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Title

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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/84z3d08q>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 25(4)

ISSN

0161-6463

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Publication Date

2001-09-01

DOI

10.17953

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Cosmopolitan or Primitive? Environmental Dissonance and Regional Ideology in the Mosquito Coast

BARON L. PINEDA

Don Paco Mendez owns and operates one of the strings of general stores that line the *calle commercial*, or commercial street, of Puerto Cabezas, the port capital of Nicaragua's recently formed North Atlantic Autonomous Region (la Raan as it is known locally). One afternoon I stopped by his store for an informal interview with him. He told me that his family was one of the founders of Puerto Cabezas during "company time."¹ His Costa Rican mother and Nicaraguan father migrated from the Pacific side of Nicaragua to establish a commercial outlet in the burgeoning Caribbean port city that in the 1920s was converted from a small Indian village called Bilwi to the Nicaraguan headquarters of the largest employer in Nicaragua—the Standard Fruit Company. He was quick to remind me that although he had been born and raised *en la costa*, on the Mosquito Coast, he was, in an existential sense, profoundly del Pacifico, from the Pacific. Although he referred to himself as an *indígena* and an *indio*, he explained to me, with more than a trace of prejudice, the fundamental superiority of the Pacific Indian vis-à-vis the Moscos de aquí (Moscos).²

Don Paco explained that he had spent some time in the *campesino* (small-scale agricultural) villages of the mountainous Nicaraguan interior, an area that, in the national mental map of Nicaraguans, is part of "the Pacific." In the Segovian mountains he had witnessed the vigor and skill with which the Indian *campesinos* rendered harvests from marginal and relatively dry lands. In his opinion the land's suitability for agriculture and the climate of the Pacific interior were far inferior to that of the Mosquito Coast, Nicaragua's relatively sparsely populated and heavily forested Caribbean lowlands. Don Paco's perception of the absence of ideal geographical, climatic, and social conditions

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for agriculture in the Pacific vis-à-vis the Atlantic stood in sharp contrast to his perception of the disparity in productivity between the inhabitants of each region. He explained:

If the Indians [of the Pacific] have a little piece of land they plant green peppers, onions, tomatoes . . . everything . . . but here the damn Moscos are lazy. They just plant their cassava and banana and then sit back in their hammock, real easy. They just cultivate in order to live and as long as they are eating they don't worry about getting ahead . . . no progress. In the Pacific they plant corn, beans and bust their asses taking care of the crops . . . they will walk ten kilometers to get water. Every day there they are cleaning and taking care of the crops, but for the Moscos from here that is too much work to do. They don't want to grow corn the damn Moscos because they are lazy.³

Unfortunately, the sort of prejudice against Costeños reflected in this quotation is not uncommon, even among some natives such as Don Paco.⁴ Indeed, more generally, the projection of negative qualities such as laziness, ignorance, and primitiveness on marginalized out-groups, however defined, is common throughout the world. What stands out about this particular expression of prejudice, however, is the way in which perceptions of land and geography—in other words, environmental ideologies—intersect with ideologies of race and group difference. Don Paco's belief that the Miskito Indians are lazy was confirmed in his mind by the fact that the agricultural production of the region has historically been very low. But he also found this supposed laziness to be particularly disturbing in light of what he perceived to be the distinctive natural abundance of the region. This abundance and the agricultural opportunities he believed this abundance potentially offered stood in contrast to the situation of the relatively arid and more heavily populated Pacific Coast.

Few people in contemporary Nicaragua question the widely held notion that the "Atlantic Coast," a phrase used by Nicaraguans more commonly used than "Mosquito Coast," is a rich land with tremendous natural abundance. However, the region is also popularly regarded as the country's poorest and least productive—its people suffering from an acute lack of infrastructure, social services, and employment. Twentieth-century Nicaraguan governments, while decrying the country's inability to harness the exploitable natural resources, have encouraged foreign companies to operate extractive mining, fishing, and lumbering industries in the region. After the Sandinista revolution and the subsequent Miskito Indian insurgency cum cultural resurgence, the issue of natural resources has emerged as the single most contentious issue in the region.⁵

In this article, I explore the ways in which Costeños as well as Pacific Nicaraguans perceive the natural world and how these perceptions intersect with their understandings of the causes and consequences of the material poverty of the region. In the minds of many Nicaraguans the region's natural abundance serves to explain the human poverty of its inhabitants. This luxu-

riant natural world is thought to lead to a diminished industriousness among the inhabitants of the region. In direct contrast, however, Costeños typically derive optimism and hope from their unwavering belief in the richness of the region and its potential for human transformation. For them the natural wealth of the region, far from sapping the energy of the people who inhabit it, represents an underutilized asset that under the right conditions should propel the coast into a particular kind of material prosperity. They share a vision of a dollar-driven and wage-driven prosperity that, in their minds, existed during “company time,” an idealized period from the 1920s to the 1970s in which US and Canadian banana, lumber, and mining industries operated on a large scale in the region. Costeños feel that in light of their natural environment and its role in their region’s history they should not be materially poor. In other words they experience a nagging dissonance between the abundance of their natural environment and the stagnation of their economies. Rather than focusing specifically on modern Costeño and Miskito political movements, this article explores ethnographically the ways in which this environmental dissonance manifests itself in the daily life of Costeños.

Pacific Nicaraguans and others have tended to conflate the region’s geography (perceived as forested, underexploited, and impenetrable) with its people who are regarded as wild, savage, and unrefined. These associations stand in direct opposition to the self-perception of most Costeños as cosmopolitan and worldly. For the purpose of this article, I establish an ideal-typical distinction between the former and latter position. I label the former the *primitivist* view of Costeño identity and the latter the *cosmopolitan* view of Costeño identity.⁶ While the primitivist view is far more prevalent among Pacific Nicaraguans than it is among Costeños, Don Paco’s case and others that I will present clearly demonstrate that this view is not confined to Atlantic Coast outsiders. To varying degrees Costeños themselves have internalized some of the premises of the primitivist view of their own nature. The competing cosmopolitan view provides an ideological counterbalance, however, against primitivist self-exoticization.

An ethnographic understanding of the complex and regionally specific nature of the intersection of racial and regional ideologies along the Atlantic Coast provides us with a basis for assessing the future prospects as well as the contemporary causes of the chronic political conflict in the region—the most recent example of which occurred during the Contra War when Costeños took arms against the Pacific-based Sandinista government. During the 1980s a standard analysis emerged among journalists, government officials, international solidarity workers, social scientists, and historians regarding this conflict in which the supposed ethnic plurality of the region was cited as the root cause of the so-called cultural clash between the Miskito Indians and the Sandinista government.⁷ The analysis developed here provides an alternative to this standard interdisciplinary approach to the region, which tends to reify the socioracial categories of the region (primarily Miskito, Creole, and Spaniard). The use of the terms *cosmopolitan* and *primitivist* as a set of Weberian ideal types avoids the pitfall of linking particular ideological positions to identifiable groups. In the conclusion I use the concept of environ-

mental dissonance to critically revisit this standard explanation of Miskito-Sandinista conflict.

PRIMITIVISM, "ATLANTICITY," AND NICARAGUA'S INTERNAL OTHER

In 1846, missionary/linguist Alexander Henderson wrote a grammar of the Miskitu language in which he described the "Mosco Indians" as a "poor and miserable people, nearly unknown as they are profitless to the rest of mankind . . . [who] content themselves with that supply which their necessities demand and which is easily procured."⁸ By the mid-nineteenth century the native inhabitants of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua, who had periodically exercised dominion over the Caribbean Coast from Belize in the north to Panama in the south, were no longer a dominant force in the western Caribbean, nor were their British allies.⁹ In turn, descriptions of Costeños shifted from a focus on their ferocity and aggression to their alleged racial and social decadence.¹⁰ This was not surprising in light of the common European and Euro-American practice of attributing savage qualities to groups that successfully resisted subjugation.¹¹ For the purposes of this article, what is interesting to note about the perceptions of Miskito Indians was that their presumed savagery at some point came to be integrally linked, in the minds of primitivist thinkers, to the perceived natural abundance of their region. Hence, when Henderson described the Miskito as a "poor and miserable people" he linked these traits to the presumed ease with which food could be procured in their environment.

In modern Nicaragua this cognitive linkage exists and is manifested particularly strongly among people from the Pacific side of the country. In his ethnography of a lower class Managua neighborhood, Anthropologist Roger Lancaster labeled this primitivist approach toward the Atlantic Coast "Atlantcity."¹² In the Pacific Nicaraguan popular imagination, the Atlantic Coast is a lush tropical forest populated by an exotic blend of flora and fauna that are unknown in the Pacific. It is a vast "underpopulated" place whose jungles and rivers have managed to halt the advancement of agriculture and cattle-raising that slowly creeps eastward along Nicaragua's so-called "agricultural frontier." It is a place of unrefined wilderness in the minds of Pacific Nicaraguans that is matched with the lack of cultural and social refinement of its people. What makes the Atlantic Coast truly distinct is its lack of human production and human transformation of the natural world. This perception stands in contrast to the self-perception of Pacific Nicaraguans who conceive of their half of the country as productive both materially and culturally. So, for example, the rural communities of the Pacific are seen as the source of Nicaraguan distinctiveness in their production of folklore such as regional dances, costumes, craftwork, and music.

One area in which this difference manifests itself is the *artesanías*, or arts and crafts, sections of Managua's popular markets (such as Huembes and the Mercado Oriental). The production of *artesanías* in Nicaragua is generally regarded to take place in those regions of the Pacific that are perceived to be most Indian, particularly certain neighborhoods in and around the city of

Masaya. These *artesanías* include objects such as pottery with Meso-American style designs, hammocks, coarse rope tapestries, colorfully painted pieces of wood, etched gourds, maracas, and miniature *marimbas*.¹³ Generally speaking, Nicaraguans take an at-times paternalistic pride in the quality of these manufactures made by “our Indians.” That is to say these *artesanías* are regarded as a defining element of Nicaraguan material distinctiveness (*cosas típicas*, literally typical things) as well as part of the *patrimonio nacional* (national patrimony). In contrast, these markets also display products that are consciously marketed as coming from the Atlantic Coast. These products include feathers, animals, stuffed animals, animal skins and bones (snakes, birds, tigers, small mammals), shells, coral, and stones. These objects are entirely unrefined or only crudely refined. In most cases Pacific artisans working on materials that may or may not be from the Atlantic Coast carry out what little processing is done on these objects. In my experience doing research along the Atlantic Coast, I have never witnessed Costeño artisans manufacture these objects sold in Managua as “authentic” Atlantic Coast products. The fact that these products are absent from the large markets of the Atlantic Coast supports this conclusion. Costeño artisans do produce jewelry (using tortoise shells, black coral, silver, and gold) that is sold in the markets of Managua, but often not exclusively as *artesanía*. This division between refined Pacific Indian *artesanía* and “natural” Atlantic Coast *artesanía* reflects a larger ideological system at work in Nicaragua in which the Atlantic and its inhabitants are viewed as being part of the natural world—wild and unrefined.

THE LANGUAGE OF MONKEYS AND BIRDS

This distinction should not be confused, however, with the equation of Indianess with the Atlantic Coast. In fact it is a common practice in Pacific Nicaragua to deny the Indianess of Costeños altogether. I have found that it is very common for Pacific Nicaraguans to refer to all the inhabitants of the Atlantic Coast as *negros* (Blacks). And it is frequently the case that they pointedly refrain from referring to them as Indians.¹⁴ During my fieldwork in Puerto Cabezas, I conducted interviews with a number of first-time Pacific Nicaraguan visitors to the Atlantic Coast who expressed, what appeared to me, honest surprise that some residents of Puerto Cabezas considered themselves Indians and might object to being referred to as *negros*.

I have also found that Nicaraguans on both coasts commonly believe that the Miskitu language represents a corrupted and reduced version of English. Many refuse to accept that what they refer to disparagingly as the Miskito *dialecto* (dialect) manifests a distinct grammar and vocabulary that can be traced easily and directly to pre-Columbian languages of Central and South America. Even some Costeños, particularly those who do not speak Miskitu fluently, denigrate Miskitu as an unrefined language on par with animal communication. One of my informants, who strongly identified herself as a Creole (an English-speaking Costeño of Afro/West Indian descent) told me that Creole people in Puerto Cabezas disparaged Miskitu as “the language of Monkeys and Birds.” This perception of the Miskitu language is entirely con-

sistent with the widespread idea that Costeños, particularly those who identify themselves as Miskito, are not “real” Indians. Paradoxically, primitivist thought closely aligns the Atlantic Coast with the natural environment.

Nicaraguans often attribute magical powers to the *negros*, and particularly the *negras* of the Atlantic Coast. Costeñas are commonly reputed to possess extraordinary power in imposing their will on others through the use of herbs and/or incantations—a form of malevolent magic that in the Atlantic Coast is sometimes called Sontin (something). In the daily folklore of the Pacific Coast, Costeñas are believed to use these powers to enchant sexually and entrap unsuspecting men, particularly those who come from the Pacific.¹⁵ This folklore asserts that Costeñas commonly are able to bewitch (*pintar*) men from the Pacific who then never return to their homes. It was my personal experience that on my periodic trips to Managua people continuously warned me to watch out for the advances of the Costeñas and often predicted that if I was not careful I would *quedar en la costa con una negra* (settle on the coast with a black woman). The magical abilities of Costeños are not, however, perceived to be part of an established and codified tradition of witchcraft. Rather, their powers are perceived to be innate and primal. Significantly, their influence is thought to rely upon the native flora and fauna of the region. Again, the attribution of these kinds of powers to Costeños is entirely consistent with the primitivist framework.

TURNING LEAVES OF TREES INTO BILLS OF CASH

Pacific Nicaraguans are not the only people who employ this primitivist framework. To differing degrees Costeños also operate under some of these assumptions. This situation can be understood within a recursive model in which many of the qualities that Pacific Nicaraguans attribute to Costeños are in turn attributed by Costeños to Miskito Indians who, in some cases, attribute these qualities to Sumu Indians.¹⁶ Costeños, even Miskitu-speaking Costeños who view themselves at some level as Indians, often attribute magical qualities to rural Indians who are believed to have the ability to turn themselves into animals—a common theme in Costeño oral tradition. Costeños frequently tell stories about shape-changing humans who have the ability to turn themselves into wild and domesticated animals as well as trees and vines.

One example of this belief was expressed to me during an evening of socializing and casual rum drinking in Puerto Cabezas. The topic of conversation that evening was the lumber business and how the US companies extracted pine and fine hardwoods (mahogany and royal cedar) from the forests of the Atlantic Coast. The group consisted of four young men including myself and three forty-to-sixty-year-old veterans of the US-dominated lumber industry in the Atlantic Coast, which in the North used Puerto Cabezas as its operations base. The conversation was conducted in Spanish mixed with Creole English, and the speakers, all of whom spoke Miskitu to a varying degree and could point to their own Miskito heritage, generally considered themselves Spaniards.¹⁷ The conversation drifted from the ways in which logs were identified and transported to the different jobs that the North American

bosses assigned to Nicaraguan workers and finally to the topic of legendary lumber workers. It was the general consensus of the older men that Indians were the best at working in the bush and that Spaniards and Black men were more suited to city work. Each of them boasted of their knowledge of the natural geography of the region and their skill in negotiating the bush. However, their own skills and abilities could not compare to the legendary prowess of Indian lumber workers. Consider the following quotation from my field journal:

6/23. Don Chale said he saw a Miskito man on the Rio Coco turn two orange leaves into two 10 cordoba bills by rubbing them in his hands. While he [Don Chale] worked in the lumber business he knew this Sumu who when he was fully loaded with stuff if you lost sight of him you wouldn't see him until you got to camp and there he was all rested in his hammock. He explained that when he got ahead, a danto [deer] would come and carry his things. Don Chale told stories of the incredible strength of this brujo [witch] who worked in the lumber business. He once beat up 16 guardias [soldiers] all at once. He did a whole crew's work. When he got killed this insignificant [unimpressive person] who looked like me [the anthropologist] shot him in the back and his chest exploded outward. He didn't die though. His eyes stayed open and his body started to stink. I asked [Don Chale] why they didn't take him to the hospital and he said because he had nothing—no throat, no heart, etc. They went and found a duenda [female witch/boogie man] from far away who said she could put him to sleep. [She] gathered his possessions up and put them in a gourd with a candle and put this into a river and this immediately started to travel upstream. She said that when it came back downstream the man would die. It was true.

This story, and others like it that were commonly told by *Porteños* (the local term of self-reference, along with *Port People*, used by inhabitants of the city), emphasized the magical qualities of Indians, their special partnership with wild plants and animals, and their ability to turn themselves into particular plants and animals.

Clearly the expressions of a primitivist framework run the gamut from highly prejudicial to relatively benign and are manifested in varying degrees by *Costeños* of all kinds as well as Pacific Nicaraguans. For the purposes of this article, it is important to note that for many Nicaraguans the material poverty of the Atlantic Coast is explained directly by the natural abundance of the region and the perceived existential closeness of all or part of its inhabitants to this natural abundance. This is an existential closeness in the sense the very humanity of *Costeños* is taken to be intimately related to the wildness of the natural environment. My informants, particularly but not exclusively Spaniards and Pacific Nicaraguans, consistently analyzed the root of *Costeño* poverty in the same way. In their view the Atlantic Coast was poor and unproductive as a direct result of the fact that the sheer abundance of the region

stifled human industriousness. Hence the following refrain, versions of which I heard frequently during my fieldwork, “Why would a person work hard [along the Atlantic Coast], if you can just go to the pier and catch a fish for dinner?”

“EL PUERTO ESTÁ PALMADO”: COSTEÑO COSMOPOLITANISM

In stark contrast to the above-outlined primitivist framework, Costeños value their own outward-looking orientation in which they welcome social, kin, economic, political, and cultural ties to the wider world. In this sense they see themselves as a particularly modern and worldly people who often are at the center of global events. I call this set of beliefs *cosmopolitanism*.

In the testimonies of my informants in 1992 and 1993, I found that the issue Costeños found most intolerable was the economic deprivations and changes that had occurred after the Sandinista Revolution. The lack of wage labor opportunities—particularly in the agro-industrial sector—caused by the flight of North American companies, stood out in the minds of my informants as the most prominent of these deprivations. Given the importance of Porteños’ collective self-image as a cosmopolitan people, the decapitalization in the region had significant social and cultural ramifications beyond the purely economic hardships it produced.

In my interviews with Costeños about “Sandino time” (the regional term for the eleven years of Sandinista administration) in Puerto Cabezas, my informants consistently returned to, in one form or another, the theme of abandonment. Whereas in their testimonies about Port (Puerto Cabezas) before the Revolution they nostalgically emphasized the connection of the city to the wider world as well as its action (*movimiento*), their post-revolutionary descriptions emphasized the feeling of isolation and stagnation that set in during the economic and political upheaval of the 1980s. In the minds of Porteños, Port had become a forsaken place that, despite its increasing population and nominal political/administrative importance, no longer offered its residents the kind of life that they once enjoyed (and were perceived to have enjoyed) in the past. Porteños did not simply lament the high levels of unemployment that resulted from the flight of the resource-extracting foreign companies that had once pumped jobs and dollars into the regional economy. Equally prominent in their testimonies was the sense of being isolated and disconnected from the wider world. This isolation was evidenced by, among other things, the lack of activity on the pier; the disrepair of the city’s houses; the immigration of the so-called “original Port People” to the United States; the unwillingness of these migrants to return to Port to visit; the absence of working foreigners in the city (as opposed to the leftist political tourists who visited the city throughout the 1980s and 1990s and almost always disappointed Porteños by their overly casual dress and their frugal spending habits); and the chronic shortage of goods—particularly those goods that had been associated with the pre-Sandinista “company time.” These goods included items such as clothes, appliances, flour, and North American knickknacks from playing cards to flashlights.

Porteños unwaveringly described the situation of Port as lamentable. In Spanish one of the adjectives my informants most frequently used to describe Port was *palmado*, a slang term that denotes destitution and poverty. In our endless conversations about the extreme levels of poverty and violence in the city, one of my key informants constantly used the refrain "*pobre Bilwi*" (poor Bilwi) to describe the present state of affairs. In Miskitu, my informants described Port during Sandino time as *sari* (sad) because there was no work and no money (*wark apu, lalah apu*). This sentiment did not change with the electoral defeat of the Sandinista administration in 1990. During my fieldwork in 1992 and 1993 Port continued to be abandoned.

The fact that the hardships of the post-revolutionary period in Puerto Cabezas were experienced as abandonment speaks to the Porteños' placed importance on maintaining cultural, social, and economic ties with the outside world. This outward-looking orientation is a defining characteristic of Costeños that North American ethnographers have noted throughout the century, although they generally have recognized this as a Miskito trait.¹⁸ Costeños generally expect the events and actors of the international arena to affect their lives and at times this leads them to overestimate the degree to which these events are likely to impinge on their world.

Costeño receptiveness toward outsiders has also been noted throughout the ethnographic literature and nothing I observed in Puerto Cabezas contradicted this observation. Indeed, this trait proved helpful during my research as Porteños eagerly volunteered to speak with me (a Miskitu-speaking Latino Gringo of "Spanish" Nicaraguan parentage) without hesitation about topics I expected to invite greater reticence. I also observed that despite the city's early history of racial violence and despite Porteños' near-obsession with racial banter (particularly pertaining to skin color), the people of Puerto Cabezas and the Atlantic Coast are surprisingly racially tolerant. Porteños recognize that Port had always been a place inhabited by a wide variety of different races and nations (*razas* and *naciones* in local usage). Indeed, during Sandino time the presence of people from diverse parts of world (China, Turkey, Italy, Japan, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Honduras, Mexico, Germany, the United States, etc.) served as welcome indication to Porteños of the economic vitality of the port and the region. As a consequence of the Revolution, the demography of the population of Port radically changed as refugees from the Miskitu-speaking Rio Coco area overwhelmingly populated the city.¹⁹ Simultaneously, the Creole elite and Chinese merchants fled the city.²⁰ Government administrators and soldiers from Managua (whose numbers had previously been far fewer) entered the region en masse, particularly Port. The upshot of these changes was that Port became far less international and racially diverse. Porteños regarded this fact as symptomatic of the abandonment of the city.

Porteños distinguish themselves from other Costeños on the basis of their own ability to speak Spanish and relate to Spaniards. They take pride in their own multilingualism (English, Spanish, and Miskitu) which they contrast with the monolingualism of English-speaking areas to the South and Miskitu-speaking areas to the West and North. Porteños universally recognize the

importance of multilingualism and they regard this trait as an integral part of being prepared (*preparada*)—an extremely important and commonly used term that can be translated as educated or sophisticated. To be prepared in this context means to possess the necessary education and formally acquired skills to succeed in a profession (*carrera* in local usage). Preparation, apart from being a mark of personal refinement, also places one in position to attain a job of high prestige, which in Port is defined as those jobs that spare one from routine manual labor. Hence in Nicaragua, no matter how much folk knowledge a *campesino* may have with regard to agricultural techniques, he or she would never be described as *preparada*. Porteños view themselves as being better prepared than other Costeños on the basis of their multilingualism and their greater access to formal education and training given by foreign companies, missionary churches, and the Nicaraguan State. Notwithstanding the abandonment of the region, Porteños view the relatively more advanced infrastructure (running water, electricity, roads, etc.) of the city in comparison to other regions of the Mosquito Coast as another indication of the privilege and, indeed, superiority, of Porteños. During my fieldwork in Puerto Cabezas, Porteños manifested this self-perception in a multitude of ways, including popular jokes. The following case provides a clear illustration of this attitude, particularly as it relates to multilingualism.

“QUÉ TAL AMIGA?”: MULTILINGUALISM

During my stay in Puerto Cabezas I participated as a player in a number of sports leagues, and I came to establish good rapport with many of the city’s athletes and athletic boosters. For that reason, when the city organized its all-star baseball team to send to the annual intra-regional championship, popularly known as the Serie del Atlántico, I was allowed to tag along with the team as an anthropologist/mascot. That year the series was held in Pearl Lagoon, a predominantly English-speaking, commercial-fishing-oriented city in the southern region that is accessible only by canal and river. During the eighteenth and nineteenth century the city of Pearl Lagoon was an important political center in Mosquito and the Mosquito Reserve and today is considered, next to Bluefields, which lies twenty kilometers to the south, the second most important city of the RAAS—the Southern Atlantic Autonomous Region.²¹ Pearl Lagoon has, since the nineteenth century, generally been recognized as a distinctly Creole town. The opportunity to travel with a large group of Porteños to the Creole city of Pearl Lagoon provided an excellent opportunity to study regional ideologies at work in a traditional and relatively depoliticized setting.

I observed that among Porteños the division of the Indian category along racial and cultural faultlines was parallel to the division of the Black category as well. This phenomena was most clearly illustrated by a series of jokes about the “primitive” people of Pearl Lagoon that were told to me by a self-proclaimed Black man of the Puerto Cabezas baseball team. Upon our return to Port, I joined a group of young men who had gathered around Ted, a charismatic veteran baseball player, as he was describing, in English, his impressions

of Pearl Lagoon. Ted remarked to the group what “primitive” life in Pearl Lagoon was like compared to Port. He noted that only a few cars existed in the entire city and he drew laughter from the crowd when he noted that all the streets were paved with grass. He also made fun of the sporadic and limited electrical service in the city that every evening left people from Pearl Lagoon talking on their porches in the darkness. The crowd received with much merriment his mimicry of a toothless elderly man swatting mosquitoes in the darkness.

Ted continued, noting that, in contrast to Port people, the Black men of Pearl Lagoon spoke Spanish very poorly. He told the following two jokes, among others, as humorous illustrations of this phenomenon:²²

A Spaniard went to Lagoon to visit one friend. When the Spaniard reached the woman house she said, “*Qué tal amiga?*” [How are you, friend?]. The woman got vexed [angry] and said, “You come to my house and call me tall and meager!”

Later, another Spaniard gone to the house and said, “*Como está?*” [How are you?]. And the old man on the porch turned round and said, “Eh, Esther someone looking you.”

In both of these jokes, the buffoon is the monolingual English speaker from Pearl Lagoon whose inability to understand basic Spanish causes an embarrassing misunderstanding. In the first joke, the person mistakes the Spanish words *tal* and *amiga* for the English words *tall* and *meager* and therefore wrongly takes offense. In the second, the old man mistakes the Spanish question *Como está?* for the English command, *Come Esther*.

These jokes illustrate a series of widespread beliefs on the part of Porteños, the relevance of which has often been overlooked in the accounts of the region. First, Porteños highly value their own ability to speak Spanish, as well as English and Miskitu. This observation stands in contrast to the oversimplified view present in much of the social science and journalism about the region which contends that the crisis of the 1980s was caused by a cultural and linguistic clash in which the Pacific Nicaraguan government was rejected on the basis of the Costeño rejection of alien culture and language. Second, this case demonstrates the role of regionally based distinctions (in this case Porteño versus non-Porteño) that crosscut racial categories (for example, Creoles, Miskitos, and Spaniards). In much of the literature on the region, analysts have neglected the kinds of intra-regional distinction outlined here in favor of approaching the standard racial categories as if they were self-evident, undifferentiated, and unchanging groups.

“WARK APU, LALAH APU”: HARD TIMES IN PUERTO CABEZAS

Porteño narratives of “company time”—the idealized mid-twentieth-century period in which jobs were most abundant and US companies were most active in the region—focused on the level of action (in English) or *movimiento* (in

Spanish) in Port. Although they recognized that work opportunities were unstable and that pay in the US companies was low, they valued the dynamism of the coastal economy. In their narrative of “company time,” Porteños consistently emphasized the past action of Port, which contrasted with its present stagnation or sadness (*tristeza*). My informants steadfastly lamented that, “*el Puerto esta palmado*” (the Port is busted) and “*no hay movimiento*” (there is no action). Action for Porteños signified the presence of a wide variety of international industrial and commercial interests that directly and indirectly resulted in economic opportunities for Porteños. The perception of action promoted in Porteños a highly valued sense of connection to the wider world.

North American ethnographers have noted that Costeños, particularly Miskito Indians, value their present and historical ties to the English-speaking Atlantic world and overestimate the importance and the centrality of their position within that world. Charles Hale and Edmund Gordon, for example, recognized what they respectively call “Anglo affinity” and “Anglo ideology” as central elements of Miskito and Creole worldviews.²³ Based on observations made during her fieldwork in the 1960s Helms claimed that the Miskito rejected the “Hispanic . . . sphere of influence” and “imitated [the] Anglo-American . . . sphere of influence.”²⁴ She argued that the Miskito attempted “to feel psychologically a part of modern times” but that this created anxieties because “the Miskito do not fully understand the nature of the modern world.”²⁵ She wrote:

For example, at the time of this study the news was heavy with the increasing military involvement of the United States in Vietnam. However, reports of fighting in the Far East were interpreted by the people of Asang to mean that the war would very likely soon affect them, because once they too experienced conflict on their river in which the United States was involved (the Sandino Affair), and if it happened once it could happen again. People talked incessantly about keeping an eye out for airplanes and awaiting an attack. Yet beneath the tension was a feeling that it was a mark of importance and recognition to have war on the river, or, in other words, if warfare were part of the modern world, the Miskito should be involved also.²⁶

Although Helms’ assertions as to the relationship between the Miskito and the so-called modern world have serious practical and conceptual limitations, she attempted to explain an important and undeniably real phenomenon.²⁷ This phenomenon is related to the inevitable cultural impact of a regionally specific, not ethnically specific, political economy in which exchange between Costeños and Anglo-Americans has created a profound dependency on interaction with more powerful external actors.

In light of this political and economic history, it is not surprising to find that Porteños find the current state of material poverty in the Atlantic Coast particularly appalling. They fervently affirm in a multitude of different ways their strong conviction that, given the natural abundance of the Mosquito Coast, they shouldn’t be so poor. They do not commonly base these judg-

ments on moral, ethical, religious, or any other of a host of possible reasons. Rather they shouldn't be so poor because their land is so rich. According to the cosmopolitan framework through which they view the world, the natural resources of the region should translate into the own material well-being. This environmental dissonance stands in contrast to the other side of the country where, to quote Lancaster's provocative title, "Life is Hard."²⁸

CONCLUSION

The analysis of regional ideology that I have developed in this article provides insight into the future prospects for the Mosquito Coast as well as the roots of the Costeño-Sandinista crisis of the 1980s. The Mosquito Coast of Nicaragua received a great deal of international attention in the 1980s as a result of the persistent opposition that Costeños manifested toward the programs and policies of the Sandinista government. The most serious case of this opposition occurred when armed Costeño groups incorporated themselves into the ranks of the US-trained and -supported Contras. In their international pronouncements during this period, Costeño leaders increasingly couched their aspirations and goals in the language of ethnicity and cultural difference as they appealed to their rights as ethnic minorities and/or indigenous peoples. Also, in the subsequent process of regional autonomy that started in 1987 and continued throughout my fieldwork in Puerto Cabezas, appeals to cultural and ethnic difference continued to be the very substance of the political discourse in the region. Social scientists and journalists universally interpreted the Costeño-Sandinista confrontation as a prototypical example of ethnic conflict and cultural clash between marginalized ethnic groups, specifically Miskito Indians, and an expansive nation-state. In contrast, the conflict between the Sandinistas and main Contra forces was interpreted as a standard case of the Central American cycle of revolution and counter-revolution which pitted the Right and its allies against the Left. The subsequent autonomy process, in which each ethnic group was officially given proportional representation in two regional senates, was represented as a clear case of identity politics.²⁹

A standard analysis of the causes of the Costeño-Sandinista crisis quickly emerged that emphasized the deeply rooted cultural differences between inhabitants of the Atlantic and Pacific regions of the country. The idiosyncrasies of Atlantic Coast history and social structure, particularly in regard to British domination of the region until 1894 as well as the enclave economy in which US companies exercised a *de facto* governmental role until well into the twentieth century, immediately were brought into focus in order to explain the nature of the ethnic or national problems that the revolution faced. Although a great deal of scholarly effort, both academic and otherwise, was dedicated to this problem, little attention was paid to ways in which these cultural differences manifested themselves in everyday practice or how they constituted part of specific regional and national ideological systems. The vast majority of interpretive energy was directed at positing a direct link between the alleged ethnic particularities formed in the past and the modern predis-

position to resist Pacific Nicaraguan governmental expansion. This standard analysis, supported by most of the anthropological and historical literature of the 1980s, operated on the misleading assumption that the region was divided into distinct groups, each of which manifested a distinct culture. The literature of the era failed to adequately separate its analytic categories from the ideologies of ethnic difference on the ground that were becoming increasingly politicized during this period.³⁰

In addition, much of the literature about the conflict operated within a “primitivist” framework that, as I have detailed in this article, also operates in the Nicaraguan ideological landscape. Internationally and nationally, the confrontation between the Sandinista government and the Contras was presented as a military and political question related to the continuance of the Nicaraguan National Guard that for almost fifty years had propped up the Somoza dictatorship. However, the armed rebellion of Costeño groups was viewed as an ethnic and indigenous question that was related to cultural and historical differences between the Pacific and Atlantic regions of Nicaragua. In an environment of increasing polarization, Sandinistas and their allies labeled the Contras Somocistas (from Somoza, or supporter) and *vendepatrias* (traitors), whose behavior could be explained by purely political factors such as political patronage and foreign intervention, respectively. Meanwhile these same pro-Sandinistas applied the label *separatists* to the insurgent Costeños whose behavior, in their view, needed to be explained by cultural factors.

On the other hand, ardent pro-Contra groups commonly referred to the Contras as pro-Democracy rebels and even (to use the term disseminated by the propaganda machine of the Reagan Administration) “freedom fighters” who were fighting for enlightened principles such as democracy and freedom.³¹ Costeño combatants, in contrast, were referred to as “warriors” and members of separate “nations” and “ethnic groups” who were fighting for “tribal” rights.³² Their behavior needed to be understood as a manifestation of deeply rooted identification with the land rather than abstract ideals. Whereas both sides predictably leveled accusations of military atrocities against the other, the Reagan Administration referred to atrocities allegedly committed on the Atlantic Coast as “genocide.”³³

Clearly, both sides (pro-Sandinista and anti-Sandinista) mobilized a rhetoric that made a consistent and clear set of distinctions between politics and culture, ideology and identity, and applied this to the geographical distinction of Pacific Coast versus Atlantic Coast. Hence, culture and identity were considered to have motivated the Indians and ethnic groups of the Atlantic Coast, while politics, patronage, and ideological conviction motivated the northern *campesinos* (the rank and file of the Contras). Ultimately a “primitivist” distinction between nature and civilization provided the master principle from which these other oppositions derived.

This article offers an analysis that avoids the pervasive assumption found in much of the scholarship about the Mosquito Coast that assumes the existence of a radical ethnic plurality in the region, such that the region is presumed to be composed of distinct ethnic groups, each with its own distinct culture. The Mosquito Coast can more productively be viewed as a single,

albeit highly diverse, society with a regionally specific social structure that has been shaped historically by unique political and economic forces. Much of the common understanding of the region, as manifested in the accounts of scholars, journalists, and others inside and outside Nicaragua, relies on an all-too-pervasive analytic framework that invests socio-racial categories with a degree of fixity and cultural content that obscures the pan-regional culture that exists. Based on an intensive ethnographic study of Puerto Cabezas, I have provided a set of non-ethnic analytical categories with which to create an alternative reading of the above standard analysis by focusing on the regionally grounded concepts of “primitivism,” “cosmopolitanism,” and “environmental dissonance” employed by ordinary Costeños, Spaniards, and other actors in the region.

Apart from providing a fruitful approach to understanding the roots of the Costeño-Sandinista conflict of the 1980s, this analysis also helps assess the future prospects for the Mosquito Coast. With this aim in mind, allow me to introduce one last anecdote. In 1992 I attended the Indigenous Assembly of Miskito Indian communities that had been called by Steadman Fagoth, the controversial ex-leader of the largest Miskito faction of the Contras. Representatives from most Miskito villages and neighborhoods had walked, paddled, and driven for days to crowd into the large auditorium in the river city of Waspam. Fagoth drew the following two lists on the chalkboard:

1. Texas
2. California
3. Ukraine
4. South Africa
5. RAAN [the North Atlantic Autonomous Region]

| | |
|--------------|-------------|
| Oil | 180 million |
| Pesca [fish] | 150 million |
| Gold | 150 million |
| Lumber | 100 million |
| Total | 580 million |

He proceeded to explain, in Miskitu, that the first list was of the five wealthiest regions in the world in terms of natural resources. The last list represented the monetary value of these resources that would soon be enjoyed by Costeños once the US companies would accept their invitations to return.

Fagoth’s formulation was deeply resonant with his audience for a number of reasons. Costeños perceive the wealth of their region as part of the regional patrimony that should be converted into their material improvement. In their ideal state of affairs they do not envision themselves as Don Paco’s noble Indian peasants that extract subsistence crops from an unforgiving soil. Rather they hark back to a time in Mosquito Coast history where wage labor jobs and imported goods were available in abundance. The Sandinista Revolution, with its well-publicized hostility toward the United States and its policy of nationalization of industries was a large step away from achieving

this ideal. The capital flight of the 1980s and the isolation caused by the Contra War only heightened the sense of environmental dissonance experienced by the inhabitants of the Atlantic Coast. Indeed, the opposition of Costeños to the revolutionary program in the first place should be understood not simply as a product of ethnic conflict (however defined) but also as the product of the perception that the revolutionary government would isolate the region and push it farther away from its people's cosmopolitan ideal. This also is a kind of cultural clash, but not the sort posited in the literature on the region, which traced the conflict to "misunderstandings" between Sandinistas and Miskitos.

For better or worse, Costeños are searching for viable ways to cash in on the natural resources that exist within the Mosquito Coast. Their cosmopolitan ethos and their experience of environmental dissonance give them a strong ideological predisposition to attempt to rectify their current situation through recourse to foreign extractive industries. Just like the mythical Indian of Mosquito Coast folklore who could turn the leaves of orange trees into bills of cash, the modern inhabitants of the Atlantic Coast and their leaders are working on the same magic. The trick will be benefiting from this conversion within a global economic system that rarely rewards the custodians of raw materials.

NOTES

1. Among the inhabitants of the Mosquito Coast, "company time" refers to that period of regional history (approximately from the 1920s to 1979) in which North American companies operated on a large scale in the region. The flight of these companies at the time of the triumph of the Sandinista Revolution punctuated the end of company time.

2. *Mosco* is a pejorative term used to refer to Miskito Indians.

3. I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Nicaragua (most of the time in Puerto Cabezas) from April 1992 until September 1993. I employed both participant-observation and formal and informal interviews with a wide variety of informants including foreigners, Costeños, and Pacific Nicaraguans. All interviewee quotations are from this time period.

4. *Costeño* is a term commonly used in Nicaragua to refer to inhabitants of the Atlantic Coast. It is a Spanish term roughly equivalent to the English "coast people" and the Miskitu *kus uplika*, all of which are commonly used within Nicaragua and the Mosquito Coast.

5. James S. Anaya and Todd S. Crider, "Indigenous Peoples, the Environment, and Commercial Forestry in Developing Countries: The Case of Awas Tingni," *Human Rights Quarterly* 18 (1996): 345-367; James S. Anaya and Theodore MacDonald, "Demarcating Indigenous Territories in Nicaragua: The Case of Awa Tingni," *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 19 (1995): 69-73; Derek Denniston, "Defending the Land with Maps," *World Watch* 7 (1994): 27-33; International Work Group on Indigenous Affairs, *The Indigenous World, 1995-6* (Copenhagen: IWGIA Publications, 1996); Bernard Nietschmann, "Conservation by Conflict in Nicaragua," *Natural History* (November 1992): 35-48.

6. The distinction I make between *primitivism* and *cosmopolitanism* recapitulates the civilization-nature dichotomy that Fredrick Pike fruitfully explored in his historical analysis of US–Latin American relations in the Americas (Frederik Pike, *The United States and Latin America: Myths and Stereotypes of Civilization and Nature* [Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992]). However, in contrast to Pike, who focuses on the ways in which North Americans applied this flawed worldview to Latin Americans, I recognize that within Nicaragua (and the Americas generally) this framework is adopted in varying degrees by those very individuals who North Americans have viewed as primitive. Hence a primitivist ideology does not easily index a defined group of people (North Americans, Latin Americans, Pacific Nicaraguans, and Costeños, for example). Rather it is part of a complex of ideas that are expressed in a contextual way across a broad spectrum of regions and social groups.

7. The following is far from a comprehensive list of some of the major journal articles and books published in this decade that specifically address the cultural roots of the Costeño-Sandinista conflict. Much of this work is of excellent quality, especially in light of the political and logistical challenges to conducting research along the Mosquito Coast during the 1980s: Richard N. Adams, “The Dynamics of Societal Diversity: Notes from Nicaragua for a Sociology of Survival,” *American Ethnologist* 8 (1981): 1–20; Akwesasne Notes, “Miskito Nation: An Indian ‘Problem’ for Nicaragua,” *Akwesasne Notes* 13 (1981): 11; Philippe Bourgois, “Class, Ethnicity, and the State among the Miskitu Amerindians of Northeastern Nicaragua,” *Latin American Perspectives* 13 (1981): 22–39; id., “Ethnic Minorities,” in *The Nicaraguan Revolution: the First Five Years*, ed. Thomas W. Walker (New Yorker: Praeger, 1985); Hans Peter Buvollen, “The Miskito-Sandinista Conflict: International Concerns and Outside Actors,” *Journal of Peace Proposals* 18 (1987): 591–601; Centro de Apoyo a Programas y Proyectos (CAPRI), *Región Autónoma del Atlántico Norte: El Desafío de la Autonomía* (Managua: Editorial El Amanecer, 1992); Centro de Investigación y Documentación de la Costa Atlántica (CIDCA), *Trabíl Nani: Historical Background and Current Situation on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua* (New York: The Riverside Church Disarmament Project, 1984); CIERA, *La Mosquitia y la Revolución* (Managua: Colección Blas Real Espinales, 1981); Philip A. Dennis, “Costeños and the Revolution in Nicaragua,” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 23 (1981): 271–296; Martin Diskin, *The Manipulation of Indigenous Struggles in Reagan versus the Sandinistas: The Undeclared War on Nicaragua*, ed. Thomas W. Walker (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987); id., *Revolution and Ethnic Identity: The Nicaraguan Case*, in *Conflict, Migration and the Expression of Ethnicity*, ed. Nancie L. Gonzalez and Carolyn S. McCommon (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989); id., *Ethnic Discourse and the Challenge to Anthropology: The Nicaraguan Case*, in *Nation-states and Indians in Latin America*, eds. Greg Urban and Joel Sherzer (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992); Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *La Cuestión Miskita en la Revolución Nicaraguense* (Mexico City: Editorial Línea, 1986); id., *The Miskito Indians of Nicaragua* (London: The Minority Rights Group, Report 79, 1988); Stedman Fagoth, *La Moskitia—Autonomía Regional* (n.p., 1986); Edmund T. Gordon, *History, Identity, Consciousness and Revolution: Afro-Nicaraguans and the Nicaraguan Revolution*, in *Ethnic Groups and the Nation State: The Case of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua*, ed. CIDCA (Stockholm: University of Stockholm, 1987); id., “Creole Identity and the Sandinista Revolution,” *Cimarrón* 11 (1989): 119–139; id., “Revolution, Common Sense and the Dynamics of African-Nicaraguan Politics,” *Critique of Anthropology* 15 (1995): 5–36;

Charles R. Hale, "Interethnic Relations and Class Structure in Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast: An Historical Overview," in *Ethnic Groups and the Nation-State: The Case of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua*, ed. CIDCA (Stockholm: University of Stockholm, 1987); id., "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 of Nicaragua*, ed. CIDCA (Stockholm: University of Stockholm, 1987); id., *Resistance and Contradiction: Miskitu Indians and the Nicaraguan State, 1894–1987* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1994); Jorge Jenkins Molieri, *El Desafío Indígena de Nicaragua: El Caso de los Miskitos* (Managua: Editorial Vanguardia, 1986); Theodore MacDonald, "Nicaragua: National Development and Atlantic Coast Indians," *Cultural Survival Newsletter* 5 (1981): 9–11; id., *The Moral Economy of the Miskito Indians: Local Roots of a Geopolitical Conflict*, in *Ethnicities and Nations: Processes of Interethnic Relations in Latin America, Southeast Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Remo Guidieri et al. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988); John Mohawk, "Marxism: Perspectives from a Native Movement," *Akwesasne Notes* 13 (1981): 9–10; id., "The Possibilities of Uniting Indians and the Left for Social Change in Nicaragua," *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 6 (1982): 24–25; id., "Nicaragua: Depressions Cloud the Issues," *Akwesasne Notes* (Late Winter 1983); John Mohawk and Shelton Davis, "Revolutionary Contradictions: Miskito and Sandinistas in Nicaragua," *Akwesasne Notes* (Late Spring 1982): 7–12; Bernard Nietschmann, "Nicaragua's Other War: Indian Warriors vs Sandinistas," *Coevolution Quarterly* 42 (1984): 41–47; id., "The Indian Resistance in Nicaragua," *Akwesasne Notes* 16 (Early Spring 1984): 12–13; id., *The Unknown War: The Miskito Nation, Nicaragua, and the United States* (New York: Freedom House, 1989); Klaudine Ohland and Robin Schneider, eds. *National Revolution and Indigenous Identity: The Conflict between Sandinistas and Miskito Indians on Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast* (Copenhagen: International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 1983); William Ramirez, "The Imperialist Threat and the Indigenous Problem in Nicaragua," *Akwesasne Notes* 14 (1982): 13–16; Brooklyn Rivera, "MISURASTA-FSLN Historical Relations," in *Voices Against the State: Nicaraguan Opposition to the FSLN*, ed. Steven Blakemore (Miami: University of Miami Institute of Interamerican Studies, 1988); Douglas Sanders, *Mosquitia and Nicaragua: an Incomplete Revolution*, in *Native Power: the Quest for National Autonomy and Nationhood of Indigenous Peoples* (Oslo: Universit ets forlaget, 1985); Robin Schneider, *Rebellion der Miskito: Indianische Sozialbewegung und Sandinistische Revolution in Nicaragua* (Berlin: Edition Parabolis, 1996); United States Department of State, *Broken Promises: Sandinista Repression of Human Rights in Nicaragua* (Washington, DC: Office of Public Diplomacy for Latin America and the Caribbean, 1984); id., *Dispossessed: The Miskito Indians in Sandinista Nicaragua*. (Washington, DC: Department of State Publication 9478, 1986); id., *Human Rights in Nicaragua under the Sandinistas: From Revolution to Repression* (Washington, DC: Department of State Publications 9467, 1986); Carlos M. Vilas, *State, Class, and Ethnicity in Nicaragua: Capitalist Modernization and Revolutionary Change on the Atlantic Coast* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1989); Armstrong Wiggins, "Colonialism and Revolution: Nicaraguan Sandinism and the Liberation of the Miskito, Sumu and Rama Peoples: An Interview with Armstrong Wiggins," *Akwesasne Notes* 13 (1981): 4–15.

I review this literature in detail in Baron L. Pineda, "Nationalism and Ethnic Politics on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua" (master's thesis, University of Chicago, 1991); id., *The "Port People" of Bilwi: Ideologies of Race, Lexicons of Identity and the Politics of Peoplehood in the Mosquito Coast* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1998).

8. Alexander Henderson, *A Grammar of the Mosquito Language* (New York: J. Gray, 1846), iii.

9. Nancy L. Gonzalez, *Sojourners of the Caribbean: Ethnogenesis and Ethnohistory of the Garifuna* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 32. For an interesting series of articles that addresses the geopolitical motivations for this shift in portrayal of the Miskito Indians, see Michael D. Olien, "E. G. Squier and the Miskito: Anthropological Scholarship and Political Propaganda," *Ethnohistory* 32 (1985): 111–133; id., "After the Indian Slave Trade: Cross-Cultural Trade in the Western Caribbean Rimland, 1816–1820," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 44 (1988): 41–66; id., "Were the Miskito Indians Black? Ethnicity, Politics, and Plagiarism in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 62 (1988): 27–50; id., "Imperialism, Ethnogenesis and Marginality: Ethnicity and Politics on the Mosquito Coast, 1845–1864," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 16 (1988): 1–29.

10. European and American outsiders historically portrayed the indomitable Indians of the region as "uncivilized" and "savage" in contrast to the subjugated *Indios cristianos* (Christian Indians) of the more populated areas of Central and South America. Germán Romero Vargas, *Las Sociedades del Atlántico de Nicaragua en los Siglos XVII y XVIII* (Managua: Colección Cultural Banco Nicaraguense, 1995), 221.

11. In other words, the classification of American peoples into a system that pitted civilization against savagery was a working part of a larger system of domination and conquest.

12. Paraphrasing one of his informant's prejudices toward the Atlantic Coast, Lancaster wrote, "It was a mysterious zone where all the normal rules of reason were suspended, inverted; a dark land untouched by science, populated by natives known by their rejection of rightness—*gente mala*: bad folks, evil people" (Roger Lancaster. *Life is Hard: Machismo, Danger, and the Intimacy of Power in Nicaragua* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992]), 213.

13. Les W. Field, "Constructing Local Identities in a Revolutionary Nation: The Cultural Politics of the Artisan Class in Nicaragua, 1979–90," *American Ethnologist* 22 (1995): 786–806.

14. This practice clearly has its roots in the historical geopolitics of Central America in which Spain and later the Republic of Nicaragua vigorously rejected territorial and national claims by *Costeños* that were based in part on their status as indigenous peoples with a history of continuous inhabitation of the Mosquito Coast region. During the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries Spain and the Republic of Nicaragua continuously opposed Miskito territorial claims on the grounds that the Miskito Indians were the offspring of runaway African slaves and therefore could not legitimately claim sovereignty (Troy S. Floyd, *The Anglo-Spanish Struggle for the Mosquitia* [Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1967]). In his provocatively titled article, "Were the Miskito Indians Black? Ethnicity, Politics, and Plagiarism in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," Michael Olien provides a fascinating discussion of the geopolitical implications of Indian and Black identification in the nineteenth century (Olien, "Were the Miskito Indians Black?" *Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 62, numbers 1–2: 27–50).

15. In his fieldwork in a lower-class neighborhood of Managua, Roger Lancaster took note of this association made by Pacific Nicaraguans between *Costeños* and witchcraft (see Lancaster, *Life is Hard*, 212).

16. Here I am following Susan Gal's use of the concept of recursivity that she

developed in a paper delivered to the Department of Anthropology at Northwestern University (Susan Gal, "Linguistic Ideology in Eastern Europe" [paper presented at Northwestern University Department of Anthropology Seminar, February 16, 1996]).

17. Although ethnic identification is highly contextual in Puerto Cabezas, to refer to oneself as a *Spaniard* is to claim some degree of Pacific origin and to assert distance from Creoles and Miskitos.

18. Eduard Conzemius, *Ethnographical Survey of the Miskito and Sumu Indians of Honduras and Nicaragua* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 106, United States Government Printing Office, 1932); Philip A. Dennis and Michael D. Olien, "Kingship among the Miskito," *American Ethnologist* 11 (1984): 718–737; Hale, *Resistance and Contradiction*; Mary W. Helms, *Asang: Adaptations to Culture Contact in a Miskito Community* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1971).

19. Betty Muñoz, *Comunidades indígenas del Caribe nicaraguense: El Caso del Barrio El Cocal, Puerto Cabezas*, in *Persistencia Indígena en Nicaragua*, eds. German Romero Vargas et al. (Managua: CIDCA-UCA, 1992); Susan Norwood, *Mehrsprachigkeit und Amtssprache in Puerto Cabezas*, in *Mosquitia—die andere Hälfte Nicaraguas: Über Geschichte und Gegenwart der Atlantikküste*, eds. Klaus Meschkat et al. (Hamburg: Julius Verlag GmbH, 1987).

20. Baron L. Pineda, "The Chinese Creoles of Nicaragua: Identity, Economy and Revolution in a Caribbean Port City," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 4 (2001): 209–233.

21. Wolfgang Gabbert, *Creoles—Afroamerikaner im karibischen Tiefland von Nicaragua* (Hamburg: Lit Verlag, 1992).

22. The following text is a paraphrased version of these jokes that I reconstructed from my field notes. In the text I attempt to retain some of the flavor of the Creole English in which it was originally told.

23. Hale, *Resistance and Contradiction*, 15; Gordon, "African-Nicaragua Politics," 6.

24. Helms, *Asang*, 221.

25. *Ibid.*, 220–221.

26. *Ibid.*, 221.

27. Helms' juxtaposition of the Miskito and the "modern world" suffers from what Johannes Fabian in his penetrating critique of anthropology labeled the "temporal fallacy" (Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1983]). Here Fabian criticized the Western anthropological practice of denying and obscuring the "coevalness" of the Western self from the non-Western Other by associating non-Western cultures with the Western past.

28. Lancaster. *Life is Hard*.

29. See Charles Hale, "Cultural Politics of Identity in Latin America," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26 (1997): 567–590.

30. Richard Handler makes a similar critique of the role of social science in Quebecois nationalism: Richard Handler, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988).

31. Americas Watch, a nongovernmental human rights watchdog group documented the Reagan Administration's consistent exaggeration and/or fabrication of evidence of Sandinista atrocities. See Americas Watch Committee, *An Americas Watch Report: The Miskitos in Nicaragua 1981–1984* (New York: Americas Watch, 1984); *id.*, *With the Miskitos in Honduras* (New York: Americas Watch, 1986). The Inter-American

Commission on Human Rights (IAHCR), without specifically mentioning accusations made by the Reagan Administration, published a report that, although highly critical of Sandinista policies in the region, failed to confirm the most serious of atrocities allegedly committed by the Sandinista army—specifically, the mass killings of Miskito Indians. The IAHCR report did confirm arbitrary detentions and some cases of torture, abuse, and murder during the period between 1981 and 1983 (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, *Report on the Situation of Human Rights of a Segment of the Nicaraguan Population of Miskito Origin* [Washington, DC: Organization of American States, 1984]). For documentation of the “distortions” and misinformation produced by the Reagan Administration see Martin Diskin, *The Manipulation of Indigenous Struggles*.

32. Nietschmann, “Nicaragua’s Other War”; US Department of State, *Human Rights in Nicaragua*, 193.

33. For the official version of the US government see US Department of State Records, *Broken Promises*; id., *Dispossessed*; id., *Human Rights in Nicaragua*.