THE MISKITO-SANDINISTA CONFLICT IN NICARAGUA IN THE 1980s

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LA CUESTION MISKITA EN LA REVOLUCION NICARAGUENSE. By Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz. (Mexico City: Editorial Línea, 1986. Pp. 196.)

THE UNKNOWN WAR: THE MISKITO NATION, NICARAGUA, AND THE UNITED STATES. By Bernard Nietschmann. (New York: Freedom House, 1989. Pp. 111. $37.00 cloth, $15.50 paper.)

LA MOSQUITIA, AUTONOMIA REGIONAL: LAMENTO INDIGENA, OCASO DE UNA RAZA QUE SE RESISTE A FALLECER. By Stedman Fagot Müller. (Tegucigalpa, Honduras: n.p., n.d. [1986?]. Pp. 180.)

EL DESAFIO INDIGENA EN NICARAGUA: EL CASO DE LOS MISKITOS. By Jorge Jenkins Molieri. (Managua: Editorial Vanguardia, 1986. Pp. 473.)

NATIONAL REVOLUTION AND INDIGENOUS IDENTITY: THE CONFLICT BETWEEN SANDINISTS AND MISKITO INDIANS ON NICARAGUA'S ATLANTIC COAST. Edited by Klaudine Ohland and Robin Schneider. (Copenhagen: International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 1983. Pp. 302.)

ETHNIC GROUPS AND THE NATION STATE: THE CASE OF THE ATLANTIC COAST IN NICARAGUA. Edited by CIDCA/Development Study Unit. (Stockholm: Department of Social Anthropology, University of Stockholm, 1987. Pp. 193.)

DICCIONARIO ELEMENTAL DEL ULWA. Compiled by CODIUL/UYUTMUBAL (Karawala, Región Autónoma Atlántico Sur), the Centro de Investigación y Documentación de la Costa Atlántica (CIDCA), and the Centro de Ciencia Cognitiva and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (CCS-MIT). (Cambridge, Mass.: CODIUL/UYUTMUBAL, CIDCA, and CCS-MIT, 1989. Pp. 165.)

During the 1980s, the conflicts of Nicaragua's Sandinista government with the Miskito people of the Atlantic Coast attracted international attention. For many Latin Americanists, the Nicaraguan Revolution seemed to provide a ray of hope for the region. It was therefore frustrating and perplexing that a progressive, socialist government could become so embroiled in conflict with a poor, marginalized ethnic minority group—precisely the sort of group the Nicaraguan Revolution should have favored.

The Miskito Coast itself differs greatly from the Pacific region of Nicaragua. Isolated from the Pacific by miles of rain forest, rivers, and savannas, it is an area of difficult access even today. The major means of transportation continues to be by boat.[1] Spanish colonization efforts on the coast were never successful, but English pirates and traders made early contact with indigenous peoples and developed strong ties with them. The Miskito people,[2] by far the largest indigenous group in Nicaragua today, probably originated as a small group of fishing, hunting, and gardening people who prospered through their trading contacts with the British.[3] They spread up and down the coast and up the Río Coco and developed a political system with authority vested in the Miskito kings. The last king was deposed by the government of José Santos Zelaya, which "reincorporated" the coast into Nicaragua in 1894. The indigenous groups of the interior, long dominated by the Miskito, are lumped together today under the generic name of "Sumu" and include speakers of the Ulwa and Twaka languages. Very small groups of Rama and Garífuna speakers are also found in a few coastal communities. The Miskito population intermarried with African slaves and European visitors, who were incorporated racially and from whom useful cultural traits were adopted. By the nineteenth century, English-speaking Black Creoles from the Caribbean had formed a separate population, centered around Bluefields and Corn Island. An interesting flexible ethnic boundary continues to exist between the Creole and Miskito populations. In 1849 Moravian missionaries arrived on the coast. They learned the Miskito language and during the 1880s made many converts in a dramatic series of events called "the Great Awakening." By the 1980s, the Moravian Church had become an important institution in most Miskito communities and had introduced profound changes into the inhabitants' lives.

When the Sandinista revolutionaries arrived on the coast in 1979, they found a local population that considered them "Spaniards" (the traditional enemies of the Miskito). The Costeños were not particularly receptive to the revolutionary programs the Sandinistas had to offer. Within two years, relations went from lukewarm to bitter. In November 1979, the

1. A rich literature of travel and exploration on the Miskito Coast gives many insights into the region and its peoples. Three of the best examples, spanning the seventeenth century to the present, are M. W., "The Mosqueto Indian and His Golden River," in *A Collection of Voyages and Travels,* edited by Awnsham Churchill, 6:285–98 (London: J. Walthoe, 1732); C. Napier Bell, *Tangweera: Life and Adventures among Gentle Savages* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989 [first pub. 1899]); and Bernard Nietschmann, *Caribbean Edge: The Coming of Modern Times to Isolated People and Wildlife* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Bobbs-Merrill, 1979).

2. Nicaraguan sources currently use the spelling "Miskitu," reflecting a recent linguistic conclusion that the Miskito language does not really have the vowel "o." I continue to use the spelling "Miskito" here simply because it is well established in the older literature.

3. Mary W. Helms, *Asang: Adaptations to Culture Contact in a Miskito Community* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1971), 14–22.

Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) recognized an earlier Miskito organization named ALPROMISU (Alianza para el Progreso de los Miskito y Sumu), which was promptly reorganized as MISURASATA (Miskito, Sumu, Rama, Sandinista Asla Takanka).[4] MISURASATA carried out the government-sponsored literacy campaign in the Miskito language and quickly became a strong political presence in the Miskito communities. Faced with counterrevolutionary activities being financed by the United States, the Sandinista government became increasingly suspicious of the "separatist" attitudes of the Costeños, and a series of confrontations occurred. In late 1981, armed conflict began between the Sandinista military and MISURASATA, which soon splintered into rival factions. The FSLN forcibly relocated forty-two Miskito villages along the Río Coco to an interior area, one ironically called Tasba Pri ("Free Land"). Fighting, punctuated by periods of negotiation, continued throughout most of the 1980s. Sandinista troops were quartered in some communities, where hostile local villagers viewed them as an army of occupation. The armed conflict yielded a tragic toll of death and suffering that involved human rights abuses on both sides.[5] Destroying vehicles, bridges, and health clinics was a major part of insurgent strategy. In 1984 the government introduced a plan for regional autonomy, which took effect in 1987, after a period of review and consultation with Costeños. Among its provisions were a plan for self-governance and guarantees of land rights and cultural autonomy. Unfortunately, many of the health, education, and other social programs originally implemented by the government had suffered setbacks during the war years. In the 1990 elections, the candidates of YATAMA, a successor organization to MISURASATA, won important government posts. But the economic situation continues to be extremely difficult.

The seven books under review are all products of the conflict years on the Miskito Coast. Numerous articles and newspaper accounts have also appeared on the subject.[6] For the first time in their history, the Miskito

4. Anthropologist Richard N. Adams was present at the organizational meeting of MISURASATA and describes the situation in two articles: "The Sandinistas and the Indians: The 'Problema' of the Indians in Nicaragua," *Caribbean Review* 10, no. 1 (1981):22–25, 55–56; and "The Dynamics of Societal Diversity: Notes from Nicaragua for a Sociology of Survival," *American Ethnologist* 8, no. 1 (1981):1–20.

5. See "The Miskitos in Nicaragua, 1981–1984," *Americas Watch Report* (New York: Americas Watch, 1984).

6. One carefully researched account is *Peace and Autonomy on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua: A Report of the LASA Task Force on Human Rights and Academic Freedom,* by Martin Diskin, Thomas Bossert, Salomón Nahmad S., and Stéfano Varese (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Latin American Studies Association, 1986). A good journalistic account is Penny Lernoux, "Nicaragua's Miskitos, Part I: Strangers in a Familiar Land," *The Nation* , 14 Sept. 1985, pp. 202–6; and "Part II: The Indians and the Comandantes," *The Nation* , 28 Sept. 1985, pp. 275–78. For the Sandinista perspective, see *Trabil Nani: Historical Background and Current Situation on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua* (Managua: Center for Research and Documentation of the Atlantic Coast [CIDCA], n.d.). My early predictions of imminent conflict, based on my fieldwork

became known to the broader world. Even U.S. President Ronald Reagan was quoted as saying, "I am a Laotian, a Cambodian, a Cuban, and a Miskito Indian in Nicaragua."[7] Several of the books to be discussed review the history of the coast and the events leading up to the conflict, but from quite different perspectives. As might be expected, they reveal a great deal about the ideological viewpoints of their authors. Scholarship cannot and probably should not try to be completely objective or neutral, and when it grows directly out of conflict, it may become especially passionate and one-sided, as are several of these books. They raise a number of important issues, including class solidarity versus cultural identity, ethnic chauvinism versus aboriginal rights, and national sovereignty versus local self-determination.

At first reading, the most polar positions in the debate seem to be those taken by Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz and Bernard Nietschmann. Dunbar Ortiz's book is a Spanish translation of an earlier, more general book.[8] *La cuestión miskita en la Revolución Nicaragüense* deals only with the Miskito case and adds some new material. In both her books, Dunbar Ortiz sets forth two causes: self-determination for Native American peoples (she is of Cheyenne background herself) and a socialist system to right the wrongs of exploitative capitalism. These two causes collided on the Miskito Coast in the 1980s, in the paradoxical situation in which the Indians were fighting against a socialist government and Indian leaders were denouncing human rights abuses by that government. Dunbar Ortiz's response to this dilemma is to deny that any abuses really took place and to blame the problems on the disinformation campaign orchestrated by the Reagan administration in the United States and also on efforts by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to encourage rebellion in Nicaragua's most vulnerable region.

U.S. support for counterrevolutionary actions undoubtedly was a major factor in the armed conflicts on the coast. The military response of the FSLN to Costeño "separatism" had much to do with the real threat posed by Contra and U.S. military forces and the emergency situation created by the U.S.-backed insurgency. These factors created the larger context in which the conflicts took place. Without the weapons supplied by the United States, the rebellious Miskito groups would have been powerless. For the Miskito, however, the struggle for self-determination was

in 1978–79, turned out to be unfortunately accurate. See Dennis, "The Costeños and the Revolution in Nicaragua," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 23, no. 3 (1981):271–96.

7. Cited in Martin Diskin, "The Manipulation of Indigenous Struggles," in *Reagan versus the Sandinistas: The Undeclared War on Nicaragua*, edited by Thomas W. Walker (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1987), 80. Diskin's essay summarizes the ways in which the Reagan administration used the Miskito case as anti-Sandinista propaganda.

8. *Indians of the Americas: Human Rights and Self-Determination* (London: Zed, 1984).

their own, and it was natural to look for allies among their longtime U.S. friends. By the mid-1980s, it had become apparent to the Miskito that they had been manipulated by the CIA and forces of the Frente Democrático Nicaragüense (FDN), who cared nothing about Miskito goals like land rights, cultural autonomy, and local control over natural resources. Along with the autonomy plan, however, there seemed to evolve a grudging willingness to work cooperatively with the Nicaraguan government toward Costeño goals.

Dunbar Ortiz emphasizes the good intentions and the open-minded policies of the Sandinista government toward the Miskito. In 1981, after serious problems had developed, the government issued its "Declaración de Principios" regarding the Miskito Coast communities (pp. 133–35). These principles included the promise of communal land titles to traditional village lands, programs supporting traditional cultures and languages, and respect for the different forms of social organization found in Indian communities. At the same time, principles important to the FSLN were restated. Economic development must benefit all the people, and although the Costeño population was entitled to a share of the benefits from rational use of their natural resources, the ultimate title to the natural resources belonged to the national government. Most important, the declaration emphasized that the national territory was united and not to be divided—territorial integrity must be absolute. Issued at the beginning of the conflicts, the policy statement was intended to reassure the Miskito and other Costeños, and as an abstract statement it was indeed fair and broad-minded. Although it did not reflect an understanding of social reality as experienced by many Miskito, it did assert their right to fair treatment and warned against any threats to national sovereignty. Unfortunately, however, the declaration did not prevent the armed conflict that followed.

In emphasizing the Sandinistas' positive efforts on the Miskito Coast, Dunbar Ortiz denies all allegations against them. Indeed, in a preface to the book, Amilcar Turcios notes that a more critical stance toward government policy would have been helpful. Dunbar Ortiz's vehement partisan position certainly detracts from the credibility of *La cuestión miskita*. For example, her defense of the forced relocation of the Río Coco communities "for their own safety" rings false. The villages were burned, the animals were killed, and villagers' homes were destroyed by FSLN soldiers to prevent their use by enemy forces. The Río Coco Miskito were not allowed to return until 1985. In this context, Dunbar Ortiz's legalistic arguments about whether the relocation violated provisions of international law seem beside the point (pp. 108–14). Clearly, the relocation was a strategic military move to counter a spearhead drive into Nicaragua by Contra forces. Most local Miskito sympathized with the anti-Sandinista forces, and relocating them was a way of eliminating a support group among

whom the Contra guerrillas moved "like fish in water." To defend forcibly moving people against their will and destroying their homes "for their own good" is hardly credible, although it may make sense in military terms. To the Sandinistas' credit, much effort was expended to make the relocation camps at Tasba Pri as livable as possible by means of schools, health centers, and agricultural projects. More important, when the experiment failed, the government assisted people in moving back to the Río Coco and reestablishing themselves along their Wangki River.

Dunbar Ortiz worked closely with the Sandinista government in developing policy on the Miskito Coast, and her intentions in defending the Miskito and other indigenous groups are laudable. But her ideological position is so rigid that all contradictory information has to be reinterpreted to make it fit. For example, the traditional Miskito hatred of "Spaniards" is presented as a case of teachings absorbed from Anglo missionaries, mostly in the twentieth century (p. 26). In fact, it harks back hundreds of years to positive experiences with Anglo contacts and negative ones with Spanish contacts, a fact on which many visitors to the Miskito have commented. Dunbar Ortiz states that it is a well-known fact that practically all the Miskito kings after Jeremy I in 1687 were Creole, were named by the British, and lived in Bluefields, south of the Miskito region (p. 140). Michael Olien's careful ethnohistorical research has shown that in fact the kingship stayed within the same family line for more than two hundred years, and that although the British legitimized the kings' succession, in no case was a king actually chosen by the British.[9] The kings ruled from Cape Gracias a Dios, Sandy Bay, and Pearl Lagoon until the 1840s, when the king's residence was moved to Bluefields. Although *La cuestión miskita* is more carefully researched than its predecessor, the account still takes many liberties with facts. It represents not the position of the Sandinista government itself but that of a committed supporter of the government who is unwilling to perceive any fundamental shortcomings in it.

Another book with an angry, partisan tone is Bernard Nietschmann's *The Unknown War: The Miskito Nation, Nicaragua, and the United States.* A cultural geographer who has done extensive fieldwork on the Miskito Coast, Nietschmann wrote a monograph on the coastal community of Tasbapauni that has become a classic.[10] In recent years, he has become a leading spokesperson for the Fourth World movement, which posits that indigenous groups around the world constitute original owners of the world's resources and as such have aboriginal rights that they are desperately defending against the encroachment of nation-states.[11] These

9. Michael D. Olien, "The Miskito Kings and the Line of Succession," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 39, no. 2 (1983):198–241.

10. Bernard Nietschmann, *Between Land and Water: The Subsistence Ecology of the Miskito Indians, Eastern Nicaragua* (New York: Seminar, 1973).

11. See "The Third World War," *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 11, no. 3 (1987):1–16.

peoples have a common territory—their homeland—as well as a common language and a sense of identity as a people. Today, hundreds of such groups are engaged in active warfare against Third World nations that are trying to annihilate them, absorb them, or at least take away their lands and deny their existence as peoples. According to Nietschmann, such wars are fought without regard for Geneva Convention rules, have caused millions of casualties, and have uprooted millions more as refugees. The Miskito people of Nicaragua constitute Nietschmann's foremost example.

Nietschmann writes well, and he begins his book by making a striking claim about Miskito land rights: "There is a country east of the mountains and west of the islands. This country is located between Nicaragua and Cuba. . . . Its territory is bigger than Belize but smaller than Costa Rica and contains more lumber trees and grazing lands than either" (p. 1). This country is the Miskito homeland, the *yapti tasba*, for which he provides a map. Nietschmann explains that the Miskito cannot be considered an "ethnic group" because ethnic groups live in other peoples' territories, and the Miskito are right at home on their own land. Nietschmann's radical pro-Miskito position seems to parallel Dunbar Ortiz's position on Indian rights. Both scholars have a personal involvement with Indian peoples and write argumentatively in favor of Indian self-determination. They differ radically, however, on the issue of the Sandinista government. Dunbar Ortiz identifies with socialist revolutionary schemes to change the social-class position of Indians and other exploited groups, whereas Nietschmann sees all nation-states of whatever ideology as oppressing indigenous peoples. For Dunbar Ortiz, the Sandinista government could do no wrong, whereas for Nietschmann it was an evil, oppressive system against which the only Miskito recourse was armed resistance. He states that without military pressure from the armed Miskito groups, the Sandinistas would never have negotiated concessions on basic rights (p. 87). Like Dunbar Ortiz, Nietschmann participated actively in events of the 1980s. He served as an advisor to the Miskito resistance groups, traveled inside Nicaragua with them in dangerous situations, and accompanied them to negotiating sessions outside Nicaragua. He knows the coast well, speaks Miskito, and identifies with the Miskito cause. His commitment to indigenous causes and his willingness to risk his life on their behalf thus made him a controversial figure, a hero to many Miskito and an avowed enemy of the Sandinistas.

The Unknown War departs from the careful, detailed scholarship of Nietschmann's earlier work. His defense of indigenous self-determination is eloquent, but the book's right-wing tone is jarring. Nietschmann states that indigenous nations around the world are firebreaks against the spread of communism (p. 52), an argument that sounds curiously anachronistic after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. He also comments that "from the mid-1600s to late 1800s, free trade and commerce propelled the

Miskito nation economically into being the most prosperous region in Central America" (p. 19). Free trade and commerce hardly seem to be an accurate description of the Miskito role as intermediaries between British traders and interior Native American groups, which included an extensive slaving operation by the Miskito.[12] Like Dunbar Ortiz, Nietschmann appears to take liberties with facts and language in order to press his position. Thus although the two writers share a common interest in self-determination for the Miskito people, their different political allegiances obscure the common ground they share.

In *La Mosquitia: autonomía regional,* Stedman Fagot Müller provides the point of view of one Miskito leader. Although poorly organized and repetitive, the book is interesting nonetheless. Fagot was a leader of MISURASATA, the indigenous self-determination organization formed in the early days of the Sandinista government. He was later imprisoned by the Sandinistas under accusations that he had served as an informer for the Somoza secret police during his college years in Managua. When freed, he fled to Honduras, where he led the Miskito military struggle against the Sandinista armed forces for some time, until factionalism in the movement brought Brooklyn Rivera to prominence as a rival leader. Fagot's armed group called themselves MISURA and operated in the northern region of the coast, while Rivera's faction continued to be called MISURASATA and was based in the south.

La Mosquitia: autonomía regional starts with an intriguing personal sketch of Miskito culture, including descriptions of the famous shamans (the *sukia*) and Miskito Moravian Christianity. Fagot's own religious convictions are evident from the importance he ascribes to shamans and his insistence that they are compatible with Christianity. In fact, religious fundamentalism was one motivating force for counterrevolution on the coast, and its usefulness in this regard is familiar from other world areas, particularly Afghanistan. Fagot goes on to discuss communist theory, which he sees as opposing ethnic diversity and requiring a strongly centralized state in which party leaders will always dominate. He describes the Miskito people as fighting valiantly and successfully to defend their lands, and he characterizes the armed conflicts of the 1980s as a fight to the death with the Sandinistas. Like Nietschmann, Fagot views all Sandinista leaders as untrustworthy, and he dismisses the Sandinista-promoted autonomy project of the mid-1980s as a tactical move to create an administrative unit that would be easier to control from the center. He concludes his book by describing what real autonomy would mean to the Miskito, emphasizing that the natural resources belong to the Costeños and their benefits should remain there.

12. Mary W. Helms, "Miskito Slaving and Culture Contact: Ethnicity and Opportunity in an Expanding Population," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 39, no. 2 (1983):179–97.

Fagot raises a number of difficult questions about regional autonomy to which no one knows the answers as yet. How much autonomy can be given and still maintain a single, sovereign country? Who will run basic public services? How will government be financed? If both sides maintain military forces, how can conflict be prevented? How economically viable can a regional government be, as compared with a larger unit? The founders of the U.S. system of government wrestled with these issues, which have vexed modern countries like the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Canada. According to Fagot, all the functions of government except those that cross the boundaries of the region should be dealt with from the coast, which would have its own autonomous governing council. Curiously enough, these points correspond reasonably well with the Sandinista autonomy project itself.

Coast observers will note that while Fagot mentions being accused of serving as an informer for Somoza's secret police, he neither confirms nor denies the charge. To the Sandinistas, the secret police file recovered from the Somoza government, which identified Fagot as an informer, was the most serious evidence of treachery imaginable. In the 1980s, Fagot's Miskito fighting force began to work closely with the FDN, the former Somoza National Guardsmen Contras, and he also faced accusations of receiving funds from the CIA and being involved in violence against some of his own people (Dunbar Ortiz, pp. 161–64, 171). Clearly, Fagot's credibility as a leader had slipped by the mid-1980s, and it is unfortunate that the viewpoints of other Miskito leaders are not as readily available.

Another scholar who worked closely with the Sandinista program on the coast is Jorge Jenkins Molieri. His book, *El desafío indígena en Nicaragua: el caso de los Miskitos*, provides an articulate Sandinista perspective on the whole period. In the prologue, renowned Mexican anthropologist Rodolfo Stavenhagen sets forth the problem to be investigated: how to reconcile the just demands of an indigenous nation for self-determination with a popular, revolutionary movement seeking national unity via programs promoting social justice.

Jenkins Molieri, who has carried out ethnographic research among Sumu people, knows a great deal about the coast and sets the Miskito story in detailed historical context. Because of the importance ascribed to Augusto César Sandino by modern revolutionaries, Jenkins Molieri is intent on demonstrating a positive role for the great nationalist hero on the Atlantic Coast in the 1920s and 1930s. He describes Sandino's soldiers founding a cooperative on the Río Coco and Sandino's vows to liberate the Costeños from the foreign companies. Like the later Sandinistas, however, Sandino himself believed the Miskito Coast to be backward and abandoned, never having enjoyed the benefits of integration into the Nicaraguan nation. One might point out that although the coast was certainly abandoned in terms of lack of social services, it also enjoyed a sort of

autonomy that allowed Miskito culture to develop and prosper. Jenkins Molieri claims that Sandino had strong military support from the indigenous peoples, a conclusion not widely shared. For instance, David Brooks's recent study describes a U.S. Marine officer, Captain "Red Mike" Edson, who had considerable success organizing the Miskito of the Río Coco against the Sandinistas.[13] Captain Edson was able to establish friendly relations with local Miskito and Sumu by taking advantage of the traditional hostility toward "Spaniards" and the fear of Sandino's "bandits."

Jenkins Molieri provides detailed information on the foreign companies that have operated along the coast, describing their rapacious exploitation of the environment. The NIPCO lumber company, for example, logged off much of the pine savanna north and west of Puerto Cabezas between 1945 and 1963, exporting some 335 million board feet of lumber (p. 200). Other lumber companies were also operating during the same period. In the gold mines at Siuna and Bonanza, the (principally Miskito) mineworkers suffered serious illnesses such as silicosis and tuberculosis, health problems whose very existence was denied by the companies. Despite callous exploitation by the foreign companies, Jenkins Molieri notes, many Miskito workers viewed their jobs as favors granted by generous employers. In Jenkins Molieri's terms, a contradiction existed between the level of exploitation suffered by the Miskito and their level of consciousness of that exploitation (p. 238). How else can one account for the fact that most Miskito still remember the company period as a golden age, with steady work and a steady supply of consumer goods? As various observers have noted, the Miskito used wage labor as a source of cash to buy useful manufactured goods and returned regularly to their real homes in their local communities, where subsistence agriculture and fishing continued and a large circle of kin welcomed them when they came home with money in their pockets.

Jenkins Molieri points out that for the FSLN, the Miskito Coast had to be viewed within a global perspective of oppression of working-class people and campesinos and their just struggle for liberation. The indigenous people were believed to fit well within this paradigm, given their exploitation by foreign companies. Like Dunbar Ortiz, Jenkins Molieri emphasizes that from the beginning the FSLN recognized that the ethnic peoples of the Atlantic Coast had special characteristics and deserved protection of their communal lands, their cultures, and their languages.

As the conflict loomed in 1981, MISURASATA became more and more powerful and the controversial issue of separatism arose. MISURASATA successfully argued for conducting the national literacy campaign on the coast in Miskito and Creole English and took on the job of

13. David C. Brooks, "U.S. Marines, Miskitos, and the Hunt for Sandino: The Río Coco Patrol in 1928," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 21, pt. 2 (1989):311–42.

making a land survey to determine indigenous land rights. This project was partly financed by Cultural Survival of Cambridge, Massachusetts. The Miskito land claims turned out to involve 38 percent of the national territory, with complete rights over the subsoil and water and coastline. From the Sandinista point of view, it amounted to a plan for regional separatism to be financed by the central government, which would also be expected to provide social services (p. 313). According to Jenkins Molieri, the Miskito argued that they deserved these land rights simply for being indigenous, ignoring the reality of a much larger and equally deserving poor mestizo population in Nicaragua. The definitive break occurred shortly before these demands were to be presented formally to the government. FSLN police arrested all the MISURASATA leaders, including Stedman Fagot, and open conflict erupted.

Jenkins Molieri discusses frankly the errors committed by the Sandinistas in their early years on the coast. They insisted on trying to transplant techniques of mass organization that had worked well on the Pacific Coast, such as the Asociación de Trabajadores del Campo (ATC) and the neighborhood-based Comités de Defensa Sandinista (CDS). The Sandinistas also failed to recognize the importance of the indigenous peoples' demands for respect for their own forms of community organization, basic values, and languages.

Surprisingly, Jenkins Molieri suggests that government officials should have been required to learn Miskito to help them communicate with local peoples and to begin understanding the underlying Miskito culture (p. 323). Earlier, Jenkins Molieri mentions MISURASATA leaders making inflammatory speeches in Miskito to local communities in front of government authorities, thus using Miskito as a code language for subversive purposes (p. 274). One may note that a common trait shared by the successful visitors among the Miskito, including the Moravian missionaries, Captain Edson of the U.S. Marines, and social scientists like Bernard Nietschmann, has been respect for local culture and language. Sharing village life with the Miskito and trying to learn their language add up to taking their way of life seriously, something the Sandinistas did not seem to do. Although the Sandinistas made eloquent statements in the abstract about the value of cultural diversity, they seemed unable to overcome their negative view of everyday Miskito life as ignorant and backward. At one point, Comandante Luis Carrión stated that "the Miskito language is very limited and does not allow for the intellectual and cultural development of people."[14] The Miskito adherence to a conservative form of Protestantism also lowered them in the eyes of the Sandinistas,

14. Luis Carrión, "Our Challenge Is to Integrate without Destroying," in *National Revolution and Indigenous Identity*, edited by Klaudine Ohland and Robin Schneider (Copenhagen: International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 1983), 202.

many of whom viewed religion as a kind of false consciousness used to inculcate passivity and acceptance of an exploitative economic system. Jenkins Molieri argues, however, that although the Sandinistas did not understand the Miskito Coast at first and made many errors, they were sympathetic to local self-determination and willing to be flexible. To most outside observers (excluding Nietschmann and Fagot), the Sandinistas' good will and positive intentions seemed clear.

Given his strong nationalist feelings, Jenkins Molieri consistently views British and U.S. activities on the coast in a negative light, including development activities of the 1960s and 1970s. The fact that the Miskito perceived their own history and culture differently simply represents their failure to recognize their own exploitation. Jenkins Molieri knows a great deal about the coast and his exposition of events leading up to the 1980s is the most detailed available. Unfortunately, he does not cite important English-language sources like C. Napier Bell, Mary Helms, and Michael Olien, which would have added a different perspective. According to Jenkins Molieri's worldview, Nicaraguan nationalism is paramount, and the Miskito must be integrated into the revolutionary nation. He argues, "The ethnic demands are, therefore, revolutionary demands made by Nicaraguan people dissociated by the history of imperialist exploitation from their own and true identity. . . . The rights to ethnic autonomy are revolutionary rights destined to strengthen national sovereignty and national integration. . ." (p. 417, my translation). Yet the Miskito peoples' "true nationality" as Nicaraguans seems highly problematic, given the fact that they were forcibly "reintegrated" into the country only in 1894, when the Nicaraguan army occupied Bluefields and deposed the Miskito king. Since 1960 the Honduran-Nicaraguan border has divided the Miskito territory, and today about one-third of the Miskito live in Honduras, where their "true nationality" is presumably Honduran.

Apart from the polemics generated by the conflict, it is important to take note of scholarly work accomplished in spite of the difficult circumstances. German and Scandinavian social scientists began working on the Miskito Coast soon after the revolution. *National Revolution and Indigenous Identity* is a book of documents published in 1983, containing important statements by MISURASATA and FSLN leaders as well as introductory essays by editors Klaudine Ohland and Robin Schneider.[15] This extremely useful work is the easiest place to locate exactly what the opponents in the conflict were saying publicly, in their own words. The editors' introductory essays clearly indicate their sympathies with the goals of both sides and their hope for reconciliation.

15. A more recent book of documents provides very useful information on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. See *The Nicaraguan Mosquitia in Historical Documents, 1844–1927: The Dynamics of Ethnic and Regional History,* edited by Eleonore von Oertzen and Lioba Rossbach (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1990).

Bruce Barrett's recent research is the first overall description of health and healing on the coast.[16] Barrett conducted an extensive health survey of Bluefields and four rural communities in the Región Autónoma Atlántico Sur (RAAS). He also worked closely with traditional healers in trying to understand traditional concepts of health. Barrett describes the effect of the war on health efforts and gives a moving account of his personal reactions to the violence that claimed the lives of those he knew. Particularly interesting is his detailed description of a *walagallo,* a three-day healing ceremony that he attended in the Garífuna community of Orinoco.

The largest body of work has been generated by the Centro de Investigación y Documentación de la Costa Atlántica (CIDCA), which has been promoting and coordinating social science research on the Miskito Coast since 1981. An agency of the Nicaraguan government, CIDCA's scholarly work during the 1980s took place within a framework of revolutionary assumptions, with an emphasis on providing information helpful for enlightened policy-making in this multi-ethnic region. Much valuable and original work has been done under the auspices of CIDCA. In *Ethnic Groups and the Nation State,* various CIDCA researchers present work bearing on how the revolution was received on the Miskito Coast.

In the first piece, Charles Hale and Edmund Gordon offer population estimates for various coastal groups, based on material collected by the Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censo (INEC). The Miskito population is estimated at 67,000, considerably less than the figure of 151,000 claimed by MISURASATA in 1981. The largest group in the whole eastern region are the mestizos, who are estimated to number 182,000. The majority are poor farm families who have arrived since the 1950s, looking for a better life. Conflict with indigenous communities over land rights has already occurred and seems likely to increase in the future.

In two outstanding essays, Hale discusses inter-ethnic relations on the coast and the Miskito-Sandinista struggle as perceived from the Miskito communities where Hale did fieldwork. The first describes the progressive rise to dominance of the Miskito people in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Creole people in the nineteenth century, and the mestizo people in recent decades. Creoles and local U.S. residents were effectively in charge of the Mosquito Reserve from 1860 to 1894, as Michael Olien has also demonstrated by means of ethnohistorical work.[17]

16. Barrett's dissertation at the University of Wisconsin, "The Syringe and the Rooster Dance: Medical Anthropology in Southeastern Nicaragua" (1991 draft), will soon be published.

17. See three articles by Michael D. Olien: "Micro/Macro-Level Linkages: Regional Political Structures on the Mosquito Coast, 1845-1864," *Ethnohistory* 34, no. 3 (1987):256-87; "Imperialism, Ethnogenesis, and Marginality: Ethnicity and Politics on the Mosquito Coast, 1845-1964," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 16, no. 1 (1988):1-29; and "Were the Miskito Indians

One possibility for improving their social status for some Miskito has been to learn Creole English and adopt a Creole identity. Hale observed this process going on in three communities where he worked and provides an interesting discussion of Creole-Miskito ethnicity.

In the second piece, Hale presents a composite Miskito reaction to the revolution in Sandy Bay Sirpi, a community he knows well. Hale's informants view MISURASATA as spearheading efforts at self-determination, and the treacherous "Spaniards" (Nicaraguan mestizos) as balking when the true extent of Miskito land claims was put forward. While valiant Miskito youth fought the Sandinista Army to a standstill, the army occupied villages and persecuted people: "We want autonomy, but it is difficult to trust the Spanish." These views come from the base, the grassroots communities that the revolution hoped to empower. Hale shows that MISURASATA grew so strong in the early 1980s by using young leaders working diligently in the communities to politicize the people, the same kind of techniques that the FSLN had used effectively with campesinos in the Pacific area of Nicaragua. MISURASATA came to be an active Miskito mass organization in the early 1980s, but one that did not share the FSLN ideology and was in competition with it. As Dunbar Ortiz has indicated, the revolution opened up new possibilities for thinking about social programs and about alternatives to traditional practices (p. 154). An explosion of interest in their own history and land rights apparently took place, with MISURASATA acting as a vanguard institution. Miskito interest in their own language and culture also flowered. In some ways, it was a new and secular kind of Great Awakening. Hale's data about the Sandy Bay Sirpi community are particularly important because they represent the only fieldwork-based view from the community level of what local Miskito people thought about the whole conflict period.[18]

In a 1990 article in the CIDCA journal *Wani*, Hale suggests possible scenarios for the future.[19] One important factor is the Miskito desire for foreign companies to return and provide work once more, accompanied by a general Miskito expectation of paternalistic help from benevolent foreigners. "Anglo-affinity," he believes, is a recurrent pattern in Miskito life. He contrasts this tendency with such attributes as self-reliance, endurance, organizational skills, and ability to compromise, all demonstrated during the war years. He concludes that the ethnic militancy developed during the conflict years can be a progressive force for the future.

Black? Ethnicity, Politics, and Plagiarism in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* (Dordrecht, the Netherlands), nos. 1-2 (1989):27-50.

18. Hale's dissertation will soon be published by Stanford University Press as *Contradictory Consciousness: Miskitu Indians, the Nicaraguan State, and the Struggles for Autonomy, 1880-1987.* It should be a major contribution on the topic.

19. "La conciencia política miskita: hacia un análisis coyuntural," *Wani* (Managua) 8 (1990):80-93.

In a more recent article, Hale describes land rights, a major issue in the struggle, as understood by the inhabitants of Sandy Bay Sirpi.[20] Prior to 1894, local communities probably asserted rights only over the subsistence lands they were cultivating. In 1915, following their forced reincorporation, title deeds to communal village lands were given to villages that solicited them. Remaining lands were to be considered national property. In 1981, however, as part of their general mobilization, MISURASATA asserted rights to the whole Atlantic region, including vast areas not inhabited or cultivated by Miskito people. This claim was immediately rejected by the Sandinistas, the event that triggered the period of armed conflict. Hale discovered through fieldwork, however, that communities like Sandy Bay Sirpi were happy simply to negotiate recognized legal title to their own communal lands. They viewed this possibility as a great step forward, even without the control over the whole Atlantic region advocated by MISURASATA. Hale states that the process of finally achieving peace was due in large part to the steady pressure that hundreds of local Miskito communities applied to their own leaders, as well as to the Sandinistas.

Carlos Vilas's article in CIDCA's *Ethnic Groups and the Nation State* attempts to give a more macro, political science view of the conflict. He reminds readers that the U.S. war of aggression against Nicaragua was the basic framework within which the Miskito-Sandinista conflicts took place, a point emphasized by all the other writers sympathetic to the Sandinista government. Vilas discusses the worldview of Sandinista leaders, who tended to perceive precapitalist economic structures as backward and transitory, to be replaced as soon as possible by socialist-oriented development. Indian patterns of life would inevitably be replaced, they believed, as the population became part of either the proletariat or the bourgeoisie (p. 71). This orthodox Marxist view fostered little sympathy for the indigenous groups' own interpretations of their culture and history. Stereotypes of Costeños as backward and primitive were also common in Hispanic Nicaragua and contributed to ethnocentrism on the part of the FSLN cadres who worked on the Miskito Coast. Vilas is evenhandedly critical. When he turns to MISURASATA, he describes the organization as a self-seeking political group whose strategy was to keep escalating demands on the government, apparently in an attempt to legitimize the organization in the eyes of Costeño supporters and international organizations. According to Vilas, MISURASATA promoted a kind of "ethnic chauvinism" based on a mystification of Miskito history (p. 83). This chauvinism led to an increasing radicalization of demands and involved an intemperate and confrontational political style that inevitably led to conflicts with the Sandinista government.

20. "Wan Tasbaya Dukiara: nociones contenciosas de los derechos sobre la Tierra en la Historia Miskita," *Wani* 12 (1992): 1–19.

In a more detailed analysis published subsequently, Vilas brings out the role of the Moravian Church in the conflicts on the Miskito Coast, an important part of the story.[21] For more than a century, the church had operated the few schools and health programs that existed on the coast. Each village had its own Miskito pastor (or *sasmalkra*) trained in the Bible Institute in Bilwaskarma. The church hierarchy became completely Costeño in the 1960s and 1970s, when the Nicaraguan Moravian Church became autonomous of its U.S. parent organization. Most of the bishops were Creole, but a large corps of Miskito sasmalkra served in the communities, preaching in Miskito and playing prominent roles in village affairs. Ever since 1849, the Moravians had tried to inculcate their own version of morality, which emphasized the virtues of stable family life, regular church attendance, sobriety, and hard work. Vilas points out that although the Moravian Church had begun its own social programs in the 1960s, they did not include the ideas of liberation theology, which was influential in Latin American Catholicism at the time. On the eve of the Nicaraguan Revolution, the Moravian Church remained quite conservative. In reaction to the Cuban Revolution, it preached a staunch version of anti-Communism. The sasmalkra network in the countryside was extremely influential, and as the conflict deepened, many sasmalkra preached against Sandinista policies, and some even participated actively in fighting government forces. By the mid-1980s, however, Moravian Church leaders had joined Catholic and other religious figures in encouraging the peace process and progress toward regional autonomy.

Edmund Gordon's contribution to the CIDCA volume on the Black Creole population of the Miskito Coast is a welcome addition on the topic. Creole people on the coast tend to be relatively prosperous and think of themselves as middle-class.[22] In the late nineteenth century, they occupied key positions in the Mosquito Reserve, and many hoped to regain prominence following the Sandinista Revolution. Gordon points out that the Creoles became unhappy on discovering that new government positions would go to mestizos. Most Creoles tended to be politically conservative, espousing anti-Communist attitudes inculcated by the Moravian Church. They also disliked the confiscation of the property of Somoza collaborators on the coast and the presence of Cuban technicians and teachers. As elsewhere, when the economic situation deteriorated and consumer goods became scarce, the Sandinista government was blamed. Nevertheless,

21. Carlos M. Vilas, *State, Class, and Ethnicity in Nicaragua: Capitalist Modernization and Revolutionary Change on the Atlantic Coast* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1989), 33–36, 86–89, 99, 116, 145.

22. The Black population of Limón province in Costa Rica, to the south, has occupied a similar position. See Philippe Bourgois, "Blacks in Costa Rica: Upward Mobility and Ethnic Discrimination," in *Costa Rica Reader,* edited by Marc Edelman and Joanne Kenen (New York: Grove Weidenfelf, 1989), 161–69.

the Creole people generally opposed armed conflict as a solution to FSLN-Costeño problems. Many young Creole men left the country to avoid the Sandinista draft and the dangerous conditions on the coast in general.

The final piece in the CIDCA volume, by Galio Gurdian, is a brief sketch of the autonomy proposal put forth for the Miskito Coast by the Sandinista government in 1984. The successful proposal recognized the Costeños' right to their cultures, languages, and systems of social organization. Indigenous peoples were also guaranteed rights to their communal lands. An elected regional assembly was proposed that would have considerable power to legislate over all matters not directly affecting the nation as a whole. At the same time, the sovereignty of Nicaragua over the whole national territory was affirmed as absolute. In a commentary on Gurdian's analysis, Andrew Gray points out that the autonomy project seemed to have originated with the Sandinista government and that its earliest version did not represent collaboration with MISURASATA or other grass-roots groups. As Gray points out, genuine autonomy must reflect the will and needs of those it serves, not simply be imposed from above.

Both Gurdian and Vilas strongly attack the "ethnicist" or "ethnic chauvinism" viewpoint of MISURASATA and its affiliations with international organizations such as Cultural Survival and the World Council of Indigenous Peoples. Gurdian asserts that the ethnicist position is based on an almost mystical exaltation of cultural traits (p. 177). Ethnicity is viewed in a romantic and ahistorical way, as if particular traits had existed from time immemorial rather than developing through traceable historical processes, as did Western culture. Furthermore, traditional ethnic traits are proclaimed as morally superior to those of the decadent West. The implication is that ethnic groups should pursue their goals independently of others, thus cutting themselves off from joint struggle with other oppressed and exploited peoples. According to Gurdian, the Miskito ignored the realities of life for other poor Nicaraguans in claiming some kind of supranational right by virtue of being indigenous. In his view, the ethnicist point of view weakens progressive movements and reinforces the position of local oligarchies.

Yet from the Fourth World viewpoint of Nietschmann and some Miskito leaders, the world's indigenous peoples do have supranational rights—aboriginal rights to the lands they have occupied since before Nicaragua came into existence. To deny the aboriginal claims of indigenous peoples is to deny history. According to this perspective, the Sandinistas labeled Miskito defense of their history and land rights as ethnic chauvinism while promoting their own brand of nationalistic chauvinism. Sandinista nationalism in turn glorified the political claims and history of Nicaragua, a national unit to which the Miskito never felt they belonged.

In coming to grips with the dilemma of an indigenous group truculently opposed to their progressive socialist system, Sandinista writers make one kind of argument that has to do with leadership. According to this view, Miskito leaders such as Stedman Fagot were opportunists out for their own benefit. Moreover, various accusations about Fagot's behavior seemed to lend credence to this view. Gurdian, for example, speaks of the justice of the historic demands of indigenous peoples as opposed to the "manipulated, unauthentic or inappropriate demands often made by leaders who only pretended to speak on behalf of their people's real aspirations" (p. 175). This argument also holds that Miskito leadership in the past was inauthentic. For example, Jenkins Molieri describes the Miskito kingship as sadly ridiculous, an institution invented by the British for their own ends (p. 26). According to this argument, through British and later U.S. contacts a social class of local exploiters developed, beginning with the Miskito kings and their associates. They controlled wealth and power while the majority of the population remained subordinate (Dunbar Ortiz, p. 64). This class division in Miskito society allegedly continued into the present, with power wielders in local communities colluding with the Moravian Church to manipulate Miskito opinion against the Sandinista government.

This argument removes the guilt for being unprogressive from "the people" and places it squarely on the backs of a local social class of exploiters and leaders who represent them: the local power structure is to blame. The implication is that the Miskito people as such are not bad but simply misled by unscrupulous leaders. An uncomfortable counter-possibility, however, is that prominent citizens and political leaders really were articulating at least some of the general views of the population and for that reason were admired and respected. Hale's data on Sandy Bay Sirpi seem to show strong support for the Miskito fighters and their leaders. Michael Olien and I have tried to show that historically, the Miskito kings may have enjoyed more legitimacy among their own people than has generally been acknowledged.[23] In the early 1980s, MISURASATA certainly achieved wide legitimacy as an organization fighting successfully for Miskito rights. Its political goal did not seem to correspond with that of the FSLN, however, especially because it was not avowedly anti-imperialistic. As a dangerous and seemingly too-successful sort of mass organization, it was threatening. In general, the Miskito, like other indigenous peoples faced with socialist demands for class solidarity, seem to be interested in the economic benefits they might receive but also intent on defining their own

23. Philip A. Dennis and Michael D. Olien, "Kingship among the Miskito," *American Ethnologist* 11, no. 4 (1984):718–37. See also Mary W. Helms's rebuttal, "Of Kings and Contexts: Ethnohistorical Interpretations of Miskito Political Structure and Function," *American Ethnologist* 13, no. 3 (1986):506–23.

self-interest and deciding whether their own leaders really represent them or not.

CIDCA's output as a research institute has been impressive. In addition to *Ethnic Groups and the Nation State,* CIDCA publishes the journal *Wani,* whose twelfth issue came out in June 1992. The first issue in 1985 contained a number of folktales in Miskito, with Spanish translations. The sixth contained articles on the various Costeño languages: Miskito, Sumu, Rama, and Creole English. The seventh issue presented the texts of three important eighteenth-century documents, with an introduction in both English and Miskito. Other issues have included a variety of articles on such topics as bilingual education, the autonomy project, the elections of 1984 and 1990, and various aspects of Costeño history. Even during the difficult years of the 1980s, *Wani* was never dominated by political reporting but took seriously the job of publishing scholarly research by both Nicaraguans and foreign scholars. It has served as an important vehicle of communication for all those interested in the coast. A unique feature of *Wani* has been its multilingual publication policy, with articles appearing regularly in Spanish, English, and Miskito and occasionally in Sumu.

CIDCA has worked closely with the group called Linguists for Nicaragua, associated with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The *Diccionario Elemental del Ulwa,* produced under the direction of Kenneth Hale from MIT, is one result of this work. Ulwa is one of three Sumu languages currently spoken in Nicaragua, where the total Sumu population is estimated at 4,800. The Miskito and Sumu languages are classified together in the subfamily called Misumalpan and are closely related. Ulwa is spoken in the community of Karawala, whose inhabitants had solicited work on their language from CIDCA as part of the autonomy project. No linguistic study of the Sumu languages had ever been accomplished before the 1980s. The dictionary represents a preliminary effort in an interesting format: it contains not only the major Ulwa-Spanish section but also smaller sections on Spanish-Ulwa, Miskito-Ulwa, and English-Ulwa. Ken Hale also directed Danilo Salamanca's 1988 dissertation at MIT, "Elementos de gramática del miskito," the first complete modern linguistic study of the Miskito language. This work is to be published in the near future, along with a more complete Miskito-Spanish dictionary. Salamanca's larger interest in the language, as expressed in the first chapter of his grammar, is to help native speakers of the language create the conditions for its survival and development. His informants hope that texts can be published for use in schools, thereby helping the language to become a more respected general means of communication rather than being limited to specific contexts.

In other parts of Latin America, Native Americans are using easily transcribed written versions of their languages to produce texts of differ-

ent kinds. With the help of computers, biography, history, fiction, and many other genres of written expression can be easily produced, which may help create a broader reading public in native languages.[24] In the Miskito case, a large part of the population is minimally literate in their own language through the work of the Moravian Church, and the Miskito regularly read the Bible and other religious literature. Salamanca suggests that one means of encouraging broader intellectual interest in Miskito might be to develop a secondary-school course in Miskito grammar, and he views his own work as a first step in that direction.

After a decade of war and negotiations and the granting of autonomy to the Atlantic Coast, what has been learned? What conclusions emerge from looking at the available sources?

First, scholars reflect the depth of feeling involved in the conflict and the seemingly irreconcilable positions being argued. Taking a position has meant getting involved on one side or the other or at least being accused of doing so, as Orin Starn has pointed out regarding current work on Sendero Luminoso in Peru.[25] For social scientists like Charles Hale, who is sympathetic to both the socialist government and Miskito aspirations for self-determination, the situation was a difficult one. Less cognitive dissonance existed for Bernard Nietschmann, who was avowedly anti-Sandinista, and Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz and Jorge Jenkins Molieri, who were strongly pro-Sandinista and anti-U.S. imperialism. They could excuse the Miskito people to some extent for being manipulated and duped over the centuries by Anglo exploiters and for not understanding the opportunities the new situation afforded them. Written in the late 1980s, these books all reflect an interest on the part of participants in current events in getting their own perspectives on the record. Some years from now, the time will come for a more measured, objective summary of the conflict, taking into account the underlying arguments and new fieldwork.

Second, in terms of the conflict itself, a process of coming to terms has taken place over the years. At the beginning, the situation seemed to lead inevitably to conflict. When MISURASATA asked for control of 38 percent of the national territory, how could the strongly nationalist FSLN, struggling against a counterrevolution, possibly agree? Yet how could the Miskito accept military occupation by Hispanic troops and a socialist government that seemed to want to engulf them in its own vision of the future? The Miskito groups were under pressure from the CIA and the FDN, and the Sandinistas felt their own backs were to the wall in defending their country. A situation of nonnegotiable demands—self-determina-

24. See Salomón Nahmad Sitton, "Oaxaca y el CIESAS: una experiencia hacia una nueva antropología," *América Indígena* 50, nos. 2-3 (1990):11-32; and Russell Bernard, "Preserving Language Diversity," *Human Organization* 51, no. 1 (1992):82-89.

25. Orin Starn, "New Literature on Peru's Sendero Luminoso," *LARR* 27, no. 2 (1992):212-26.

tion versus national sovereignty—seemed to exist, one with little room for compromise and negotiation. Negative images of "the other side" were deeply entrenched, and the loss of relatives and companions to violence diminished any trust in the other side's promises. Nevertheless, Sandinista policy evolved over the years to take into account the Costeño position, culminating in the autonomy agreements. The Miskito people, anxious to end the killing and destruction, became more tolerant of the Sandinista government and more appreciative of the development efforts it was making. The result was an emerging ability to work together despite differences. The autonomy project pleased most Costeños, although to what extent "autonomy" and "national sovereignty" are compatible remains to be seen. The compromise involved one side swearing allegiance to the national government and the other side granting autonomy to those who had certified themselves as loyal. Some room for optimism existed in the late 1980s, a situation more hopeful than that in countries like Peru, Lebanon, Somalia, and the former Yugoslav republics. Yet it should also be pointed out that a remaining major problem is the need for an economic base on which to build. Without investment and employment, political autonomy may mean little more than a return to subsistence agriculture and fishing.

Finally, the decade brought a political revitalization of the Miskito, with new pride in Miskito history and culture and in fighting successfully for some sort of independent status. The Sandinista Army did not crush the insurgent groups; rather, both sides fought to a standstill. When offered "autonomy," the Miskito people felt some pride in having pressed their own demands successfully. The sociological axiom about creating solidarity through facing a common enemy seems to have applied as Miskito militancy developed. Yet to some extent, the Sandinista government itself fostered this "explosion" of pride in Miskito identity. Government policy supported bilingual, multicultural programs and acknowledged peoples' just demands for self-determination. A prime example is CIDCA, with its remarkable program of research and publication. Its work demonstrates that in spite of violent conflict and harsh economic circumstances, serious intellectual work can be and has been accomplished in documenting the history, languages, and cultures of the Miskito Coast. This work also suggests the possibility of cultural as well as political revitalization. As it develops, Miskito cultural revitalization may prove to be as interesting a topic for scholarly study as the widely publicized conflicts of the 1980s.