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Forced Relocation: Catalyst for Indigenous Resistance on Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast, 1980–1990

Since colonial times, the people of Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast have developed a distinctive cultural and ethnic heritage that has evolved separately and often contrary to that of the Hispanic civilization to the west. Within a region comprising nearly two-thirds of Nicaragua's national territory, a diverse population of approximately 120,000 Indians and Creoles has successfully resisted repeated attempts by the state to assimilate them into the cultural mainstream. As a result of their geographic isolation from the Spanish conquest and their proximity to the Caribbean, the aboriginal population of the Atlantic Coast came into extensive contact with British traders as well as a small number of African slaves whose English language, social customs, and ethnic stock both contributed to the rise of the Miskito[1], Sumu, Rama, and Creole peoples. This emergence of new local identities also coincided with the establishment of independent cultural and political structures. Likewise, the regional adaptation of Moravian religiosity and North American capitalist tendencies served to further differentiate the *Costeños* from Mestizo society.[2] Consequently, the inhabitants of the Atlantic Coast came to regard the Nicaraguan state as an intrusive foreign entity that at times sought to impose its authority and Hispanic culture over the region.

For the most part, the indigenous communities of the Atlantic Coast enjoyed a sense of political and cultural autonomy not experienced by other ethnic

[1] Over the centuries, there has been a number of different spellings for the term *Miskito* (i.e. Mosquito, Musquito, Miskitu etc.), referring to a specific indigenous tribe on Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast.

[2] Charles R Hale, *Resistance and Contradiction: Miskitu Indians and the Nicaraguan State, 1894–1987*. (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1994): 12–13.

minorities in the western half of Nicaragua. Nevertheless, with the successful overthrow of the 43-year Somoza regime by the *Frente Sandinista Liberación Nacional* (FSLN) on 17 July 1979, the new Sandinista government attempted to implement a program of national liberation (with a "we know what's best for them attitude") that would inevitably come into direct conflict with pre-existing social, political and economic formations in the region.[3] The FSLN had set out to redress centuries of what they perceived as imperialist exploitation and racist discrimination in an attempt to create a more egalitarian society in which disparities of wealth and opportunities would be eliminated. However, in their effort to bring the revolution to the Atlantic Coast, the Sandinistas displayed little regard for ethnic and cultural sensibilities that had been essential to the longevity of Coast society. Consequently, the *Costeños* reacted to state initiatives with increasingly pronounced displays of defiance. Over time, the growing militancy of the indigenous opposition combined with the perceived threat of a U.S.-backed foreign invasion from across the Honduran border prompted the Sandinista government to respond to acts of civil disobedience with increasing oppression and violence. As a result, large segments of the Coast population that had been passively resistant toward the revolutionary process soon found themselves engaged militarily against it.

Over the course of this paper, I will carefully illustrate how Sandinista programs of cultural assistance and social reconstruction that were intended to benefit the peoples of the Atlantic Coast had actually served to alienate large segments of the indigenous population. Likewise, I will show how the apparent ignorance of the Sandinistas in regard to their understanding of indigenous social and political formations, that had resulted from centuries of contact with British and North American enterprises, produced high levels of indifference among the Coast communities toward the revolutionary process. As a result, I will demonstrate how increasingly repressive responses on the part of the Sandinista government toward popular dissension helped to transform the fundamental character of the indigenous opposition from one of political apathy to that of armed resistance.

The Emergence of Indigenous Societies on the Atlantic Coast

Since the arrival of the Spanish, the indigenous inhabitants of Central America have struggled to preserve their traditions in the face of advancing Hispanic culture and political rule. During the 16th century, many of the native Indian tribes who migrated southward from Mesoamerica to the Nicaraguan

[3] *Ibidem*, 6–7, 12.

west coast were enslaved at the hands of the Spanish either to be sent as labourers to the silver mines of South America or to be put to work upon local plantations producing foodstuffs in support of colonial enterprises elsewhere (Bartolomé de las Casas, Bishop of Chiapas (1545), defended Indian rights in opposition to colonial policies).[4] Over a short period of time, the Indian population had been decimated by poor working conditions and disease.[5] As a result of prolonged coexistence between the Spaniards and the Indians, a new racially mixed Mestizo society emerged within the context of a dominant Hispanic culture. Yet while the Spanish language, religion, and social customs pervaded the Pacific region of what would become Nicaragua, the Spanish failed to establish the same direct influence and control over a geographically isolated region known as the Atlantic Coast. Mountains, swamps, and jungles had hindered expansion eastward by the Spanish, leaving the region only accessible from the Caribbean. Therefore, it was Great Britain that was able to establish its influence over the region through a commercial relationship that proved mutually beneficial to both the British and those Coastal tribes that had migrated north from the Amazon basin.[6]

In 1633, British traders from the nearby Providence Island settlement established commercial relations with members of the Bawiksas tribe on the Atlantic Coast. The Indians traded meat and fish in exchange for metal tools and highly sought after manufactured goods. However, when the British colony was destroyed during a Spanish naval bombardment in 1641, many of the surviving colonists chose to resettle on the Atlantic Coast, eventually integrating into the local Indian communities. Over time, the racially mixed descendants of these communities coalesced into what would become the Miskito nation, with its own distinctive language and culture.[7] The Miskitos were receptive toward the British commercial presence in the region, often joining privateers in raids upon Spanish settlements. In addition, the Miskitos became intermediaries for the British in trading with other tribes further inland. As a result, the British rewarded the Miskitos with firearms that not only enabled them to resist Spanish political

[4] Bartolomé de las Casas, *The Devastation of the Indies: A Brief Account*. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 53–57.

[5] Gillian Brown, "Miskito Revindication: Between Revolution and Resistance," in *Nicaragua: A Revolution under Siege*, ed., Richard L. Harris (London: Zed Books Ltd, 1986): 175; John-Paul Wilson, "Church, State, and Society during the Nicaraguan Revolution," *Diálogos Latinoamericanos* 16, (Fall 2009): 117, Fall 2009, Casas, *Devastation of the Indies*, 53–57.

[6] Carlos M. Vilas, *State, Class and Ethnicity in Nicaragua: Capitalist Modernization and Revolutionary Change on the Atlantic Coast* (Boulder & London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1987): 13–16; Philip A. Dennis, "The Costeños and the Revolution in Nicaragua," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 23–3 (1981): 274.

[7] Brown, "Miskito Revindication," 178; Karl Bermann, "Big Stick: Nicaragua and the United States, 1848–1984," in *The Miskito Question and the Revolution in Nicaragua* ed. Judy Tazewell (Hampton, VA: Compita Publishing, 1984): 2.

penetration into the region, but also to expand their own territory at the expense of the weaker aboriginal tribes. By 1687, the British had established a protectorate over the region under the auspices of Miskito Kingdom. For generations to come, Miskito kings were to be recognized and commissioned by a British superintendent, who governed through a system of indirect administration.[8] Nevertheless, the Miskitos embraced their political ties to Great Britain, not as subjects to the British crown but rather as partners of a lucrative trade.

With their relationship to the British deepening, the Miskito Kingdom came into greater contact with the British Caribbean colonies. As plantains, bananas, and sugarcane began to be cultivated, slave labourers from Jamaica and the Cayman Islands were imported to work the plantations along the Atlantic Coast. Although many of these immigrants would form the basis of a separate black, English-speaking community, some chose to take Miskito wives, whose children were subsequently accepted into the Miskito tribe. Further adding to the ethnic diversity of the region were small numbers of Sumu and Rama Indians, who had fallen under Miskito rule yet had avoided miscegenation. For nearly a century, the Sumu, Rama, and Creole populations lived in relative harmony among the Miskito majority, some even holding office within the administration.[9] Nevertheless, as a condition of the Convention of London in 1787, Great Britain was forced to relinquish its control over the Miskito Kingdom to Spain in exchange for exclusive lumbering rights in Belize. Even though the British were to remain in close contact with the Miskito king, their influence had been severely diminished as a result of their departure. Interestingly enough, the Spanish never renewed their attempt to colonize the region, effectively endorsing the local authority of the Miskito king.[10]

By the early 19th century, the Miskitos had entered into a profitable contraband trade in mahogany with the Spanish residing to the west. This exchange precipitated the rise of port centres, such as Bluefields and Greytown (San Juan de la Norte) that facilitated the transit of valuable goods westward along the major river-ways. The prosperity of the trade soon attracted independent British loggers back to the Miskito Kingdom as the result of the exhaustion of mahogany in Belize. Nevertheless, with the declaration of Central American independence in 1821, trading with the Spanish came to an abrupt end. And with the departure of Spain from the region, the British sought to revive its influence over the Coast by re-establishing its protectorate.[11]

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[8] Dennis, "Costeños and Revolution," 276; Vilas, *State*, *Class and Ethnicity*, 17–19.

[9] Michael D Olien, "Imperialism, Ethnogenesis and Marginality: Ethnicity and Politics on the Mosquito Coast, 1845–1964," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 16–1(1984): 2–7; Janusz Bugajski, *Sandinista Communism and Rural Nicaragua* (New York and London: Praeger Publishers, 1990): 67.

[10] Vilas, *State*, *Class and Ethnicity*, 20–21.

[11] *Ibidem*, 21–23.

At the behest of the British superintendent, missionaries representing the Moravian Church began to arrive to the Atlantic Coast in 1847. This entrance was perhaps one of the most important events to have taken place during this period in terms of its lasting impact upon Miskito society. With evangelization came the establishment of the first permanent institutions from which to provide health care and education to the people at large.[12] More significantly, though, the Protestant faith became a new expression of ethnic identity on the Coast, with important features distinguishing it from the Catholic/Hispanic culture to the west. Moravian missions became the centre of village life, thereby providing Miskitos, Sumus, Ramas, and Creoles alike with a unifying force from which to transcend their own individual cultures. Likewise, the Moravian Church played a profound role in creating a new political consciousness among the Coast inhabitants. Although loyal to Great Britain, the missionaries, nonetheless, encouraged the population to assert their regional autonomy as a result of growing trepidation over the Nicaraguan state and its designs on the Miskito Kingdom. Henceforth, as literacy and religious observance increased, a widening distinction emerged between the *Costeños* and the "Spaniards" residing to the west.[13]

In 1849, the discovery of gold in California sparked interest in an inter-oceanic route from east to west via Central America. The United States had long tolerated the presence of Great Britain on the Atlantic Coast; nevertheless, British influence had now come into direct competition with North American interests.[14] Over the next decade, a series of treaties between the two countries gradually diminished the British presence on the Coast, placing more control of the Miskito Kingdom over to the Nicaraguan government. Most notable was the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty (1850), guaranteeing equal access to the shipping channels at Greytown.[15] Soon after, the Accessory Transit Company provided transportation through Greytown to Lake Nicaragua with an additional short rail to reach the Pacific Ocean.[16] Ultimately, the Treaty of Managua in 1860 effectively limited British jurisdiction to within the borders of Belize. The Nicaraguan state would encompass the territory that had been the Miskito Kingdom. However, the Miskitos were allowed to retain the customs and local authority they were accustomed to as a part of an autonomous reserve within the national boundaries.[17]

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[12] Dennis, "Costeños and Revolution," 277.

[13] Bugajski, *Sandinista Communism*, 66.

[14] Vilas, *State*, *Class and Ethnicity*, 25–27.

[15] Armin Rappaport, *A History of American Diplomacy*, (New York: McMillan Publishing Co., 1975): 141–142.

[16] Dexter Perkins, *The Monroe Doctrine*, *1826–1867*. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1933): 229.

[17] Bernard Nietschmann, *The Unknown War: The Miskito Nation*, *Nicaragua*, *and the United States*. (London: Freedom House, 1990): 20–21.

Although the locus of power remained firmly in the hands of the Miskito king, an important evolution had been taking place within the ethnic hierarchy. Since the establishment of the Miskito Reserve in 1861, Bluefields had emerged as the financial centre of the region as well as the seat of government. A bicameral legislature had been established consisting of both general and executive councils to enact laws and appoint officials as well as to handle any number of fiscal or judicial matters as there might arise.[18] As time went on, members of the Creole population achieved greater representation within these regional government bodies as a result of superior education and their growing commercial orientation. The Miskitos, on the other hand, found their numbers in government positions decreasing due to their greater illiteracy and their inability to speak fluent English. Eventually, the Miskito king came to preside over entire councils comprised of solely English-speaking Creole members as the Miskitos were pushed further out of the civic mainstream. As a result, the political marginalization of Miskitos vastly accelerated the social differentiation between ethnic communities as the Creole population came to dominate the economic enterprises of the Atlantic Coast.[19]

By the late 19th century, the construction of an inter-oceanic railroad (and later a canal) across the Isthmus of Panama greatly reduced the demand for transportation services in Greytown and Bluefields, prompting *Costeños* to revitalize the production of gold, rubber, and bananas as a means of obtaining wealth and foreign goods. The resurrection of the plantations and mines soon attracted a new wave of migrant workers from both Jamaica and the American South. In addition, U.S. entrepreneurs began to invest in the operations in which Creole supervisors contracted large numbers of Miskitos as salaried workers to engage in extraction activities. As more raw materials and basic commodities came to be exported internationally, money and manufactured goods started to filter into villages and rural areas, transforming a primitive economy based on subsistence agriculture to one linked financially to the world market. Ultimately, western Nicaraguan authorities, witnessing such capital accumulation, were forced to reconsider their policy toward the Atlantic Coast.[20]

From the outset, relations between the Nicaraguan government and the Miskito Kingdom had been marked by mutual suspicion and mistrust. The *Costeños* had been only too aware of the ethnocentric nature of the Nicaraguan state and had fought tenaciously to preserve their own cultural heritage and political economy through regional autonomy. However, in light of their recent economic

[18] Vilas, *State*, *Class and Ethnicity*, 31.

[19] Olien, "Imperialism, Ethnogenesis," 10–15.

[20] Vilas, *State*, *Class and Ethnicity*, 27–30; John-Paul Wilson, "Regional Confluence: Foreign Enterprise and Nicaraguan Costeño Society," *Globality Studies Journal*, no. 38, (September 22, 2013): http://globality.cc.stonybrook.edu/?p=960; Nietschmann, *Unknown War*, 21–22.

prosperity, the state came to resent the special status that the *Costeños* enjoyed, viewing the Miskito Kingdom as an obstacle towards the development of a national infrastructure and a satisfactory foreign policy.[21] Therefore, in 1894, President José Santos Zelaya of the ruling Liberal Party ordered a Nicaraguan expeditionary force to occupy the Atlantic Coast and remove the authority of the Miskito king under the pretence of curtailing an "unauthorized" foreign economic presence within national boundaries. The Miskito Kingdom was subsequently incorporated into the rest of Nicaragua as the Department of Zelaya, and over the next several decades, the government engaged in a campaign to "Hispanicise" the region by promoting Spanish as the official language of education and *administration*. In addition, large numbers of Mestizo peasants were encouraged to migrate to the sparsely populated region in an attempt to alter the ethnic balance.[22] Ironically, it was President Zelaya who would encourage an unprecedented level of North American and European investment with the promise of tax incentives and economic autonomy, precipitating the growth of large-scale multi-national corporations on the Coast.[23] Hence, the political and economic activities that had once been controlled by the local Miskito population were to be dominated by foreign nationals and new Mestizo migrants for the next 70 years.[24] This net demotion in status championed by the "Spaniards" would become a part of Costeño cultural memory.

The Nicaraguan government believed that the presence of multi-national corporations within the Department of Zelaya could generate high levels of economic activity that would, in effect, improve the national economy, in which case, the state gave foreign companies virtually free reign to exploit the region's minerals, forests, and wildlife in return for a substantial sum of the revenues. This relationship, nonetheless, proved to be a short-term solution to complex problems associated with national development. Despite having employed large numbers of local Indians as unskilled labourers, companies reserved management and technical positions for Mestizos and foreign nationals at the exclusion of skilled and educated members of the Creole community.[25] Likewise, companies made little attempt to advance local industry, instead preferring to import needed machinery and spare parts from abroad. Initially, Coast inhabitants enjoyed significant improvement in their standard of living as a result of decent wages and increased access to manufactured goods. However, the failure to reinvest into the local economic infrastructure ultimately sent the region into a state of decline.[26] By the 1930's Great Depression, the entire educational system and

[21] Vilas, *State*, *Class and Ethnicity*, 31–32.
[22] Olien, "Imperialism, Ethnogenesis," 21–22; Vilas, *State*, *Class and Ethnicity*, 38–40.
[23] Wilson, "Regional Confluence".
[24] Bugajski, *Sandinista Communism*, 66; Olien, "Imperialism, Ethnogenesis," 17–18.
[25] Vilas, *State*, *Class and Ethnicity*, 44–45.
[26] *Ibidem*, 48; Dennis, "Costeños and Revolution," 279.

national infrastructure was on the verge of collapse. Roads and communications suffered from deterioration and neglect. And the region's political institutions had become havens for graft and corruption. Yet, beyond token efforts to redress problems of unemployment and illiteracy, the state was completely unprepared to handle the crisis.[27]

The ascendance of Anastasio Somoza García to the presidency brought little in the way of immediate economic relief to the Atlantic Coast. In fact, the dictator outright abandoned the region as a hopeless backwater, instead concentrating his efforts within the western portion of the country. However, as a result of state neglect, the Coast inhabitants began to experience political and economic freedoms not to be found in the west.[28] World War II marked the beginning of a gradual but often intermittent recovery of the region. During the Japanese occupation of Southeast Asia, the Allies looked to Central America as a new source for raw materials, such as rubber. By the 1960s, there had been enough capital investment to revitalise the long dormant fishing and lumbering industries.[29] As the *Somocistas* came to dominate most economic sectors in the west, influence on the Coast was limited to a mere taxation of revenues. In essence, the Coast inhabitants enjoyed a substantial degree of self-rule as well as cultural and religious independence, and as a result, few *Costeños* were inclined to dispute state policies. Indeed, some even chose employment within the *Guardia Nacional*.[30]

During the 1960s, the Pacific region of Nicaragua experienced dramatic increases in agro-industrial production and manufacturing under the Somoza regime. As more land and property came on the west coast under the control of the *Somocistas*, the eastward migration of landless peasants vastly accelerated. Eventually, state interests necessitated colonisation of the largely under-populated Atlantic Coast to release demographic pressure. With the help of foreign aid granted by the United Nations and the Alliance for Progress, the regime expanded social services and economic development into the region for the first time. In addition to state-enforced reforestation projects, new roads and bridges were constructed to link rural areas with larger population centres. However, in the wake of these internal improvements, Somoza assumed control of banana, sugarcane, and marine exports, adding them to his already extensive personal economic empire. Not unlike the multi-national corporations that preceded, the revitalisation of the Coast economy was designed to serve the *Somocistas* rather than the *Costeños*.[31] Even though the local population was presented with an

[27] Vilas, *State*, *Class and Ethnicity*, 43–46.

[28] Charles R Hale, *Resistance and Contradiction*, 118–119; Juan Mendez, *The Miskitos in Nicaragua*, *1981–1984*, (New York: Americas Watch Committee, 1984): 4.

[29] Vilas, *State*, *Class and Ethnicity*, 51.

[30] Bugajski, *Sandinista Communism*, 69.

[31] Bermann, *Big Stick*, 7; Hale, *Resistance and Contradiction*, 119–121.

abundance of new opportunities for basic wage labour, Indian workers were often relegated to strenuous and low paying jobs. Furthermore, there was little chance of upward mobility. *Somocista* enterprises were the ones controlled by Mestizo capitalists who embraced the ideals of Hispanic culture. In this case, some Miskitos and Creoles chose to distance themselves from their communities in an effort to rise within a dominant culture that held indigenous customs in contempt. Hence, if a *Costeño* hoped to achieve his aspirations, he must accept a "shift" in his ethnic identity.[32]

In the face of such uneven social and economic distribution in Nicaragua, the Catholic Church, fuelled by the renewed vigour of the Second Vatican Council and the *Consejo Episcopal Latinamericano* at Medellín, opted to dedicate its efforts toward improving the lot of Nicaragua's poor.[33] Catholic missionaries descended upon the Atlantic Coast to serve both the corporal and spiritual needs of the people. Moreover, a growing number of Christian laity within the region adopted a theology of human liberation in challenge to continued Indian subordination at the hands of the Mestizo majority.[34] In 1973, Miskito members of the Moravian clergy organized the Alliance for Progress of Miskitos and Sumus (ALPROMISU) to represent the interests of indigenous peoples within the Somoza regime. The organization stressed Indian control over the land, resources, and political institutions of the Atlantic Coast by promoting social awareness among the local communities. Throughout the final years of the Somoza dynasty, members of ALPROMISU received both verbal and physical harassment at the hands of the *Somocista* elite. However, in the midst of the Sandinista-inspired armed insurrection against the regime, the role of ALPROMISU and the Miskito population was decidedly passive.[35]

The Sandinista Revolution on the Atlantic Coast

The Sandinista were unable to overcome the *Somocista* after many attempts. Only a broad based coalition (FAO, *Frente Amplio Opositor*) of various organizations could withstand the onslaught of the *Guardia Nacional*. In which case, it was the pivotal role of the Catholic Church that allowed this coalition to form and succeed. Pope John XXIII set the theme of socio-economic structural change through a series of encyclicals that included *Mater et Magistra*, again emphasising the rights of ownership and free association as a means of

[32] Hale, *Resistance and Contradiction*, 122–124.

[33] CELAM, *La Iglesia*, 3–4; Wilson, "Church, State, and Society 120–122".

[34] Hale, *Resistance and Contradiction*, 125.

[35] Dennis, "Costeños and Revolution," 285–286; U.S. Department of State, *Dispossessed, the Miskito Indians in Sandinista Nicaragua*. (Washington DC: The United States Department of State, 1986): 1–2.

social and economic change.[36] In *Pacem im Terris*, he gives clear definition of rights and duties of individuals, society, national states, and international relations, stressing the need for decent standards of living, education, and political participation.[37] This theme was fully realised over the course of Vatican II, where the emphasis was placed on lay participation in the acquisition of equity and freedom. The social teachings of Vatican II were synthesised and further discussed by Pope Paul VI in the post-Vatican-II document, *Populorum Progressio*, including endemic poverty and injustice as well as the vast disparities of wealth and power supported by social, national, and international structures maintaining the status quo.[38] Vatican II's *Apostolicam Actuositatem* hoped to resolve these "immense inequalities" and advocate a "commitment to the poor" with a renewed call to Catholic Action.[39] Both Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes* and Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio* emphasised that the world and its goods are given to all mankind and that great disparities are not justified.[40] *Gaudium et Spes* reaffirms the ancient teaching that "When a person is in extreme necessity he has the right to supply himself out of the riches of others".[41] Consequently, these very issues soon became the centre piece for an Episcopal Conference that would have an even greater impact on Nicaragua and the rest of Latin America.

In 1968, the *Consejo Episcopal Latinamericano* held their Second General Conference in Medellín, Columbia.[42] This historic gathering of clergy had been assembled to address the issues brought up during Vatican II in a way that was relevant to the needs of Latin America. Dom Helder Camara, CELAM Secretary General, was a moving force sighting the need for transforming the current capitalist socio-economic structures while avoiding Marxist options with its associated class warfare as "both systems militate against the dignity of the human person".[43] Camara pleaded for the development of grass-root communities to form networks for a non-violent confrontation with the prevailing unjust socio-economic systems.[44] At Medellín, the Church's relationship to political authority was redefined to take on an offensive role in the remodeling of societal structures and display "a special commitment to the poor". This new

[36] John XXIII, "Mater et Magistra: On Christian and Social Progress". 15 May 1961, 4.

[37] John XXIII, "Pacem in Terris: On Establishing Universal Peace in Truth, Justice, Charity, and Liberty". 11 April 1963, 2–5.

[38] Vatican II, '*Gaudium et Spes*: Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World', 2–4; Paul VI, "Populorum Progressio: On the Development of Peoples," 26 March 1967, 1–4.

[39] Vatican II, '*Apostolicam Actuositatem*: Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity', 5–7.

[40] Vatican II, '*Gaudium et Spes*: Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World', 37–39.

[41] *Ibidem*, 39–40.

[42] CELAM, La Iglesia en la Actual Transformacion de America Latina a la Luz del Concilio. CELAM: Bogotá.

[43] *Ibidem*, 4.

[44] Camara, Helder, *Spiral of Violence*. (London: Shed and Ward Ltd., 1971): 81–82.

social doctrine encouraged the establishment of *Comunidad Eclesial de Base* (CEB or Christian Based Community) aimed at defending the rights of the impoverished masses and creating awareness of the social injustices, but more importantly, it encouraged a theology of human liberation based on analysis of class conflict that attempts to employ the gospel as a means of resolving concrete problems.[45]

Vatican II had ushered in a greater concern for humanity, particularly the material conditions of the poor, the marginal, and the excluded. Liberation theology was created as a result of the existing doctrines and institutions failing to serve the real needs of the people. According to their chief author, Peruvian priest, Gustavo Gutiérrez, the key to analyzing the problem and creating a solution lay in the recognition of class struggle that is a part of current Latin America society and inherited from colonialism.[46] Camara and Gutiérrez both struggled for an appropriate Christian response to this problem. Gutiérrez believed that only through social revolution could Latin America change its present condition.[47] Such a revolution would have to be waged with religious symbols that made a clear distinction between the oppressor and the oppressed. In this sense, unjust social structures, such as capitalism and Western imperialism, became associated with sin. Perhaps the most elegant examples are found in the writings of the Trappest priest Fr. Ernesto Cardenal, who led the Marxist Christian community in Nicaragua.[48] For example, poems of Marxist Christianity in *Like the Waves* (*Cantiga* 35) and *The Grave of the Guerrilla* (*Cantiga* 36), Christ could be interpreted as the ultimate political figure and revolutionary. Cardenal made use of traditional Christian imagery with the "New Jerusalem" replaced by the "New Havana" described in *Cantiga* 19.[49] According to Gutiérrez, there could be no neutrality; one had to take up the "option of the poor" and be committed to Marxist revolution in order to be a Christian.[50] While there is some convergence of Marxist and traditional Christian ideals, they differ on the roles of private property, democracy, human solidarity, and especially revolutionary violence.

The Sandinista Revolution was mainly organized among western Spanish Mestizos against the Somoza regime and was met with little enthusiasm on behalf of the indigenous inhabitants of the Atlantic Coast. With the exception of a few radical student groups, virtually no *Costeños* actively participated in the overthrow of Somoza. Although the Indian and Creole communities had

[45] *Ibidem*, 37–39.

[46] Gutiérrez, Gustavo (1973) "A Theology of Liberation," (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1973): 137.

[47] *Ibidem*, 48, 53–58.

[48] Cardenal, Ernesto (1993) *Cosmic Canticle*. (Willianic, CT: Curbstone Press, 1993): 351–378.

[49] *Ibidem*, 191.

[50] Gutiérrez, "A Theology of Liberation,"108–109, 137–140.

experienced a sharp demotion in the social and cultural status in the wake of a recently established Mestizo majority, these indigenous minorities had found the presence of the *Somocistas* on the Coast to be relatively unintrusive in relation to their customs and way of life.[51] Moreover, *Somocista* industries had provided them with extra income to complement their efforts at subsistence farming and the opportunity to purchase foreign manufactured goods. The victorious *Frente Sandinista Liberación Nacional* (FSLN), on the other hand, regarded the *Costneños*' self-determination and capitalist sensibilities as politically ignorant and ideologically regressive to the revolutionary process. Furthermore, early concerns for "Nicaragua's territorial unity was one dimension of the national unity strategy, a pillar of the Sandinista program".[52] The Sandinistas immediately seized control of the remaining foreign and *Somocista* enterprises, effectively ending the enclave economy with its well-stocked company stores on the Coast.[53] Henceforth, the new regime would seek to reverse the effects of over a century of "imperialist exploitation" by redirecting "subsistence patterns, political structures, and class relations toward socialist development".[54]

The Sandinistas, however, in their overzealous attempt to eliminate racist and ethnocentric patterns, would fail to recognize distinctive social formations (communal lands, English in education and administration, capitalism, Protestantism, and specific Indian cultural factors) in their application of political organization and symbolism to the Atlantic Coast. For example, the literacy campaign was dominated by western Mestizo students from high schools and universities with very little training to implement this "political project with pedagogical implementations".[55] The state initiated a massive cultural assistance program aimed at strengthening ethnic identities and preserving communal lands. Subsistence farmers were organized into agrarian cooperatives in an effort to maximize production for the entire region. Lands not under immediate cultivation or lacking proper titles were converted into state farms.[56] Basic commodities were sold directly to the state at fixed prices (an onerous practice not unlike price-fixing under the *Somocista*),[57] and the state in turn provided access to consumers through local commissaries. Having the advantage of a common language and culture, the Mestizo population was able to more fully participate in government programs and, therefore, receive a greater share of the

[51] Bugajski, *Sandinista Communism*, 69–70.

[52] Vilas, *State*, *Class and Ethnicity*, 107.

[53] Hale, *Resistance and Contradiction*, 129; Wilson, "Regional Confluence".

[54] Bugajski, *Sandinista Communism*, 72.

[55] Sheryl Hirshon, *And Also Teach Them to Read*. (Westport, Connecticut: Lawrence Hill & CO., 1983): 3,7.

[56] Bugajski, *Sandinista Communism*. 81.

[57] Hirshon, *And Also Teach Them to Read*. 141–143.

benefits.[58] The Miskitos, with their own culture and language, came to resent state initiatives that often excluded ethnic minorities from national life. At the onset of the Sandinista literacy campaign, the Indian communities were held back by the Spanish curriculum. Moreover, when encouraged to join mass organizations in an attempt to further their proletarian rights, the Miskitos increasingly encountered a commercial and economic infrastructure dominated by Spanish-speaking Mestizos from the Pacific region. The Sandinistas with attitudes of arrogant certitude having grown in Hispanic culture of the west coast had no previous experience in dealing with ethnic minorities with their distinctive language and cultural assumptions.[59] Therefore, when policies fell short of expectations, the Miskito population would mobilize against what they perceived as an unwanted intrusion.[60]

Although the Sandinistas seemed to voice concern about the plight of Nicaragua's indigenous population, the National Directorate was intent upon subjugating any independent source of authority or organization. This was likewise true in the subjugation of the Catholic Church by the Sandinistas.[61] As Miskito activists began to press the new government to renew their political autonomy, the FSLN grew increasingly suspicious of their motivations. The Sandinistas were only too aware of Miskito ties to the *Somocistas* and North American capitalists and deemed their separatist demands as counter-revolutionary. As a result, several branches of the Sandinista Defence Committee (CDS) began to arrive to the Coast to subsequently replace the existing Miskito and Moravian institutions.[62] Hence, to fully consolidate the Atlantic Coast under centralised control, the state found it necessary to further subordinate the independence aspirations of the indigenous communities.

In the face of increasing agitation within the indigenous population, FSLN leader, Daniel Ortega, agreed to meet with representatives of 185 indigenous communities during ALPROMISU's fifth annual congress, 8–11 November 1979, to consider grievances brought to the attention of the Sandinista government. During the course of the delegation, Ortega contended that the needs and interests of the *Costeños* could best be served within the existing Farm Workers' Association (Asociación *de* Trabajadores del Campo, ATC). Miskito leaders, on the other hand, insisted on the formation of a new grassroots organization headed by those who it aimed to represent (non-Hispanic minorities). In the end, Ortega consented to the creation of Miskito, Sumu, Rama, Sandinista Unity (MISURASATA) and awarded it a seat on the newly formed Council of

[58] Hale, *Resistance and Contradiction*, 129–131.
[59] *Ibidem*, 12.
[60] Mendez, *The Miskitos*, 5; Bugajski, *Sandinista Communism*, 77.
[61] Wilson, "Church, State and Society," 128.
[62] Bugajski, *Sandinista Communism*, 75; Nietschmann, *Unknown War*, 26.

State, but even though MISURASATA would participate in the implementation of government programs, the Sandinista cadre remained distrustful of its leadership.[63] Membership would be comprised of largely Moravian religious and student activists who served to empower the Miskito people. As the organization received wide support from the Miskito community, it became increasingly aggressive, confronting the state on issues ranging from worker wages to resource jurisdiction. MISURASATA proved to be an effective instrument in promoting the interests of the indigenous population, subsequently compelling the Sandinistas to pass a variety of pro-indigenous legislation that included a bilingual education law and an increase of land titling to Indian communities.[64]

Although the government reluctantly conceded to a great number of Miskito demands, social unrest soon spread to other sections of the indigenous population. Creoles began to demonstrate in the streets of Bluefields against the lack of government consideration for their political interests. Furthermore, the Creole community was opposed to the Sandinistas invitation of Cuban educators and physicians to the Atlantic Coast due to their underlying Communist agenda. By 1980, members of this disaffected population had organized into the Southern Indigenous Creole Community (SICC) despite the government's refusal to officially recognise it. Therefore, in response to the state's seeming indifference, the Creole population remained generally apathetic toward the revolutionary process.[65]

Despite government efforts to improve living conditions on the Coast, the Miskito population could still recall better times in recent memory. The *Costeños* longed for the days when hard currency and foreign manufactured goods circulated through the villages and the state allowed them to determine their own destiny. As months past, the Miskitos came to regard the Sandinistas' anti-capitalist rhetoric and socialist organization as a direct threat to their continued way of life. In August 1980, the Nicaraguan Institute for National Resources and the Environment (IRENA) authorised the seizure of 9000 square kilometres of virgin forest as a national reserve. Subsequently, the state allowed the reserve to overlap into territory claimed by a Miskito community due the lack of a proper title. The leaders of MISURASATA were convinced that this was the first step by the state to ultimately nationalise all natural

[63] Barricada Staff, "Together We Will Build A Just Society!," in *National Revolution and Indigenous Identity: The Conflict Between Sandinists and Miskito Indians on Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast*, ed. Klaudine Ohland and Robin Schneider (Copenhagen: International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, Document no. 47, November 1983): 38–40; Brown, "Miskito Revindication," 181.

[64] Hale, *Resistance and Contradiction*, 133–135; Nietschmann, *Unknown War*, 28.

[65] Phillipe Bourgois, "Ethnic Minorities," in *Nicaragua: The First Five Years*, (201–216) ed. Thomas W. Walker (New York and London: Praeger Publishers, 1985): 203; Dennis, "Costeños and Revolution," 290.

resources on the Atlantic Coast.[66] As a result of the incident, certain elements within the Miskito organisation opted for greater militancy in confronting the government.

Steadman Fagoth Müeller had emerged as a prominent leader within MISURASATA due to his outspoken criticism of Sandinista policies. As the Miskito representative within the Council of State, he had been a proponent for regional self-determination and labour pluralism on behalf of *Costeño* youth and women.[67] In response to the recent wave of government expropriations, Fagoth demanded "territorial rights encompassing nearly one-third of Nicaragua's territory, political independence, five additional seats within the Council, and even a seat within the governing junta".[68] The Sandinista government had arrested Fagoth, having allegedly uncovered his ties to the *Somocistas* as a former intelligence agent. Outraged by this action, members of MISURASATA met at a Moravian church in Prinzepolka in February 1981 to discuss the next course of action. Shortly after their arrival, Sandinista soldiers came to make arrests. A violent confrontation ensued, resulting in the death of four soldiers and four Miskito civilians. In the end, 33 MISURASATA leaders were rounded up on charges of separatism. News spread quickly across the Atlantic Coast prompting nearly 2,000 *Costeños* to hold a two month vigil for their release. Bowing to public pressure, the FSLN released Fagoth and the others in May. Nevertheless, blood had been spilled, and MISURASATA expected severe retaliation on the part of the Sandinistas. As a result, Fagoth and 3,000 other Miskitos were compelled to flee to Honduras in hopes of meeting up with the infant Nicaraguan Democratic Force (Fuerza Democrática Nicuaragüense, FDN).[69]

The policies of President Jimmy Carter had facilitated the success of the Sandinista Revolution by implementing an effective arms embargo;[70] and the 1980 Carter budget had provided $75 million to the FSLN. With the fall of the Somoza government, soldiers of the former *Guardia Nacional* began operating in Nicaragua's frontier provinces as a counter-revolutionary guerrilla force (Contras) using bases in Honduras. This Nicaraguan Democratic Force

[66] Brown, "Miskito Revindication," 181; Barricada Staff, "Agreement on Norms For Lumber-Felling" (14 February 1981) in *National Revolution and Indigenous Identity: The Conflict Between Sandinists and Miskito Indians on Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast ed*. Klaudine Ohland and Robin Schneider, (Copenhagen: International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, Document no. 47, November 1983): 95–105.

[67] Bugajski, *Sandinista Communism*, 75.

[68] Hale, *Resistance and Contradiction*, 135.

[69] Patria Libre Staff, "Counter-revolutionary Plan Subdued in the Atlantic Coast," *Patria Libre*, no. 11. February 1981, in *National Revolution and Indigenous Identity: The Conflict Between Sandinists and Miskito Indians on Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast* ed. Klaudine Ohland and Robin Schneider (Copenhagen: International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, Document no. 47, November 1983): 99–105; Brown, *Miskito Revindication*, 182.

[70] Anastasio Somoza, *Nicaragua Betrayed*. (Boston: Western Island Publishers, 1980), 239–240).

would become a focus of U.S. policy; and its proximity to the Miskito homelands would become an important factor in the struggle to re-establish autonomy.[71] Interestingly, it has been suggested that the Carter Administration had planned to engage the Miskito against the FSLN even before the July 1979 revolutionary victory had taken place.[72] At the start of the Reagan administration, the FDN began receiving weapons and training from the CIA to destabilise the Sandinista government. Fagoth and his Miskito followers established an alliance with these Contras in hopes of securing a semi-autonomous region under U.S. arms.[73] In October 1981, armed Miskitos, under Fagoth's leadership, began making incursions onto the Atlantic Coast in an attempt to inspire a Miskito uprising against the Sandinistas. As the Sandinista army retaliated against these activities, thousands of *Costeños* were forced to flee to Honduras and Costa Rica to escape the incurring violence. Oftentimes, however, these refugees found themselves caught between the opposing combatants.[74]

Forced Relocation: The Catalyst for Miskito Mobilization

As the conflict escalated, the Sandinistas became increasingly concerned over civilian collaboration with the Miskito insurgents. Sympathetic villages often provided the guerrillas with safe havens as well as sources for supplies and recruitment. The FSLN feared that these activities might be pre-emptive of a full-scale U.S. invasion against the regime. Therefore, the government found it necessary to relocate certain Coast communities that might offer assistance to the counter-revolutionaries.[75] In January 1982, the Sandinistas began forcibly evacuating inhabitants from 65 communities along the Rio Coco near the Honduran border. Within two months, over 8,500 Miskitos had been evicted from their homes and moved by truck, bus, and even on foot across rugged terrain to a number of resettlement areas located far away from any armed activity. Members of these communities had been given only a few hours notice of their predicament and had been allowed to retain only a few essentials

[71] Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, *Indians of the Americas Human Rights and Self-Determination*. (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1984): 247–249.

[72] *Ibidem*, 247.

[73] Charles R. Hale, "Institutional Struggle, Conflict and Reconciliation: Miskitu Indians and the Nicaraguan State (1979–1985)," in *Ethnic Groups and The Nation State: The Case of the Atlantic Coast in Nicaragua (*CIDCA/Development Study Unit, Stockholm: University of Stockholm, Department of Social Anthropology, 1987): 111–112.

[74] Brown, "Miskito Revindication," 184; Nietschmann, *Unknown War*, 33–34; Ortiz, *Indians of the Americas*, 249.

[75] Brown, "Miskito Revindication," 185; Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, *KGB, The Inside Story*. (New York: Harper Perennial, 1990): 599.

in their possession. The villages, crops, farm animals and all else left behind were then subsequently destroyed so as to deny the insurgents anything of value.[76] It has been alleged that over 300 Miskitos had been killed during the evacuations. However, one thing that remained certain was the fact that another 10,000 *Costeños* had chosen to flee to Honduras rather than become captives of the Sandinista government.[77]

The vast majority of the displaced Río Coco inhabitants were placed in a series of resettlement camps known collectively as *Tasba Pri* or "free land," located some 50 miles south of the river. For the most part, the camps provided adequate food, health care, and even schools for the large number of Miskito residents. Yet, by the same token, they often lacked the amenities to which the Miskitos had grown accustomed.[78] For one thing, the camps were unable to provide sufficient housing to most camp residents. Inhabitants were forced to reside in long communal tents known as *champas* that consisted of elevated wooden floors, open sides, and a plastic roof. Most often, entire families were grouped together in these narrow dwellings creating cramped conditions with little privacy. Likewise, there were few work opportunities available for residents beyond collective agriculture and intermittent construction. Traditional Miskito pastimes such as hunting and fishing were seriously curtailed due to restrictions on movement outside of the resettlement areas. As a result, unoccupied adult males were often subject to being drafted into the Sandinista defence forces.[79]

In the months following the Río Coco evacuations, the flight of Miskito refugees into Honduras had helped to swell the ranks of the armed insurgents operating on the Atlantic Coast. With training and a limited supply of second-hand weapons, many able-bodied males had volunteered to infiltrate back into Nicaragua to join the guerrillas in their struggle against government forces. In response to these incursions, the Sandinistas decided to relocate an additional 18,000 Miskitos from 49 communities in Northern Zelaya.[80] However, the process that had once been described by the FSLN leadership as a "peaceful, orderly, and uneventful affair," soon elapsed into a violent and chaotic scene in which Sandinista soldiers increasingly took out their hostilities upon helpless civilians.[81]

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[76] Mendez, *The Miskitos*, 15–16; Ortiz, 252.

[77] Mendez, *The Miskitos*, 17; Nietschmann, *Unknown War*, 34.

[78] Brown, "Miskito Revindication," 186; Mendez, *The Miskitos*, 18.

[79] Mendez, *The Miskitos*, 19–23.

[80] Bugajski, *Sandinista Communism*, 95; Nietschmann, *Unknown War*, 39.

[81] Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, *Report on the Situation of Human Rights of a Segment of the Nicaraguan Population of Miskito Origin and Resolution on the Friendly Settlement Procedure Regarding the Human Rights Situation of a Segment of the Nicaraguan Population of Miskito Origin*. (Washington DC: General Secretariat, Organization of American States, 1984): 83.

Poor military command over government troops had contributed to abductions, rapes, and other reprehensible behaviours. Likewise, logistical problems associated with resettling a large population resulted in a number of unnecessary tragedies. One such incident involving an overloaded helicopter ended in the deaths of 75 children who were being transported to an internment camp.[82] To make matters worse, the Sandinista government decided to declare a state of emergency in July 1982, further restricting civil liberties and special programs on the Coast so as to isolate the guerrillas from the civilian population. During this latest effort to curb the spread of counter-revolutionary activity, Sandinista soldiers often failed to differentiate the conscientious objector from the armed insurgent. Suspected collaborators were rounded up on the slightest pretence, thereby subjecting entire villages to extreme levels of physical harassment.[83] By targeting Miskito communities, the Sandinistas had hoped to deprive the armed resistance of valuable sources of supplies and recruitment, but as a result of martial law and continued relocations, the civilian population had been pushed ever further into the armed camp.

The new oppression perpetrated not only on the Atlantic Coast but also in the Pacific region by the National Directorate soon led to cracks in Sandinista solidarity, with the hero of the revolution, Edén Pastora, leaving Nicaragua with his Southern Sandinista Army to take up opposition in Costa Rica. His explanation of these actions in a 15 April 1982 press release stated the following: "With sorrow I have seen that intranquility (sic) reigns among my people, also anguish, fear, bitter frustration, personal insecurity. Our Miskito, Sumu, and Rama Indians are persecuted, jailed, or assassinated. And the press and radio are unable to denounce to the world this regime of terror that the feared State Security creates on the Atlantic Coast and in all of Nicaragua".[84]

By August 1982, the situation on the Atlantic Coast had deteriorated to such an extent that a diplomatic solution no longer seemed possible. With the remaining MISURASATA leaders either having been imprisoned or forced to flee the country, the Indian leadership reluctantly conceded their authority to Steadman Fagoth Müeller who had long professed the need for a "holy war" against Sandinista forces. As a final break with its Sandinista foundations, Fagoth had MISURASATA formally dissolved in order to form a new organization that would become more closely aligned with the Contras (FDN). Upon its inception, MISURA (Miskitos, Sumus, Ramas) would operate as an independent branch of the FDN, in an effort to recapture villages and disrupt government communications and supply lines.[85]

[82] Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, *Report on*, 83–84; Mendez, *The Miskitos*, 41.

[83] Brown, "Miskito Revindication," 187–188; Bourgois, "Ethnic Minorities," 204–205.

[84] Edén Pastora, 15 April 1982 Press Release from San José, Costa Rica, trans. Shirley Christian, in *Nicaragua: Revolution in the Family*, (New York: First Vintage Press, 1985): 391–394.

[85] Brown, "Miskito Revindication," 186.

As a result of the relocation process and the subsequent armed conflict, approximately 70,000 *Costeños* had been displaced since 1982. Whereas 20,000 had been subject to internment in the resettlement camps, another 50,000 had been forced to flee to Costa Rica and Honduras where as many as 10,000 had joined the armed resistance.[86] Similarly, of the 400 Miskitos that had been incarcerated as political prisoners, 250 had been executed for counter-revolutionary activities. In addition, the communities that had remained intact had suffered from famine and other hardships associated with government restrictions placed upon movements beyond the vicinity of villages. However, as pressure continued to mount on multiple fronts, the Sandinistas found it necessary to redress a number of these "past errors" to quell some of the opposition to the regime.[87] Initially, this new policy manifested in the partial release of civilians and political prisoners from their confinement. Furthermore, the FSLN offered amnesty to insurgents who were willing to lay down their arms and return to Nicaragua. But even though hundreds of Indian guerrillas accepted the offer and returned to their families, the government still had not voiced any consideration for indigenous demands, nor had it compensated for the pain and suffering inflicted upon Coast inhabitants. In consequence, the fighting continued until the Sandinistas gave serious considerations toward the issue of regional autonomy.[88]

With an open counter-revolution occurring on two additional fronts, it was becoming increasingly evident by 1983 that Sandinista policies on the Atlantic Coast had failed and a new course of action was required. Although there had been some redirection of the literacy campaign by offering instruction in native languages a few years earlier, the main apparatus of government remained firmly in Sandinista hands.[89] In early December 1983, amnesty was given to 300 jailed *Costeños* for their opposition to Sandinista rule and an additional 900 *Costeños* were pardoned in 1984.[90] These actions were followed by a reduction in the number of outside Mestizo civil servants being replaced by local *Costeños*. The healing process was accelerated by the establishment of Peace and Autonomy Commissions (PAC) formed directly with local *Costeños* (including many religious leaders) with locally elected representatives to promote peace, repatriation, and reconstruction of the villages. By 1987, 120 PACs were in operation among the Rio Coco villages and over 20,000 Miskitos had been repatriated.[91] An Autonomy Law for the Atlantic Coast was passed in September 1987 by the National Assembly, giving the Miskito of

[86] Nietschmann, *Unknown War*, 43.
[87] U. S. Department of State, *Dispossessed*, 4–5.
[88] Brown, "Miskito Revindication," 191–193.
[89] Ortiz, *Indians in the Americas*, 243.
[90] Vilas, *State, Class and Ethnicity*,155.
[91] *Ibidem*, 165.

the region rights to local water, land, and woods traditionally held by the local communities whose peoples, once again, have the right to the produce from such areas as well as to form their own social organisations.[92]

Conclusion

The *Costeños* regarded the Sandinista programs of cultural assistance and social reconstruction as yet another ill-conceived attempt by the Nicaraguan government to Hispanicise the region. Nevertheless, as time went on, the Coast inhabitants soon recognised the potential for serious disruption of well-established social and economic patterns and, therefore, found it necessary to resist efforts that threatened to destroy their historical traditions and continued way of life.

The forced migration of large numbers of Miskitos under less than ideal conditions helped to accelerate the already massive defections into Honduras and Costa Rica. In addition, the increasing dislocation of indigenous groups served to transform attitudes of political indifference into more pronounced displays of armed resistance. Ultimately, the ensuing armed conflict between Sandinista forces and Miskito guerrillas would resolve the long-standing ideological dispute on the Atlantic Coast. Therefore, since passive resistance had failed to bring about political change, military insurgency became the decisive instrument of negotiation in gaining their rights.

John-Paul Wilson

Forced Relocation: Catalyst for Indigenous Resistance on Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast, 1980–1990

Summary

Over the course of this paper, the author carefully illustrates how Sandinista programs of cultural assistance and social reconstruction that were intended to benefit the peoples of Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast actually served to alienate large segments of the indigenous population. Likewise, he shows how the apparent ignorance of the Frente Sandinista Liberación Nacional (FSLN) in regard to their understanding of indigenous social and political formations produced high levels of indifference among the Coast communities toward the revolutionary process. As a result, he demonstrates how increasingly repressive responses on the part of the Sandinista government toward popular dissension helped to transform the fundamental character of the indigenous opposition from one of political apathy to that of armed resistance. However, to reach such valid conclusions, the

[92] Hale, *Resistance and Contradiction*, 231; Vilas, *State, Class and Ethnicity*, 175.

author first retraces the origins and evolution of the Miskito, Sumu, Rama, and Creole peoples within the context of their continuing struggle against the Nicaraguan state to maintain their own separate cultural and ethnic identities. In addition, he discusses the arrival of the Sandinistas on the Atlantic Coast and how their social and political interaction with the Costeños precipitated hostilities. Finally, the author examines the Sandinista decision to forcibly relocate large numbers of Miskito civilians and how it related to subsequent indigenous emigration and the emergence of an armed conflict.