways that were consistent with the Reagan Administration's policies toward the revolutionary government.

Part of the reason for this imbalance in reporting stemmed from the fact that many reporters relied very heavily on U.S. State Department officials for information about events in Nicaragua. A good example to support my claim is Jack Anderson's article from the Washington Post:

... From the very beginning of the Sandinistas' successful revolution in 1979, the Miskitos resisted the Marxist-oriented government's threat to their lifestyle. They resented the leftist ideology, and such possibly well-intentioned programs as literacy classes.

Like any insecure revolutionary regime, the Sandinistas viewed the Miskitos' resistance to directives from the central government as evidence of rebellion, or even loyalty to the Somoza forces in exile. The Indians' location—in the northeast corner of Nicaragua near the Honduran border, across which many of Somoza's defeated national guard troops had fled to safety—made them naturally suspect to Sandinista leaders. Occasional outbreaks of violence perhaps fueled by the Somoza exiles, led the Sandinistas to consider the Miskitos a threat to the revolutionary regime. Their suspicions of the Indian tribesmen became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Miskito leaders were imprisoned beginning in early 1981.

Then, last December, the Managua regime apparently decided to get really tough. Claiming that they were putting down "counterrevolutionaries," the Sandinistas moved in.

At least 100, and probably more, Miskitos were killed as the Sandinistas tried to settle the Indian problem for good. "The situation on the east coast is rapidly deteriorating," according to one State Department cable. One source went as far as to say that the Sandinistas "are bent on wiping out the Miskitos.
many of whom have fled to Honduras or Costa Rica to escape reported massacres."

Another source considered reliable by the State Department said that "early in January, bodies began floating downriver" past one Miskito village. "He [the source] also told of a rumor that the FSLN [Sandinistas] had rounded up a group of males, lined them up on a barge on the river, shot them and allowed them to float downriver," the report said. "He could not personally verify the reasons for the deaths, but he personally observed the bodies floating in the river." (Emphasis mine).45

From the above passage it is clear that Anderson believed that the U.S. State Department was the most reliable source of information for events in Nicaragua and in this way he allowed Washington to dominate the debate on a highly controversial issue. In so doing, Anderson recorded the Tasba Pri incident as an event without prehistory. I do not want to challenge the accuracy of the events described in Anderson's article, but I wish to point out that the "Marxist-oriented government" of the Sandinistas neither tried "to settle the Indian problem for good" by killing indigenous peoples nor were the Sandinistas "bent on wiping out the Miskitos."

Contrary to Anderson's views, much of the academic literature on the topic of the Nicaraguan Revolution has shown that the Sandinistas were committed to pluralism

because they tried to empower the working people of Nicaragua by transferring power from the wealthy minority to the poor majority.\textsuperscript{46} The Sandinistas set up grassroots organizations on the Atlantic Coast and other parts of the country as devices for political socialization and gave indigenous peoples and other poor Nicaraguans an opportunity to participate in the country's political process. By setting up grassroots organizations, the revolutionaries addressed the critical relationship between power and democracy. However, their Leninist vanguard-party model of social change, which I criticized in Chapter 3, led the Sandinistas to subsume Miskitu demands and cultural identity within the goals of the revolution. But, this does not mean that we need to view the Sandinista project of social transformation as a racist or totalitarian project that was designed to "wipe out Miskitos" as suggested by Jack Anderson or the Reagan Administration. In fact, the Nicaraguan Constitution of 1987 contains over thirteen articles that recognize and guarantee indigenous peoples the rights of citizenship as the rest of the population. Compared to the constitutions of other Latin American

countries, the Nicaraguan Constitution is very progressive.47

It is remarkable that the press never discussed Sandinista programs and policies in the context of Nicaragua's struggle against U.S. imperialism or referred to the two most striking features of the Sandinista regime: land reform and the establishment of grassroots organizations to promote participatory democracy. In my opinion, the Sandinista project was a collective, perhaps protracted, task that sought to advance participatory democracy. My strongest criticism of Anderson's article is that it fails to satisfy an important condition required by the normal practice of journalism--the condition of contextuality.

5.4. An Epistemological Dilemma

This section focuses on the epistemology of the reporters themselves in an attempt to explain why American journalists viewed Sandinista policies and projects as antidemocratic. My discussion is organized around the

following questions: (1) Why were journalists opposed to the concept of participatory democracy?; (2) Why did reporters rhetorically cast the Sandinistas as "Marxists" or "Communists," who were considered to be evil and antidemocratic in the context of the Cold War?

In the United States, "democracy" is commonly defined as "rule by the people, for the people, and of the people." During the 1980s, when President Ronald Reagan and representatives of the Reagan Administration spoke of democracy in Central America, they implied that capitalist economic growth itself is democratic. Their argument was simple: the centrally-controlled socialist economies of Cuba and the former Soviet Union had failed to satisfy the needs of all their citizens. The explanation for this failure was that the single vanguard party in Cuba and the former Soviet Union was not responsive to the needs of the masses. Moreover, state ownership of property denied opposition groups and the masses access to resources. In other words, Communist regimes were antidemocratic, which automatically meant that the free market was democratic. Liberal democrats also argued that there was nothing undemocratic about a big economic gap between the rich and the poor as long as everybody had equal opportunity and
certain guaranteed legal rights. President Ronald Reagan, George Shultz, and other American politicians often insisted that Nicaragua had to be "contained" and "isolated," from "exporting its revolution." They told the American public that the danger was that Nicaragua, a Soviet ally and military base, would conquer the Hemisphere and take away all the luxuries that Americans enjoyed.

In February 1982, the Reagan Administration authorized covert military action against the Sandinistas, and news of the covert operations was revealed to the New York Times and the Washington Post. Yet, neither the Reagan Administration's aggressive intent nor its efforts to recruit Miskitus against the Sandinistas was discussed in the news reports or articles published in these newspapers. In fact, in March 1982 the New York Times published an article by Lawrence E. Harrison, who developed a strong critique of the ideology of Nicaraguan revolutionaries by arguing that:

The tragedy of the Nicaraguan revolution is that the Sandinistas have come to power with a set of attitudes, shaped both by Nicaraguan history and Latin American leftist myths, that are alienating Nicaragua from the United States and driving it down the Cuban path... The Sandinistas are convinced that 'Yankee

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imperialism' is at the root of the country's problems: that it is we who have created Nicaragua's dictatorships and its oligarchy (even in the 19th century, when our presence was minimal); that half the Nicaraguan people are illiterate because we want it that way (they ignore the fact that one-third of existing Nicaraguan schools were built by American aid and programs).

... The Sandinistas thus belittle Western democracy because they have been taught that it is a smokescreen for exploitative capitalism. They also learned firsthand observation that "democracy" as practiced in the Somoza years was a charade by a greedy and irresponsible family. The discrediting of democracy is the late President Anastasio Somoza Debayle's cruelest legacy to his people (Emphasis mine)." 49

This excerpt clearly indicates that some American journalists borrowed conceptual schemes, not necessarily consciously, from government officials about Central American revolutionaries, indigenous populations, as well as the goals of U.S. foreign policy. Journalists are very much a part of American culture, which values "democracy." Yet, many of them developed a strong critique of the revolutionary government because they believed that the Sandinistas "belittle[d] Western democracy." Harrison's article raises some interesting questions about liberal democracy: Is "democracy" a political method? Did journalists such as Lawrence Harrison favor or privilege liberal democracy over other political projects in their

analysis of the Sandinista government? But, isn't "democracy" a relative term whose meaning is open to interpretation and debate?

Implicit in Harrison's article is the notion that liberal democratic capitalism and political liberalism guarantee freedom for all. I was particularly impressed by his remark that the "tragedy of the Nicaraguan revolution is that the Sandinistas have come to power with a set of attitudes, shaped both by Nicaraguan history and Latin American leftist myths, that are alienating Nicaragua from the United States and driving it down the Cuban path." My response to his remark is that there is ample historical evidence to show that Nicaragua's post-independence history has been characterized by U.S. economic, political, and military intervention. "Yankee imperialism" is not a "leftist myth."

I would certainly agree that several Sandinista policies were fundamentally flawed, at least in the first few years of the revolution, and failed to construct an egalitarian society. But, this does not mean that analyses of the revolution in Nicaragua or the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict should be limited to discussions and debates concerning an institutional arrangement that legitimizes
political leadership. In my opinion, the concept of
democracy in Nicaragua should be defined in terms of
popular empowerment, not as a method of choosing political
leaders who do not represent the masses. Political
pluralism is important but democratization must also take
place at the grassroots level in order to transform and
reorganize Nicaragua's oppressive institutions that shape
people's lives and identities.  

Radical democratic theorists such as Atilio Boron and
Amrapal Dhaliwal have already shown that democratization at
the institutional level does not necessarily guarantee an
even distribution of power in civil society, particularly
with regard to subaltern groups such as women, workers, and
ethnic minorities. In addition, radical democratic
theorists have problematized discourses of subaltern
representation, rights, and voting. The problematization of
voting is not an argument to abstain from voting. Voting is
a highly meaningful act, but it must be carefully assessed
because liberal democratic discourses tend to conceive
voting as one's "political voice." Questions of voice and
the "speaking subject" suggest that in the postcolonial,

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50 Richard Flacks, "Reviving Democratic Activism: Thoughts About
Strategy in a Dark Time," in Radical Democracy: Identity, Citizenship,
postmodern, postfeminist world subaltern groups may be able to vote, but this does not guarantee their representation. In other words, democracy is not realized by efforts to replace one political system with another. Because if it did, what would explain the re-emergence of armed conflict on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua under neoliberal regimes that hold periodic elections?

Other topics of criticism in the American press included the closure of La Prensa, the opposition paper, and the revolutionary government's relations with the Catholic Church. In October 1985, a New York Times editorial entitled "Nicaragua Bares the Nightstick" condemned press censorship in Nicaragua and the Sandinista government's attitude toward the Catholic Church by stating:

Nicaragua's Sandinista regime has now suspended by decree the new freedoms it had grudgingly accorded its domestic opponents. There is no reason to swallow President Ortega's claim that the crackdown is the fault of "the brutal aggression by North America and its internal allies." A more likely explanation is an eruption of discontent over a crumbling economy and military conscription. But until now, despite the war with the U.S.-backed "contra" rebels based in Honduras.

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and Costa Rica, the Sandinistas needed no new powers to crush or cow political and religious dissent.

So why did the new Nicaragua abandon even the pretense that it tolerates pluralism? The junta's decree makes it explicit its power to detain without cause, to stifle the press, to control all movement of peoples, to disband labor unions, to ban political rallies and open mail. The posting of these familiar rules of tyranny appears to be the resolution of an internal debate—a clear victory for Interior Minister Tomás Borge, who has long clamored for "firmer measures," especially against a hostile Roman Catholic Church.

Most likely, Mr. Borge is finally getting his nightstick because the junta no longer sees any benefit in placating dovish Americans and European Socialists. The Sandinistas never intended to share power. When the U.S. Congress reversed itself and voted to support President Reagan's aid to anti-leftist rebels, they must have decided they had nothing more to lose by revealing their true political colors. And what may have tipped the balance was fear that dissent was spreading from the church and middle classes to trade unions and the peasantry (Emphasis mine).\(^{52}\)

It is interesting to note how journalists framed the conflict between the revolutionary government and the Catholic Church. The New York Times presented it as a simple struggle between Marxist-Leninists who did not believe in the power of God and devout Christians. Once again, journalists failed to contextualize the conflict and mention that relations between the Catholic Church and the revolutionary government soured only after the Catholic Church tried to prevent alliances between religious

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grassroots organizations and revolutionary political activity. Conservative Catholics including Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo feared that mass mobilization at the grassroots level by the Sandinistas would eventually threaten the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. During the Contra war, Cardinal Obando y Bravo worked closely with the right-wing opposition against the Sandinistas and the Catholic radio station broadcast messages that discredited the revolutionary government's policies and programs. In other words, the conflict between the Catholic Church and the revolutionary government was a political issue rather than a religious conflict as presented in the New York Times editorial. The Sandinistas did not "adopt firmer measures" against Catholic priests and bishops on purely religious grounds.

Regrettably, the New York Times never presented or explained the conflict between the Sandinistas and the Catholic Church as a contest between two kinds of politics; instead journalists discussed the issue in an ahistorical fashion by presenting it as a matter of power conflict between "Nicaraguan leftists" and "religious Catholics."

And, as John Spicer Nichols has pointed out, the Sandinistas closed down La Prensa only after it increased its coverage of religious matters and "consistently advocated the position of the Church in the escalating confrontation between the curia and the government."^54

In sum, negative images of the Sandinistas in the American press were consistent with the Reagan Administration's characterization of them as Communist enemies of the United States. This chapter is not a complete analysis of American press coverage of the Nicaraguan Revolution, but an attempt to describe the ways in which journalists used sources to tell the story of the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict. Extensive research is needed to explore the ways in which news media rely on political élites to describe foreign policy cases and explain why press coverage of foreign affairs often remains within narrow institutional bounds.

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CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

The most important thing is to not stop questioning.

Albert Einstein

The Cold War has ended, the Sandinistas are no longer in power, Nicaragua is making its "transition to democracy," and much has already been written about the adverse impact of centrally planned economies and the subordination of civilians to a single vanguard party.¹ So, what is the relevance now, at the end of the twentieth century, of a dissertation about the Nicaraguan Revolution and Miskitu resistance? In conclusion, I would like to draw together some of my arguments and explain the significance of my research topic.

¹ The argument is that self-sufficiency in countries such as Cuba and China is not necessarily synonymous with democratic control of the economy because Communist party élites exercise power comparable to that of the business élites of capitalist societies. See Darrow Schecter, Radical Theories: Paths Beyond Marxism and Social Democracy (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 1175-188.
From 1979 to 1990, the history of Nicaragua was profoundly shaped by revolutionary interests and much of the literature produced in Nicaragua and the United States during that time focused on the political, ideological, and cultural parameters of the revolutionary struggle and Miskitu resistance. However, most researchers in the past juxtaposed the demands of a revolutionary state and a Miskitu "nation" as mutually exclusive/irreconcilable discourses. My critique of such studies suggests the need to re-examine the Sandinista concept of participatory democracy in Nicaragua. The work of the South Asian and Latin American Subaltern Studies Groups is extremely useful to understand the ideological limitations of Sandinismo as well as the construction of Miskitu collective identity. I also think a re-evaluation of Sandinismo and Miskitu resistance is important to understand the issues related to regional autonomy and the role of Amerindians in the process of globalization.

I wish to reiterate that the purpose of my dissertation is not to produce a new "theory" which presumes to explain the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict. Rather, I have tried to highlight the limitations the ideology of revolutionary nationalism in Nicaragua and
explain the role of the revolutionary state in the construction of Miskitu collective identity by discussing the following questions: (1) Why did everything positive from the Sandinista standpoint look absolutely negative from the perspective of Miskitus?; (2) Are nationalism and ethnicity constructed reciprocally?; (3) Why was the revolutionary government unable to overcome the idea of equating anti-Sandinismo with counterrevolution?; (4) Is it possible to write a historical narrative that does not privilege statist/nationalist discourses in the interpretation of Miskitu resistance in Nicaragua?

5.1 Participatory Democracy or Liberal Democracy?

The Sandinistas defined democracy as "a fundamental restructuring of property and power relations, as well as increased popular participation in the country's political, economic, social, and cultural affairs." The Sandinistas established a number of grassroots organizations, including MISURASATA, to increase the economic and political participation of the masses. However, the 1984 elections marked Nicaragua's formal adoption of liberal democratic
institutions, and the importance of mass organizations declined because the political parties and elections became the central focus of the process of democratization. Several social scientists (Nancy Stein, Susanne Jonas, Terry Lynn Karl) have discussed the limits and achievements of the electoral process and Nicaragua's transition to liberal democracy in Nicaragua by asking the following questions: (1) To what extent did the electoral process signify a real rupture with the structures of power (the military, judiciary, police, and the central bank) of the Somoza dictatorship?; (2) Did the transition represent continuity of the neo-liberal project inaugurated by the Somozas?; (3) Did it, then, maintain the latent danger of political and social instability?^2

Scholars such as Thomas W. Walker have suggested that Nicaragua will continue along the path of democratization rather than reverting to authoritarian rule. However, his argument is based on three assumptions. First, the traditional alliance among agrarian oligarchs and the military has weakened, and at the same time, the strength of the popular forces has increased to an extent that they

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can influence political decisions. Second, the arena of social struggle has shifted from the military to political terrain, where competitive elections have paved the way for peaceful negotiations. Third, the United States has changed its traditional stance in favor of authoritarian regimes; the U.S. government is now promoting an environment conducive for political, social and economic reconstruction.\(^3\)

In response to the above argument and assumptions, some other scholars (Terry Karl, Lucrecia Lozano, Karen Remmer) have argued that Nicaragua, today, is virtually ungovernable. The economic crisis, fragmented political parties, and violent conflicts between government and "recontra" forces, pose a threat to Nicaragua's fragile political balance. The Nicaraguan economy is far from recovery, and U.S. financial assistance has been much less than originally anticipated. However, this view rests on an alternative set of assumptions. First, although the traditional alliance among the military, oligarchs, and the church against the masses has weakened, the net result has been the emergence of a power-seeking "New Right," and a

disarmed and divided popular movement. Second, the "new rules of the political game" still favor the elite coalitions of the past. Finally, the socioeconomic conditions of the "poor" (and by extension, Amerindians on the Atlantic Coast) have worsened under the neo-liberal model for economic development. Under the Sandinista government, the socioeconomic and political interests of the masses, including Amerindians, were represented through grassroots organizations.4

According to William Robinson, the Sandinista government provided health, educational, and medical benefits to its citizens through state-run welfare programs and institutions. However, Nicaragua's neo-liberal structural adjustment programs since the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas have led to massive public sector layoffs, a sharp reduction in social spending, and the elimination of subsidies on basic consumption goods. These measures have led to frequent strikes that both paralyze the country and demonstrate the popular classes' continued willingness and ability to organize resistance. There is

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not much that President Violeta Chamorro could or Arnoldo Aleman can do under neo-Liberalism, which seeks to establish conditions for the total mobility of capital and this means the elimination of state intervention in the economy. Neo-liberal "structural adjustment" programs seek macroeconomic stability for the activity of transnational capital. This economic model is being imposed by the transnational élites who operate through USAID (United States Association for International Development), the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and World Bank. Their goal is to establish neo-Liberal states that have three functions: (1) assure macroeconomic stability (stability in prices and exchange rates) and the juridical conditions for the operation of capital; (2) provide the human and physical infrastructure necessary for capital accumulation; (3) and maintain social order.\

Consequently, many scholars, including William Robinson, do not view the electoral victory of Violeta Chamorro or Arnoldo Aleman as Nicaragua's "transition to democracy." Instead, they argue that Nicaragua now has a polyarchic political system which caters to the demands of

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the transnational élites. However, the twin legacies of a social revolution and a "fractious elite" have made the consolidation of polyarchy highly problematic in Nicaragua. The popular classes "do not allow anti-popular projects to stabilize, and the political élites are unable to reach a consensus in their own affairs, and the economy continues to shrink." According to Robinson, this is the cause of ungovernability in Nicaragua.

5.2 Radical Democracy

In assessing the literature on the Nicaraguan revolution and Miskitu resistance, I am inclined to suggest that political liberalism is an important component of democracy. However, the concept of democracy in Central American countries, especially Nicaragua, should not be limited to its liberal-democratic meaning. Economic exploitation and oppression are deeply rooted social and cultural relations. In this case, democratization also involves the elimination of the structural relations of oppression such as sexism, racism, and homophobia that are often combined with class relations.
The Sandinistas thought that a socialist struggle against U.S. imperialism would empower the working class and create a power-free social space. But Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe have pointed out the limitations of class-centered analyses and struggles by arguing that society is divided along class and non-class lines; classes have fragmented and new identities have emerged in ways that cut across class lines (e.g. new social movements). Although capitalist labor exploitation is linked to all other kinds of oppression, a socialist struggle against imperialism alone is not sufficient to get rid of racism, sexism, and homophobia. In other words, "we are never actually confronted with nothing but capitalism; similarly sexism, racism, and homophobia never appear in isolated form."⁶

In my opinion, the paradox and epistemological limits of classical Marxism were reflected in Sandinismo. The revolution created the opportunity for open discussions of the "ethnic question" (la cuestión etnia-nación) in the context of the process of political, economic, and social transformation of Nicaragua. The Sandinistas thought that the best way to establish an egalitarian society was to

fight U.S. imperialism by setting up grassroots organizations and promoting participatory democracy. I do believe that the Sandinistas were committed to improving the living conditions of the "the oppressed," but my main criticism of Sandinismo is that it did not provide ethnic minorities to empower themselves against oppressive systems of governance. A socialist struggles can only be meaningful to Miskitus and other Amerindian populations when it provides them the tools to fight against injustice. Miskitus resistance to the Sandinista project certainly stressed the need for intellectuals to rethink and transform Leftist projects in Central America.

Of course, there is no standard formula for dealing with ethnic minorities in multiethnic societies. However, I believe that Miskitus and other minority groups should never be asked to pay the price of cultural self-destruction in exchange for inclusion, legitimacy and recognition in "national projects." Socialist projects should make sure that minority groups are granted access to the material resources that they need to preserve their cultural rights. In other words, social and cultural diversity must be preserved as people struggle against imperialism and authoritarianism. Plurality and diversity
are not problems to be overcome; in fact they constitute the necessary conditions for the establishment of democratic institutions. Unless political and economic changes are accompanied by good governance through democratic institutions, Nicaragua will face the risk of ungovernability. In this context, it is important to contest hegemonic political discourses, and herein lies the significance of Subaltern Studies and my project.⁷

People who want to understand democracy should spend less time in the library with Aristotle and more time on the buses and in the subway.

Simeon Strunsky

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