Indigenous Perspectives and Resource Management Contexts: 
The Case of Northeastern Nicaragua

By

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B.A., University of Oxford, 1994

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of The Requirements for 
The Degree Of
Master of Arts

in
The Faculty of Graduate Studies

Department of Resource Management and Environmental Studies

We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standards

The University of British Columbia
September 1998
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Abstract

As natural resources become scarcer, stakeholder competition over them has grown both more frequent and intense. Resource conflicts between indigenous peoples and nation-states can prove particularly problematic, since these stakeholders often perceive their respective management interests as being mutually incompatible. However, since inter-stakeholder competition invariably fosters destructive and short-termist patterns of environmental use, resource conflicts have to be addressed and resolved.

The potential of co-management arrangements - whereby competing stakeholders become partners in the development and implementation of management policies - to resolve conflicts between nation-states and indigenous peoples, is currently enjoying increasing cross-disciplinary support. Joint stewardship arrangements are not, however, always easily established. Incorporating the perspectives of those indigenous peoples who have historically been marginalised from management processes, and who must now be integrated within them, represents an essential precondition of co-management success.

This thesis analyses indigenous environmental perspectives in northeastern Nicaragua - with particular reference to the Miskitu Indians and forestry resources - to determine the types of cultural and context-specific considerations which genuine and sustainable co-management arrangements in this particular region would need to accommodate. Four principal spheres of indigenous experience, which inform Miskitu environmental perspectives, shapes the analytical framework: indigenous communities; institutions; global economies; political negotiation and leadership. By employing a multi-level, interdisciplinary and dialectic analysis, the thesis presents an alternative theoretical approach to resource managers attempting to understand and resolve comparative instances of inter-stakeholder conflict. It also strongly urges managers to appreciate the complexity and uniqueness of respective indigenous perspectives and management contexts, and the need to reject stereotypical representations of indigenous peoples, communities and institutions, when attempting to develop co-management agreements.

Whilst joint stewardship remains an important goal for resolving resource-conflicts between indigenous peoples and nation-states, it might not prove immediately viable in every management context. Locally-specific obstacles can indeed thwart the development of sustainable co-management regimes. In the particular case of northeastern Nicaragua, governance systems will need to be strengthened, inter-stakeholder trust fostered, and communities closely facilitated, before regional co-management initiatives can become effective.
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Acknowledgments

This thesis would never have been possible without the help of so many generous people that I am unfortunately unable to recognise them all by name here. However, I would like to acknowledge the contribution of those individuals and organisations who most directly made this research possible. I am particularly indebted to my supervisor, Tony Dorcey, and my first reader, Blanca Muratorio. Both have given me invaluable advice, support and encouragement throughout the various stages of this research. Whenever I strayed off track, they always got me back to my central thesis concerns and objectives; if it weren't for them, I'd probably be currently wrestling with the thirty-fifth draft of my thesis proposal.... Thanks also to Les Lavkulich for having faith in me and encouraging me to go my own way; and to Nancy Dick, for helping me out in so many different ways over the past few years. I would also like to recognise the support given me by all my fellow RMES students, especially Gary Kofinas, for the vital technical, moral and theoretical services provided, and Angela Crampton, for sharing my frustrations, and for encouraging me through example to get the thesis done! Particular thanks and recognition are due to Karl Offen, "my last resort", for being such an invaluable and ready source of information and resources on the Atlantic Coast over the last couple of years. I would also like to acknowledge the crucial contribution made by Luis Silva, not only for first getting me interested in the Miskitus and northeastern Nicaragua, but also for giving me the contacts I needed with which to launch my fieldwork. I also very much appreciate the financial support and independence given me by the UBC Graduate Fellowship and Centre for Human Settlements, without which my fieldwork and therefore thesis, would never have been possible.

In Nicaragua itself, I am greatly indebted to the Cunninghams, particularly Miss Judith Kain Cunningham, her daughter Mirna and granddaughter Judith: for giving me a home, for making my research possible, and for sharing it all with me. I would also like to thank CIDCA for so generously providing me with full access to their bibliographical resources, and to the faculty and students of URACCAN, for all their moral and logistical support. Special thanks is definitely owed to the members, supporters and advisors of the Elders' Council - the Consejo de Ancianos or Almuk nani - for welcoming me among them, and for helping and supporting my research in so many different ways. I would also like to thank all those people in the Regional Council, Regional Government, MARENA, MADENSA and SOLCARSA who gave me their time, and helped me appreciate the complexities of this region. I would especially like to recognise the great assistance given me by Maria Luisa Acosta, who not only facilitated my research in Awas Tingni, but also provided me with insights and information on many related regional issues. Thanks also to Avelino Cox, for hoarding so much knowledge on Miskitu culture, and for being willing to share it with me. To Rev. Santos Cleiban, for his insights on Asang and the Moravian Church, I am also extremely grateful. Many thanks also to Georgina vi
Muller and Artilio Thomas, for being my friends and interpreters during community research, and to Jerry Lopez, for getting me started with Miskitu. Thanks also to Dave, my much abused, self-appointed personal organiser, and to Wayne, for his company and support. Special thanks are due to Seamus, who has borne more grumpy and depressive thesis-induced behaviour than anyone should reasonably take, but has nevertheless stuck around to the bitter end; this thesis would never have been possible without you. Many thanks also to my family for their much appreciated (if long-distance!) support.

To the communities of Awas Tingni and Asang, and indeed to all the people I interviewed in the communities, I extend the deepest and sincerest gratitude. Tingki pali to all.
Seven small nations crowd onto the tapering isthmus that links Mexico to South America. Together they are known in Central America. Six of them share a Spanish colonial and Indian heritage. Belize, a former British colony, has greater cultural ties to the English-speaking Caribbean islands.

Chapter 1 Thesis Objectives, Analytical Framework, Case Study and Research Methodology

Thesis Objectives and Theoretical Concerns

Conflicts over natural resources have been an historical feature of human societies. However, in the present day, the combination of finite natural resources and multiple, competing interests over them has made resource management conflicts arguably both more frequent and intense. Since inter-stakeholder competition tends to make the already weighty task of sustainable environmental management all the more complex, by promoting short-termist, sectoral and self-interested patterns of resource use, resource conflicts inevitably have to be addressed and resolved. Among the various types of conflicts currently being witnessed by the global community are those which develop when indigenous peoples, residing within the boundaries of nation-states, are affected by and implicated in, the management of natural resources. In order to resolve inter-stakeholder conflicts involving indigenous peoples and nation-states, and to promote collective management in their place, the environmental perspectives of the particular indigenous peoples involved, and the specific management contexts from which conflicts have arisen, must both be taken into account.

The primary objective of this thesis is therefore to analyse the environmental perspectives of the indigenous peoples of northeastern Nicaragua, with particular reference to the Miskitu Indians and forestry resources, to determine the types of cultural and context-specific considerations which genuine and sustainable co-management arrangements in this particular region would need to accommodate. Although the focus is predominantly upon the Miskitu aboriginal peoples, the Mayangna Indians of this region will also feature in this inquiry. The management context of northeastern Nicaragua is marked by profound conflict between indigenous communities, regional authorities and the nation-state. To properly appreciate the nature of resource conflict in this particular management context, the analysis of indigenous environment perspectives in northeastern Nicaragua\(^1\) will consider how indigenous relationships with the regional, national, and international economic and political systems in which they are situated, have over time, shaped contemporary inter-stakeholder dynamics and indigenous attitudes in this region.

By employing a multi-level, interdisciplinary and dialectic approach, this thesis provides an important theoretical alternative for resource managers attempting to understand and resolve comparative instances of inter-stakeholder conflict. It also strongly urges managers to appreciate

\(^1\) An alternate term for northeastern Nicaragua which will be used in this thesis is the 'RAAN' or the North Atlantic Autonomous Region. The southeastern Atlantic region is known as the RAAS. The term "Atlantic Coast" refers to any part of the RAAN or RAAS.
the complexity and uniqueness of respective indigenous perspectives and management contexts, and the need to reject stereotypical representations of indigenous peoples, communities and institutions, when attempting to develop collaborative management arrangements. By focusing upon the environmental perspectives held by a particular set of stakeholders from this region, the indigenous communities, this study moreover hopes to make a practical contribution towards improving regional stakeholder understanding. Lack of inter-stakeholder trust and communication arguably represents one of the greatest obstacles impeding the development of sustainable co-management approaches to resource use in the RAAN at present.

The emphasis of this investigation is therefore upon indigenous peoples as environmental decision makers, looking at how their particular outlooks and circumstances condition their resource management strategies and agendas. To borrow from Nietschmann, a prominent authority on the Miskitos:

"...we are considering the Miskito as a population within an ecosystem whose major adaptations are expressed through culturally guided behaviour" (Nietschmann, 1973: 9).

**Indigenous Perspectives and Management Contexts through History**

Indigenous cultures cannot be understood separately from the historical experiences from which they have emerged (Fenelon, 1997:1). Indigenous perspectives, as with all human societies, develop through experience and over time, in response to a number of factors, both local and external. This thesis therefore relies heavily on historical material to provide context and depth to the analysis of contemporary indigenous environmental perspectives in northeastern Nicaragua. This approach is supported by Novacek, who described indigenous ethnicity in this region as:

"an historically constituted entity - one that does not exist separately from the social conditions in which it was formed, and continues to exist" (Novacek, 1988: 18).

Contemporary Miskitu perspectives have indeed developed from a dense network of interwoven experiences, which are constantly being reexamined and renewed over time. Their collective historical experiences in turn provide, renew and maintain common cultural identities and shared management perspectives:

"... when a particular society has had repeated experiences of successful collective actions and experiences in the past, positive attitudes towards co-operation tend to be conveyed to its members through myths, customs, sayings, and norms, which are all elements of their specific cultural endowment" (Baland and Platteau, 1996: 324)

A dialectic analysis of indigenous environmental perspectives and management contexts in northeastern Nicaragua is therefore essential to this thesis. As Nietschmann argues:
"... a better understanding of the Miskito's present-day relationship with their environment and the nature of their subsistence system can be gained by looking at the historical and cultural antecedents." (Nietschmann, 1973: 73).

Reconceptualising environmental problems and resource management research

Although history, context and culture are integral to both the environmental perspectives and resource use practices pursued by human societies, the discipline of resource management has nevertheless traditionally neglected such concerns. Resource managers' reliance upon scientific, technical, and top-down approaches with which to analyse and resolve environmental problems, has moreover facilitated the exclusion of local peoples from management processes. The exclusion of cultural concerns and local participation has however become increasingly hard to justify, since Western science and states alike have quite an abysmal record of "sustainable" resource management. Whilst the ability of Western scientists to "manage" the natural environment has come under increasing scrutiny in recent years, scientific approaches are moreover themselves being either modified or simply ignored by politicians, who ultimately determine state environmental policies.

There is therefore a clear need for resource management processes and policies to be unconditionally recognised as human constructions, rather than impartial, absolute "scientific" truths (Howitt, 1996). As Usher pointed out almost fifteen years ago:

"Management is a prerogative that flows from the system of property. Every system of resource management is based on certain assumptions, frequently unstated, those of social organisation, political authority and property rights, all of which are closely interrelated. As no two societies or cultures are identical in these respects, there can be no such thing as a scientifically or technically neutral management regime, that is equally applicable and acceptable to both. Consequently, where two social systems share an interest in the same resource, there must be some accommodation in the sphere of property, as of management, unless one is to obliterate the other" (Usher, 1984)

The greatest contemporary challenge to resource managers, and arguably the area where their efforts are most likely to yield positive and predictable progress, is how to manage the people who use and compete over resources, rather than the environment itself. Since environmental degradation is primarily caused by human societies themselves; given that stakeholder

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2 I use the phrase "resource management" reluctantly, since whether human beings can actually "manage" the environment or not remains a debatable issue. There is clearly a need for a new term which does not convey such a strong - and misplaced - sense of control over the environment as does "resource management." Perhaps resource stewardship could represent a useful alternative. In the absence of satisfactory and recognised alternatives, I will use "resource management" in this thesis, though with my stated reservations.

3 "Sustainability" is another extremely controversial concept, without a satisfactory definition. However, though I employ this term somewhat hesitantly, I remain sympathetic to the original meaning and intentions with which this concept was developed. My understanding of sustainable environmental use is best represented by the holistic, not strictly biophysical interpretation presented in the 1987 Brundtland report; extractive practices "...that meet the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987: 43).
competition over natural resources moreover serves to exacerbate the rate and scale of ecological
destruction; and in recognition of the inability of political and scientific approaches to resolve the
contemporary ecological crisis; the wisdom of acknowledging and incorporating local
environmental perspectives, and developing more horizontal and collaborative approaches from
which to formulate and implement environmental policies, is compelling.

**Building inter-stakeholder consensus: the basis for sustainable management**

Making room in the policy process for local people whose material and cultural survival
depends most closely upon the environment, and who have the longest and most intimate
association with it, therefore makes both moral and practical sense. Sustainable resource
management is, or should be, as much to do with the sustainability of resource-using groups as
the ecosystem itself (Butz 1996). If we accept that environmental sustainability depends upon
consensual human participation, the importance of incorporating local concerns into resource
management plans and policies becomes apparent. When local communities are excluded from
management processes, and when the complexities of management contexts and inter-
stakeholder relations are ignored, the chances of management initiatives failing are simply much
greater - irrespective of how scientifically coherent and ecologically sensitive they were designed
to be:

"...lack of attention to the relevant units of social organisation and their internal dynamics
explains not only management failures and resource use inefficiencies but also increasing
inequalities and socio-economic differentiation" (Baland and Platteau, 1996: 261)

However, though management processes which exclude local participation and realities
are inherently unstable, nation-states are nevertheless often reluctant to modify traditional top-
down policy approaches to management. This is particularly true when the local people involved
are indigenous, and have strong claims to own and use the same land and resources designated
by state government for national development purposes. As Feit concluded from his research
into the negotiations between the Cree and Quebec government over the proposed James Bay
Hydroelectric project:

"... negotiations over James Bay appear to confirm the common assertion that the most
fundamental conflicts between indigenous people and liberal-democratic states with a
capitalist economy centre around the use of land and resources, especially for development
purposes, and around assertions of state sovereignty" (Feit, 1989)

Historical experience of state oppression, and resistance to their rights and interests, means that
many indigenous groups also come to perceive national interests as being fundamentally opposed
to their own. The mirror conviction of mutual incompatibility therefore locks indigenous
peoples and nation-states in a damaging war or attrition.
The many global instances of conflict between indigenous peoples and nation states have led some observers to assume that the cultures and concerns of these particular stakeholders are in fact polar opposites; contradictory frameworks of analysis and perspectives which could never be reconciled (Fernandes, 1993: 3). This misplaced, defeatist attitude means that concerted attempts to develop common approaches to shared problems are sometimes not even attempted. However, indigenous peoples rarely have all the requisite resources and experience required to develop and maintain management initiatives, in a modern context, on their own. They usually will require at least a minimum degree of support from regional and national institutions. Meanwhile, states cannot expect management regimes which ignore local interests to be successfully upheld at the localities - particularly if state institutions are weak, and unable to maintain a permanent presence in outlying areas. Ultimately, neither the state nor indigenous communities can sustain a management approach without the other: feasible and sustainable management systems require some degree of inter-stakeholder collaboration. Particularly in settings with complex jurisdictions and multiple ethnicities, cross-system and cross-cultural accommodation are essential prerequisites of effective management systems.

**Co-management**

The potential of co-management arrangements to resolve conflicts over resources between indigenous peoples and nation-states has garnered increasing cross-disciplinary support in recent years. As Campbell has observed

"...the principles of co-management as nonconfrontational, inclusionary, and consensus-based have been hailed by the academic community, industry leaders, government representatives, and First Nations alike as a viable means by which resource conflicts on aboriginal territory may be resolved." (Campbell, 1996: 3)

Co-management agreements require nation-states and indigenous peoples to become partners, rather than competitors, in the development and implementation of resource management policies. Since co-management systems theoretically involve the sharing of management responsibilities between stakeholders, they therefore actively encourage the devolution of responsibility to local communities. By increasing communication and co-operation between the parties involved, co-management initiatives moreover attempt to prevent resource conflicts from reemerging (Campbell. 1996: 2). According to Evelyn Pinkerton, co-management:

"...involves genuine power sharing between community-based managers and government agencies, so that each can check the potential excesses of the other" (Pinkerton, 1993: 37)

Accepting opposing stakeholders as legitimate parties in a collaborative approach to resolve management problems cannot in itself resolve the problem of environmental degradation or indigenous marginalisation. Nevertheless, the willingness to pursue management objectives collectively does represent an essential starting point from which progress towards sustainable -
rather than fractured - management regimes can develop (Howitt, 1996; 21). However, despite the marked enthusiasm which surrounds the co-management concept in management circles at present, genuine and sustainable joint stewardship arrangements are not necessarily easily established. Each management context is likely to reveal specific dynamics and impediments which can potentially thwart the development of local co-management initiatives. Collaborative approaches to management have to be attempted, but we must also recognise that inter-stakeholder cooperation is not always readily achieved. The final objective of this thesis is therefore to assess the prospects for co-management in the RAAN, in light of the indigenous environmental perspectives analyzed, and the management context described. From this analysis, it will be possible to identify major factors which might currently be inhibiting successful co-management initiatives from emerging in this region.

This section has presented the major objectives and research concerns which have motivated this thesis. I would now like to move on to discuss the analytical and theoretical frameworks which have informed and structured it. Since this is a multi-level, interdisciplinary and dialectic study, an analytical framework able to address and reveal the complexity of indigenous perspectives, and by extension, local management contexts, was necessary. This framework will be reviewed in the ensuing section.

**Analytical and theoretical framework**

Four principal themes or categories of experience which have over time, influenced the development of indigenous environmental perspectives in northeastern Nicaragua were selected for my analytical framework. Indigenous communities' relationship with the regional and national political systems within which they reside, whose institutional cultures impact and shape local experiences and perspectives, is a persistent theme of this thesis which will be introduced in Chapter 2. The second theme considers indigenous cultures and environmental perspectives at the community level. An historical examination of indigenous community life in Chapters 3 and 4 will be complemented by contemporary findings drawn from the community of Asang, River Wangki, in Chapter 5. The relationship between indigenous peoples and global economics represents the third theme. Through an historical examination of the regional forestry industry, Chapter 6 shows how that national and international economic policies have created traditions of environmental destruction and careless management in the region, which have inevitably restricted the range of options available to communities by which to use available forestry resources commercially. The fourth theme considers indigenous peoples from a political perspective. In Chapter 7, I analyse indigenous identities in relation to political contexts, considering not only how indigenous peoples represent their concerns in non-indigenous circles, but also how the experience of political representation and participation in management contexts itself, affects indigenous culture and identity. In Chapter 8, all the four spheres of indigenous
experience discussed will all drawn upon to analyse contemporary examples of indigenous involvement in resource use, ownership, and management issues. Finally, in Chapter 9, the future prospects for co-management initiatives in the RAAN will be evaluated.

Analysis of these four spheres of indigenous experience will each be informed by a complimentary field of theoretical literature. The specific application of these themes will be examined in ensuing parts of the thesis, in relation to the case study material itself. The salient analytical concepts being employed in this thesis nevertheless deserve some brief introduction.

Indigenous peoples and institutions of the nation-state: Conflict and cooperation

As already mentioned, conflicts between stakeholders over modes of use and rights over resources proliferate worldwide, and can be particularly intense between indigenous peoples and nation-states. Campbell, based on her research in the Canadian north, provided three general reasons to explain why resource conflicts between indigenous peoples and states are so prevalent and protracted. First of all, the principal location of "untapped" resources within nation-states frequently coincides with the main areas of habitation occupied by aboriginal communities. Secondly, resources targeted for national industrial development may also continue to provide indigenous communities with their essential subsistence needs. And thirdly, national governments and judicial systems regularly fail to clearly define and resolve indigenous rights to their traditional territories, and the natural resources found on them (Campbell, 1996: 1). Though in specifics, the local contexts and perspectives in northeastern Nicaragua are very different from those found in the Canadian north, as this thesis shows, the three major reasons for conflict between indigenous peoples and the state identified by Campbell are strikingly similar to those found in the case study area as well.

The nature of the relationship between indigenous communities and the nation-state in which they reside is a crucial factor which either fosters or impedes co-management initiatives. Obviously, in order for a co-operative relationship to develop, a minimum of trust between the two parties must exist. In the absence of trust, local peoples are more likely to defy imposed resource management policies, however concerned they might be with local and ecological interests. When relations between indigenous peoples and nation-states are poor, communities are as likely to pursue confrontational as co-management strategies. This frequently occurs in the Canadian north, where slow or ineffective conflict resolution mechanisms can lead First Nations groups to reject dialogue, and adopt civil disobedience tactics (such as roadblocks or blockades) instead (Campbell, 1996: 1). The role of institutions and the nation-state in shaping indigenous environmental perspectives in the RAAN, and in encouraging or deterring Miskitus from co-management initiatives, will be introduced in Chapter 3, and pursued throughout the course of the thesis.
Indigenous cultures and environmental perspectives at the community level

Community relations and community perspectives are integral to this thesis. Particular aspects of indigenous community culture - livelihood practices, forms of social organisation, value and belief systems - and how these affect local environmental perspectives, have shaped analysis at the local level. My approach in examining the local sphere of indigenous environmental decision making borrows from the theoretical framework developed by David Butz, from his research amongst the Shimshal pastoralists of Northern Pakistan.

Butz's analysis is conceptually appropriate to this thesis given the special emphasis which he places upon the role of community as the primary locus for indigenous environmental decision making. Butz concluded that the Shimshal ultimately debated and determined resource management strategies at the community level:

"ecological .... activities [are] symbolically and instrumentally embedded in the places and life worlds out of which they developed" (1996:52).

Though competition might occur between families within the community, conflict remains within the confines of acceptable community behaviour, and would moreover be set aside when the community faced the outside world collectively. According to Butz, Shimshali community members feel they have a responsibility to support community initiatives, given their belief that

"unified community support [is] indicative of a solidarity of purpose appropriate to the Shimshali" (Butz, 1996:43).

Membership of a Shimshal community does not merely provide moral and cultural identity and support; it also affords Shimshali an array of practical rights, most importantly, access to land and resources. The livelihood strategies by which these land and resources are used, are determined collectively by community members, according to the material productivity, and the ideological appropriateness of the particular strategy being considered (Butz, 1996:40). These two realms of concern, which Butz calls instrumental and symbolical, are ultimately interwoven and operate simultaneously in indigenous consciousness. Butz provided a number of illustrations of how instrumental and symbolical concerns shape Shimshal decision-making processes in practical terms. For example, the Shimshal, who traditionally herd yak, have been eager to develop ways of making their livestock more materially profitable. Nevertheless, the Shimshali recently rejected an aid agency's offer to help them make livestock farming more viable, because the agency's plan was to replace yak with more marketable cattle. Although the Shimshali recognised that this route would bring greater profits to the community, their history and traditions were so bound up with their identity as yak herdsmen that the symbolical sacrifice which switching to cattle would have required was culturally unacceptable to them. The particular decisions faced by Miskitus in northeastern Nicaragua may be very different from
those of the Shimshali, but in general terms, there are similarities, since both need to reconcile instrumental or material imperatives with symbolical or ideological concerns, to achieve culturally-acceptable forms of environmental use. The local realm of indigenous environmental experience will therefore be examined with the following considerations in mind: the material and ideological significance of indigenous livelihood practices, and the community, as the forum in which environmental use strategies are debated and determined through time.

**Indigenous peoples within global political-economic systems**

Although indigenous societies today retain many distinct cultural features to set them apart from modern industrial societies, the likelihood of encountering an indigenous person or tribe without exposure to the outside world is nevertheless negligible. Many have indeed had contact with non-indigenous societies for centuries, from the early colonial times to the late twentieth century (such as is the case with the indigenous inhabitants of northeastern Nicaragua). So although indigenous peoples might occupy marginal areas and positions within global society, they do not live separately from it:

"Indigenous peoples are no less a part of economic and social relations within a large context of multinational society than other groups of poor people, although the kinds of processes that constitute the links must be specified in each case" (Fisher, 1994:221 - my italics).

As the links between external forces and indigenous society come under increasing scrutiny, research which considers ethnic peoples abstracted from the wider world appears either incomplete or naive. As Wilmsen argues:

"A sharp change of focus is essential. We need to examine the relations of community within these subordinated groups and their relations to the larger civic arena in which they interact with dominant powers, to establish the configuration of political functions within these groups and their cultural expressions." (Wilmsen, 1989: 7)

In terms of this larger civic arena, indigenous peoples are today usually located within the boundaries of nation-states, whose governmental policies have a considerable influence upon decision-making processes within local communities. As Bryant has observed, "state policies play a pivotal role in contemporary human-environmental relations" (Bryant, 1992:18). So how should we characterise the state policies which affect local environmental use practices in so-called "developing" countries like Nicaragua? State policies in the non-industrialised nations of the world today are particularly likely to be shaped by global economic policies, rather than local or ecological interests (Howitt, 1996). As Kennedy has observed, many such nations have indeed become the:

"self-managing servants of the international capitalist system" (Kennedy, 1996: 244)
It is therefore hardly surprising when, having been subjected to national and international developmentalist\(^4\) policies, indigenous communities are themselves frequently found pursuing livelihood strategies and objectives which have been conditioned by the self-same paradigm.

Indeed, whilst much has been written about the direct ecological threat posed by developmentalism and globalisation, far less attention has been given to the damaging environmental repercussions caused by the homogenisation of global culture itself (Filer, 1996). Continual exposure to external developmentalist values inevitably encourages indigenous peoples to fashion their goals and responses accordingly. As Filer has noted in Papua New Guinea, the continual destruction of forestry resources, rather than fostering resistance to logging itself, has led to many tribes accepting the terms of this imposed reality, and seeking advantages and rights for themselves within the developmentalist framework instead:

"We, the resource owners by God given right have been living miserable lives, and have been under-privileged, under-developed and uncivilised for too long. We cannot watch this opportunity to improve our lives, stride past....this is the foundation of a civilised generation for our tribe....critics of logging should not venture blindly, because this is our birthright and our privilege" (Filer, 1996)

According to Filer, indigenous communities in PNG which repudiate western materialism "are a seriously endangered species, if indeed they can be found beyond the populist imagination of progressive intellectuals" (Filer, 1996). Desperate economic circumstances foster short-termist livelihood practices and attitudes at the locality. Indigenous peoples can become increasingly frustrated by the seemingly endless cycle of destruction of local ecological destruction, perpetuated by national governments and foreign companies, which rather than improving their living conditions, makes their livelihoods more precarious than ever before. When indigenous peoples' land holdings are threatened by the influx of outsiders, their resource use strategies are likely to modify, and become more defensive and self-preservationist. These types of changes are however not likely to benefit either local society or the local environment in the long-term, since inter-stakeholder competition greatly restricts the space for forward planning and reflection (Bromley, 1991/2).

Economically poor indigenous tribes are today not only bombarded by developmentalism and modernisation imperatives to expropriate their natural resources - they can also lack the necessary skills and education to become controlling parties, and protect their interests, when resource extraction occurs (Lucashenko, 1996:11). If traditional knowledges and practices

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\(^4\) I use the term"developmentalism" to describe the socially and ecologically negligent economic policies currently being perpetuated by the global economic system. The word "development", unless otherwise indicated, will be used to denote progress, growth or improvement. Although I am aware that some readers might see little distinction between these two terms, since the RAAN is so impoverished, the natural environment must inevitably serve a commercial purpose. The central issue is not whether resources should be used, but how, and by whom.
cannot adapt to new circumstances, provide meaning and answers to contemporary challenges, and prevent indigenous peoples and local resources from being exploited by external economic and political systems, then the steady evaporation of community power and cohesion can encourage community members - particularly the younger generation - to respond to the irrefutable draw and power of money instead (Filer, 1996). Traditional regulatory systems and indigenous culture alike can therefore be greatly undermined by globalisation, modernisation and developmentalism. As Mac Chapin has seen occur with the Kuna, younger community members begin to question old beliefs, or simply fail to learn them (Chapin, 1991). In such circumstances, indigenous people become "especially vulnerable to internal as well as external pressures to exploit their resources" (Redford & Stearman, 1993: 251).

The natural resources of our case study, northeastern Nicaragua, have been the target of commercial interest for centuries, a factor in the region's history which has proved influential in shaping indigenous environmental perspectives today. It would be wrong to assume that indigenous society had automatically appropriated all the values and objectives associated with the capitalist sphere. However, the terms of reference used by indigenous peoples when defining their resource strategies and agendas have inevitably been influenced by international markets and political systems over time. The alternative elements of indigenous lifestyles - common property perspectives, communal identity, reciprocity (elements which are often particularly useful for local management initiatives) - might eventually capitulate entirely to exogenous pressure, if local community integrity cannot be protected. In this respect, it is vital that indigenous communities' land tenure bases be guaranteed. Securing land titles in a rapidly encroaching world has indeed become a major priority of indigenous environmental agendas throughout the globe. Co-management initiatives will therefore need to protect both indigenous material needs and community cultural integrity from the ravages of developmentalism. As Kennedy argues:

"...rejecting development is necessary to change the power relations, because one has to change the ways of knowing ... if diversity is to be defended from the barrage of knowledge-power techniques which this universalism has deployed then systems of knowledge rooted in particular places must be constructed." (Kennedy, 1996: 248)

The nature of links between indigenous peoples and external economic systems, and how these have influenced indigenous environmental perspectives over time are in conclusion, central theoretical concerns of this thesis.

**Indigenous identities: formulation and legitimacy**

Indigenous identities are considered in two different ways in this thesis: as genuine reflections and expressions of indigenous culture, and as political strategies designed to strengthen the group's negotiating power and secure their particular political interests. The need
to reconcile these two different, and sometimes opposing facets of identity is a major challenge facing indigenous peoples, particularly their indigenous leaders, today. Indigenous identities must simultaneously retain local symbolical legitimacy, whilst also performing vital instrumental or political functions in furthering indigenous agendas before the outside world. In order to appreciate the cultural and political considerations which condition indigenous perspectives on resource management issues, and the "cultural tightrope" walked by indigenous leaders when attempting to reconcile these dual imperatives, examination of the formulation and nature of indigenous identities is essential.

As this thesis shows, the images which indigenous peoples project of themselves to the outside world are not necessarily always consistent with the particular forms of cultural affiliation considered meaningful at the locality. The messages and symbols of indigenous identity which strengthen the cultural group's political position externally do not necessarily animate the locality, and vice versa. For example, indigenous peoples might choose to present themselves as "intrinsic conservationists", in order to further their land claims and negotiating strength (Brown, 1993: 316). According to Redford:

"..... if some indigenous peoples have presented themselves uncritically as 'natural conservationists', it is only because they recognise the power of this concept in rallying support for their struggle for land rights, particularly from important international conservation organisations" (Redford, 1993).

Although popular stereotypes of indigenous peoples can at times be politically useful to them, if there is considerable disparity between local meaning and perspectives, and externally projected images and appeals, the political effectiveness and legitimacy of indigenous agendas, leaders and movements can suffer in the long-term. Moreover, the need to adapt to external political and negotiating norms, can create tensions within indigenous society which are particularly borne by indigenous leaders. Though indigenous leaders might acquire political legitimacy and support in national and international political forums, the physical and psychological distance from indigenous communities which their involvement in external political circles and negotiations requires, can lead to their local support base being weakened. As Fisher has observed amongst the Kayapo' in the Amazon, although their goals remain fairly consistent through time:

"the changing regional context has necessitated different and sometimes contradictory forms of mobilisation and participation" (Fisher, 1994: 220).

The need to pursue indigenous rights within non-indigenous political circles can therefore generate considerable tensions within indigenous society. If indigenous leaders cannot balance their dual and sometimes contradictory imperatives, their ability to ensure indigenous compliance to co-management agreements they are party to is also considerably weakened.
The theme of indigenous identity therefore facilitates analysis of the ideological changes wrought upon indigenous communities, which arise from their need to reconcile local perspectives and objectives with external political norms and realities. As this study suggests, the simple act of participating in co-management initiatives can in itself, potentially modify and test indigenous cultures and communities.

Case Study: The RAAN

This opening chapter has so far reviewed the conceptual framework and analytical themes to be employed in this thesis; an introduction to the case study area to which they will be applied is also necessary. My case study material was collected in the northeastern most province of Nicaragua, the RAAN, where I primarily focused upon indigenous perspectives and experiences in the municipality of Waspam. A brief description of the characteristics of the case study area are presented below.

Geo-political features of the RAAN

When we use the term "Atlantic Coast", we are not merely distinguishing Nicaragua's eastern seaboard from the west. The term is something of a misnomer, since it applies to a vast region which extends far beyond the eastern seaboard, from the coastal lowlands, through the pine savannas and secondary forests, and up into the highlands and rainforest of the central interior. Administratively speaking, the Atlantic Coast is divided between two Nicaraguan departamentos (province), the Northern and Southern Atlantic Autonomous Regions. The RAAN and RAAS are the only departamentos with their own regional councils and governments in the country; institutional recognition of the historical differences which set this area apart from the rest of Nicaragua.

The RAAN, upon which this research is focused, is the largest of all Nicaraguan departamentos, encompassing over 25% of the total country (see Fig.3). In contrast to its physical size, it has a very small population of below 200,000, approximately 4.42% of the total Nicaraguan population. It has therefore the lowest population concentration per departamento, with only 6 inhabitants per kilometre squared, compared to a national average of 35.9 (Rep. de Nicaragua, 1996). The low population to land ratio, among other factors, has facilitated the preservation of valuable natural resource reserves in the region. Nonetheless, the RAAN is also one of the poorest and most disadvantaged. The regional population suffers from a lack of employment opportunities, services and infrastructure, a dislocated local economy, and an unstable autonomous political system. The physical isolation of the RAAN from the Pacific Coast, where the political, economic and culture spheres of Nicaraguan society are concentrated, exacerbate the disadvantages experienced by this region. Geographical isolation is paralleled by
Fig 3. Map of Nicaragua, Showing National Departamentos, Including the RAAN & RAAS

Source: Atlas Nicaragua, Centroamerica y El Mundo, 1995
ethnic, cultural and historical differences which serve to set the Atlantic Coast and its people apart the rest of Nicaragua.

The influence of history

Although the Atlantic Coast remains both isolated and underdeveloped, the indigenous peoples of this region have nevertheless experienced a long history of contact with non-indigenous societies, and involvement in external political and economic systems. The 1980s war between the Sandinistas and the Contras, in which the Miskitus primarily sided with the latter American-backed forces, represents merely one of the more recent and obvious examples of this phenomenon. External influences have inevitably impacted local indigenous cultures, and as a consequence, local environmental perspectives. However, local responsiveness to external influences has throughout the centuries been tempered by the maintenance of pre-contact practices and norms, given the persistent role played by indigenous communities as the primary locus of cultural reproduction. Contemporary indigenous cultural perspectives in northeastern Nicaragua have developed from a syncretic process, fueled both by exogenous and endogenous factors. In order to appreciate indigenous attitudes towards the environment today, an understanding of the various historical contexts and levels of indigenous experience (as a community member, as a Nicaraguan, and as a citizen of the globalised world) from which the Miskitus have emerged is crucial. The examination of contemporary management contexts and perspectives will therefore be preceded throughout this thesis by historical material and analyses.

Costeño society

The RAAN has a multiethnic population of approximately 190,000 inhabitants, of which 42% are mestizos, 40% Miskitu Indians, 10% Creoles, and 8% Mayangna Indians (Acosta, 1996: 11). The greatest concentration of indigenous inhabitants in Nicaragua is to be found in this region.

5 People of the Atlantic Coast, whatever their ethnic origin, are collectively referred to (and refer to themselves as) costeños, or 'coastal peoples.' This Spanish term will appear throughout the thesis.

6 Although many documents will refer to the Miskitos, I prefer to use the alternate term Miskitu, deemed more appropriate since the Miskitu language does not include the letter 'o.'

7 Creoles are descendants of African slaves, who were imported to the Atlantic Coast by the British and European. On the Atlantic Coast, the term applies to every English-speaker of African descent, who does not identify themselves as indigenous (Howard, 1993:2).

8 The Mayangna have until quite recently, been more commonly referred to as 'Sumu.' This however, is reportedly a derogatory term applied to them by the Miskitu Indians some centuries ago, supposedly referring to the alleged stupidity or laziness of this other tribe. As a result, the Mayangnas have openly stated their desire to be called by their own name, and not an imposed one. Ma means 'sun' and yagna, 'us'; Mayangna can therefore be taken to mean "we, the children of the sun" (Wani, 1993: 31). However, many people, including Mayangnas themselves, continue to use the term 'Sumu', and so one hears both terms appear in conversations in the RAAN.
Fig. 4 Map of the Northern Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN), Northeastern Nicaragua

Source: Automomía y Derecho en la RAAN CIDCA-UCA, 1997
The mestizo and Creole populations tend to be concentrated within the handful of urban or semi-urban centres of the RAAN, particularly the regional capital, Puerto Cabezas, or Bilwi, but also the municipal centres of Rosita, Bonanza, Siuna and Waspam (the remaining municipal centre, Prinzapolka, is inhabited primarily by Miskitus, and cannot really be considered an urban centre even by standards in the RAAN). The 143 or so Miskitu communities tend to be located nearby or along coastal and riverine areas; the 18 Mayangna villages are concentrated towards the interior, far up the rivers and into the heart of the tropical rainforest (see Fig. 5).

The types of settlements located in the RAAN can be placed into three general categories. In the first category, is Puerto Cabezas, the regional capital. In the second, are the municipal capitals, such as Waspam and Rosita, which share aspects common to both Puerto and the third category settlements, the numerous indigenous communities. Although Puerto Cabezas can appear a somewhat unimpressive excuse for a regional capital, with its poor infrastructure, unreliable civic amenities, and fairly small population (approximately 30,000 inhabitants), it nevertheless represents the principal political and urban settlement in the RAAN, and offers several defining characteristics of comparative geo-political centres. Despite the fact that Puerto's infrastructure, housing, roads, electricity and water services fall drastically short of civic needs, it is the primary regional magnet for rural immigration. Although unemployment in Puerto is rife, there are still more opportunities for fixed employment, and particularly, informal enterprise, here than elsewhere in the RAAN. Livelihoods in Puerto, in contrast to the rural communities, are therefore more likely to be dependent upon wage labour or informal enterprise than subsistence agriculture, hunting or fishing. Although the range of manufactured goods available in Puerto Cabezas is much more limited than in Managua, it is nevertheless more diverse than anywhere else in the RAAN. Puerto also has a hospital, numerous medical centres and schools, and an airport with frequent daily flights to Managua and Bluefields. Perhaps the most striking characteristic of Puerto Cabezas, which sets it apart from other settlements in the region, is its comparatively liberal and multi-cultural social atmosphere.

In comparison, in a municipal regional capital like Waspam, the range of goods to be found are smaller, and although the social conventions are more liberal than in the communities, they are more evident than in Puerto Cabezas. Electricity is only available four hours in the evening, and running water is extremely unreliable. There are a number of schools, health centres and a hospital - although the hospital is comparative to Puerto Cabezas’, the schools are much less equipped. Waspam has a landing strip, but flights from this town are infrequent. Inhabitants of Waspam subsist on a mixture of both informal enterprise and land-based activities.

9 Although the capital of the RAAN is most widely referred to as Puerto Cabezas, it originally was known by an indigenous Mayangna name, Bilwi. With the growth of indigenous consciousness over the last two decades, many people in the RAAN have chosen to revert to the traditional name. I will be referring to both during my thesis.
Fig. 5 Map Depicting the Location of the RAAN's Numerous Indigenous Communities and other Settlements

Note: Settlements appearing in blue type represent particular focus areas of this research, which will be referred to during the thesis.

Source: Diccionario Miskitu, CIDCA 1996
In the third category settlement, the indigenous communities, both commercial and subsistence activities usually depend upon the environment and natural resources. There is no running water or electricity. Not all communities are connected by road to Waspam or Puerto, and therefore only a limited number of villages own vehicles. Although communities usually have a couple of small stores, they are invariably only equipped with the most basic of items. Owning of business of this sort is therefore not a usual occupation of community dwellers, whose livelihoods primarily depend upon land-based activities, whether for trade or subsistence purposes. Apart from the ubiquitous church, villages do not usually have eateries or any other entertainment locales, and alcohol is rarely consumed in them.\(^{10}\) As a result, the norms of behaviour found in indigenous communities are much more conservative and far removed from those found in Puerto Cabezas. This situation is both compounded and reflected by the poverty of regional infrastructure, which makes communication between the various settlements difficult, and encourages the retention of distinct social practices, outlooks and behaviour. It is therefore important to remain aware that within the various types of settlements in the RAAN mentioned in this thesis, very different social attitudes and lifestyles are encountered.

Field work for this study was principally carried out in the municipality of Waspam (see Fig 4), which has a predominantly indigenous population, distributed amongst 83 communities. The majority of these are Miskitu, with only a handful of Mayangna communities - Awastingni, Umbra and Arangdak (CIDCA, 1997; Wani, 1993: 27). The emphasis is therefore upon the indigenous population, and in particular, the Miskitus. However, Mayangna and regional perspectives and issues will also be presented in the discussion, particularly as one of the principal communities considered in fieldwork was Mayangna.\(^{11}\) Interethnic tensions exist between the Miskitu and Mayangna Indians, the result of centuries of domination by the former over the latter, and therefore represent a significant aspect of regional ethnic relations to be considered.

**Economic sphere**

There is an acute scarcity of formal employment in the region: around 85% of the population are currently unemployed (La Tribuna, Jan. 1988). Economic activity in the RAAN is therefore largely informal. The majority of the rural population continue to make their living in a traditional manner, through a combination of subsistence agriculture, petty trade, hunting and wage labour, when and if it is available. The urban population, which has burgeoned since

\(^{10}\) Although some of the larger, more prosperous communities such as San Carlos (on the River Wangki) has been able to set up a club at which videos are shown (with the help of an electric generator) and beer is sold, this instance is the exception rather than the rule.

\(^{11}\) The potential problems of using material both from Miskitu and Mayangna sources is discussed later in this chapter.
the conflicts of the 1980s, compete for the limited number of full-time jobs. The majority are largely to be found engaged in some form of trade, domestic service or unemployed.

Opportunities for employment in the market economy might be scarce, but material goods are widely coveted. Ironically, one of the poorest areas of the country also faces the highest prices, given the high costs of overland transportation from the Pacific. In general, the quest to secure even the most basic of living standards is fraught with difficulty. People are insecure about the future, and their ability to keep afloat given economic conditions in the RAAN.

Foreign commercial interest in the natural resources of the Atlantic Coast is currently on the increase. This attention, however, is not considered unusual on the Coast, as it forms part of a long-standing historical trend which people have grown accustomed to. Although the region is isolated and underdeveloped, it has attracted global commercial attention on many occasions in the past. Essentially, temporary economic booms on the Coast have been fostered by external, not internal incentives; namely, the extraction of raw materials from the region. Given their short-term objectives, foreign investment in the region has been restricted, and lasting benefits minimal. As resources become depleted, or their market value drops, companies withdraw, and the regional economy lapses into stagnation, with popular frustration increased. In many ways, the economic history of the Atlantic Coast fits in with the label of an 'enclave economy.' The development of an internally coherent local economy has long been undermined by regional expectation of, and dependency upon, external economic stimuli for growth. The effects of the enclave economy experience have had lasting repercussions on economic patterns and cultural perspectives on resources and their use in the RAAN.

*Indigenous struggles and indigenous rights*

Nicaraguan legislation on indigenous rights is on paper, quite progressive. The 1980s conflicts between the Miskitu and Sandinistas in particular led to significant improvements in the legal status of indigenous people in national territory. The Regional Autonomy Law, and articles 180 and 181 of the constitution recognise the particular rights of indigenous communities to own communal lands, and to "use, enjoy and benefit" the resources located upon them. However, this theoretical right has yet to be satisfactorily translated into a legal reality for the majority of indigenous communities. Although a number of indigenous communities have at particular points in regional history been granted land titles, they have generally failed to reflect indigenous peoples' own perceptions of their communities' boundaries. Many communities have no form of land title whatsoever. A thorough revision of the regional land tenure system is therefore urgently needed. For whilst land tenure remains undefined, lumber companies are readily able to
take advantage of the absence of accountable owners, and of the weak institutional environment which they encounter in northeastern Nicaragua.

Beyond the land rights issue, indigenous peoples in the RAAN have countless other reasons for frustration. The regional economy is extremely fragile; social services, particularly education, health and transport, fail to address popular needs. The regional autonomous government however appears unwilling or unable to address their concerns. Meanwhile, although indigenous communities have, particularly since the war, become more conscious of the exploitative economic relationships in which they find themselves, a regionwide, representative body able to focus indigenous demands for rights and qualitative development has so far failed to emerge.

Overview

This brief description of northeastern Nicaragua was designed to provide the reader with a general introduction to the case study area which is the subject of this thesis. The circumstances of the region hold many parallels with other so-called developing areas in the world: it is marginalised, poorly serviced, with extremely high poverty and unemployment figures. The indigenous peoples of the region, the Miskitus and the Mayangnas, are faced with similar problems confronting indigenous peoples worldwide: conflicts over land, degradation of their environment, political struggles with the state and imperiled livelihoods and culture. However, as subsequent chapters will demonstrate, within the overriding framework of common characteristics presented in this section lies a rich tapestry of experiences and features unique to the RAAN which have shaped contemporary indigenous environmental perspectives in this region.

Research and Fieldwork: Methods and Theory

Before turning to the case study material, the research methodologies used to develop this thesis will be briefly discussed. The theoretical decision to focus upon cultural, political, institutional and economic issues, which would be considered from both an historical and contemporary perspective, naturally affected my choice of research methodologies. Moreover, the thesis goals and theoretical approach were not determined in isolation from the case study context, according to theory and hypothesis alone, but through the act of research itself. The experience of applying theory to practice was therefore highly influential in shaping my analytical framework, and clearly requires examination.

Research process and regional focus

My research and fieldwork, were primarily conducted over three separate visits to the RAAN, July to December 1996, May to August 1997 and November 1997. Repeat visits helped
improve the quality of my data, allowing assumptions to be retested, greater experience of the regional contexts and perspectives to be acquired, and time to be more productively spent. This also allowed me to cover the breadth of material required by my diverse theoretical interests.

The majority of research was conducted in the RAAN, although I also spent some time in Managua, conducting interviews and examining secondary sources. While in the RAAN, I was primarily based in Puerto Cabezas. Many interviews, and almost all of the historical and secondary sources, were collected here. Fieldwork in the outlying villages, particularly those located within the municipality of Waspam (both in the pine savannahs and the upper Rio Coco or Wangki), however enabled me to develop interview on community, as opposed to regional level perspectives. Specific concentration upon two indigenous villages, Asang and Awas Tingni, represented the focus of my community-related research. Shorter trips were made to some coastal villages, as well as to Rosita, located in the RAAN's interior mining district, where the headquarters of the controversial lumber company SOLCARSA were located (see Figs 4 & 5).

Methods

Literature review and secondary sources

Since my inquiry is specifically concerned with the social contexts of resource management, qualitative research methods were selected. My theoretical interest in the role of history in formulating and contextualising contemporary indigenous attitudes and management approaches meant that historical and secondary sources became crucial to the thesis. Before going to Nicaragua, I read a wide range of secondary literature on the Atlantic Coast region. In Puerto Cabezas itself, I systematically worked through the archives of the Centro de Investigacion y Documentacion de la Costa Atlantico (Centre for Investigation and Documentation of the Atlantic Coast or CIDCA), concentrating in particular upon historical documents, such as Moravian Mission reports, British government or Mosquito Reservation documents, and travellers’ accounts. Secondary literature on a variety of issues, such as

12 A large and complex variety of terms, assumptions and methodological approaches can be classified under the heading "qualitative research." As Denzin and Lincoln have observed, qualitative research crosses disciplines, fields and subject matter, has no theory or paradigm distinctly its own, and does not privilege any particular methodological approach over another (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994: 1, 3). I have nevertheless selected a few of the theoretical assumptions regarding qualitative research which seem particularly relevant to this thesis. Qualitative researchers often seek "answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994: 3). The research approach, rather than linear, is often cyclical or iterative, with hypotheses not constructed prior to research, but developing out of the research findings themselves (Creswell, 1994: 145). Qualitative researchers do not present their findings as representations of an objective reality, but acknowledge the role of their own interests and ideologies in shaping their material (Janesick, 1994: 212). They therefore tend to openly discuss the ways in which their personal values and concerns influenced their research and conclusions. How these aspects of qualitative research figure in my thesis will become clear in the rest of the chapter.
indigenous livelihoods or cosmologies, the Moravian Church, the company period and the 1980s war were also referred to. A variety of secondary material on contemporary circumstances was also acquired, including documents and resolutions of the RAAN Regional Council, declarations and correspondence from the Elders' Council, management plans and declarations from the MADENSA and SOLCARSA lumber companies, and articles from press and periodicals addressing regional issues. A wide variety of secondary material related to the case study area itself was therefore used in this research, which combined with the theoretical sources used, produced a large and eclectic pool of bibliographical references for this thesis to draw upon.

Fieldwork

The other major branch of my research was fieldwork. Interviews, designed to collect first-hand information on contemporary perspectives and management contexts, represented the principal component of fieldwork. In order to present my findings with confidence, I felt it necessary to conduct both as numerous and diverse a range of interviews as possible. A few hundred informants have therefore contributed to this thesis, including national government ministers, regional government representatives, municipal authorities, company representatives, urban dwellers, villagers, indigenous leaders, elders, health workers, teachers, members of the press, spiritual healers, men and women, young and old. The interviews varied greatly in format, content, and length. Taken as a whole they represent a rich source of material with which research hypotheses have been tested and formulated.

Interviews were either noted down or recorded, depending on the willingness of the informant to be taped. Outside the communities, in Puerto Cabezas, Waspam, Rosita and Managua, the majority of interviews were conducted by myself in Spanish. Within the indigenous communities, interviews were conducted either in Spanish, Miskitu or Mayangna. If Miskitu or Mayangna proved the preferred language for the informant, an interpreter became necessary. Two principal interpreters assisted my research, one in the community of Awas Tingni, and another in Asang. Both were friends as well as assistants, which made it easier for me to communicate to them my research interests and objectives for the interviews. By the later stages of fieldwork, I had acquired enough understanding of Miskitu to enable me to follow and intervene in conversations held in Miskitu. By communicating in the indigenous language, I experienced an even greater level of responsiveness from my informants.

Not all my interviews were conducted individually; many, sometimes unintentionally, developed into group interviews, as other people gradually began to participate in conversations already in progress. This is one more example of the flexible approach which I found most productive for my research. I was able to observe the way people interacted on such occasions, which allowed me to appreciate aspects of indigenous group dynamics and relations. My
theoretical interests in conflict and consensus within and between indigenous communities were particularly addressed on such occasions. Group interviews also provided valuable sources of information, since informants tended to spark others' memories and add to one other's responses, which naturally helped to enrich my data.

Another aspect of fieldwork which proved useful in my research was participant observation. Participant observation was at times a conscious act, such as on the occasions when I was given permission to attend community, inter-community and regional meetings. These meetings provided me with invaluable insights into the nature and diversity of perspectives and identities within the RAAN, as well as the regional context of resource management itself. Participant observation was however more usually, a natural consequence of living and interacting with the world around me. In effect, all the time I spent in the region was part of the research and learning process in itself.

In order to chronicle information gained through the course of daily events, I kept a detailed field journal. My field journal has proved particularly useful to my research in three respects. It has enabled me to provide context to the interview notes and tapes I have amassed, facilitating recollection of the time, setting and state of mind I was in when conversing with the informant. Since neither the focus of my interviews nor the quotations which I have selected from them are arbitrary, but are both directly related to the theoretical structure of my research, it is extremely useful for me to have a record of the principal concerns directing my fieldwork at the particular stage of any given interview. This point relates to a second way in which the field journal has proved useful. My field journal allows me to chart my reactions to the case study context, and relive the various stages through which I progressed during the course of fieldwork, and the assumptions and perspectives which I held at each specific moment. Especially during the first six months, my learning curve proved steep, as I experienced many different stages of interpretation and understanding. The journal allows me to contextualise each interview within particular time frames and analytical positions, which necessarily affected both the type of questions I posed, and the manner in which I interpreted them. The third significant contribution of the field journal is the record of conversations and events whose significance I might not have appreciated at the time, but which would subsequently prove extremely relevant to my research.

**Case study communities: Selection and implications**

As discussed previously, although there are many Miskitus living in Puerto Cabezas, the social practices, values and outlooks held in this particular settlement means that indigenous lifestyles are in many respects, more similar to those of Mestizo Puerto dwellers than families residing within the outlying communities. My theoretical focus upon indigenous culture therefore made research conducted within indigenous communities themselves an essential
component of my research. The community which I selected for this purpose was Asang, from the River Wangki or Coco (see Figs 4 & 5). The River Wangki is considered to be the heartland of Miskitu culture. I therefore felt it to be important, given my historical and cultural interests in the analysis of environmental perspectives, to spend time in a community from this area. Moreover, the upper reaches of the River Wangki have a long history of formal and informal commercial activity directed towards resource extraction, lumber being one of these products. These events are recent enough in history that informants with direct experience or first-hand accounts of company activities from the late 19th century to the present can be located.

My interest in examining the historical process of modification and adaptation of indigenous culture, from which contemporary attitudes towards management have developed, made Asang an especially obvious place to conduct my research, since the most comprehensive ethnography written on the Miskitu of this area by Mary Helms, focuses upon this village. Helms spent over a year in Asang during the 1960s, considering the social, economic and political aspects of Miskitu community life. "Asang" (the book) represents a thorough examination of a particular moment in this community's history and perspectives, and therefore provide me with unique source of information to compare my own findings against. Her work also provided valuable insights into Miskitu culture which my own research, not geared towards producing an ethnography, could never have independently unearthed.

In Asang, I primarily looked at change and conflict within the community, in relation to environmental use practices and political agendas. Generational differences were represented by comparisons between the responses of elderly and younger informants. I was fortunate to have been able to speak with one of the eldest, and reportedly, the most knowledgeable man of the community on a variety of occasions, from whom I learnt a great deal of fascinating information on past events and beliefs related to the community of Asang. I was also able to attend a community meeting held to discuss conflicts over land and resources between Asang and their neighbours. This event, and supplementary interviews with village leaders and members, helped me identify sources of internal and external tension besetting the community, and to appreciate their environmental perspectives. The dual historical-contemporary focus of my research in Asang was located conceptually within wider regional, national and international contexts and events, in order to understand how external factors were contributing to the emergence of new tensions and orientations within community culture and society.

The other community I selected was the Mayangna community of Awas Tingni. I was drawn to Awas Tingni because it was located at the epicentre of multiple and interrelated regional conflicts over land rights and resource management. At the time, Awas Tingni was the only community in the region engaged in a contractual relationship with a large-scale, foreign
lumber company, an agreement which provided *de facto* recognition of their claim to this territory. Awas Tingni represented a unique practical example of incipient regional co-management of forestry resources, with insights and future implications for the relationship between context, culture and resource management in the RAAN. It was moreover engaged in an advanced land claims process, made possible by a foreign legal and technical advisory team assisting the community. The Awas Tingni case had implications for most parties concerned with resource management in the region, who each had their own particular interpretation of the issues raised by this community. As a case, and as a community, Awas Tingni represented a unique opportunity to discuss a variety of research themes, such as inter-stakeholder conflict, institutional behaviour and politico-economic incentives, related to resource management practices in the RAAN.

The only disadvantage which Awas Tingni posed to me was that it was primarily a Mayangna, not Miskitu community. I had intended to concentrate solely upon the Miskitus, for fear that not intending to spend time in the heartland of Mayangna territory, around the community of Musawas, I would be unable to do justice to Mayangna perspectives. However, since Awas Tingni represented the only example of an agreement between an indigenous community, the national government and lumber company to manage forestry resources, theoretically based upon co-management and community-based management principles, in the region, I considered it a vital case study for my thesis; particularly since this case had catalysed debate over the role of indigenous communities in the ownership and management of natural resources, not only at local, but national and international levels as well. Moreover, I felt it reasonable to assume that many of their experiences would probably be faced by any community in the area, in a similar situation, whether Miskitu or Mayangna. Although Miskitus and Mayangnas retain distinct indigenous identities, which as will be shown in Chapter 2, have been heavily conditioned by historical tensions between them, their resource use practices and environmental agendas, particularly in the contemporary context, are nevertheless being shaped by the same geographical, institutional, political and economic contexts. And whilst both Miskitus and Mayangnas assert their separate identities, as informants from both ethnicities told me, they also share many of the same cultural characteristics, experiences and concerns. With these considerations in mind, I decided that despite being a Mayangna community, Awas Tingni as a research site had much to offer my analysis of conflict and co-management situations involving indigenous peoples and governmental authorities, with implications for regional indigenous peoples beyond the confines of the village itself. Therefore, whilst research in Asang was focused to provide information on Miskitu culture *within* communities themselves,

13 Awas Tingni is one of the many communities without any form of title to their land.
fieldwork in Awas Tingni aimed to incorporate institutional, management, multi-cultural and
multi-stakeholder issues as well.

**Some implications of field work for the theoretical approach of this thesis**

The range of interviews which I conducted during my fieldwork helped me become
aware of both the commonalities, but also the variety of perspectives held by people in the
RAAN, enabling me to identify the parameters of the different groups expressing them. For
example, although prior to my arrival in the RAAN, I had expected the Regional Council and
Governments to be at the vanguard of regional rights and autonomous action, I soon discovered
great discrepancies existed between popular and official perspectives. In fact, I found significant
popular distrust in the administrative bodies, which are often presented as inefficient or corrupt,
and more responsive to national than regional interests. I therefore did not make the issues of
autonomy and decentralisation prominent themes of my thesis as I had previously been
considering doing.

I had also underestimated the level of difference between opinions and behaviour
acceptable in Puerto against those in the communities. The same informants could in fact speak
and behave very differently, according to the context in which they were operating, actions
which located particular cultural values within specific social mediums. Through the course of
many interviews, I learnt that actions did not always reflect held opinions or concerns; the same
observation worked the other way as well. These factors sensitised me to the existence of
tensions *within* indigenous society which I had not fully appreciated before my visit. I had
expected to find that indigenous culture had in some way or other been 'eroded' or 'lost'; I was
thinking more in terms of either/or perspectives, which I now realise are both inaccurate and
fundamentally inappropriate. Tensions occurred because both external and internal factors, and
instrumental and symbolical considerations *coexisted* in indigenous peoples' experiences and
understanding of themselves, and the outside world. Essentially, my field work convinced me
that only a multifaceted approach would be able to reflect the complex nature of influences
shaping indigenous environmental perspectives in the RAAN, bringing in the past as well as the
present, and considering the case study context in relation to the external spheres in which it
operates.

**Research material in the thesis**

The selection of research material deployed in the various chapters, whether secondary,
historical sources or first-hand fieldwork data, has naturally depended upon the respective
theoretical concerns and themes which they respectively address. Chapter 3 presents an
historical examination of Miskitu culture, communities and livelihoods which draws solely upon
secondary sources, as does Chapter 6, which examines the historical context of regional forestry
management. Both Chapter 4, which looks at indigenous cosmologies and belief systems, and Chapter 7, which considers indigenous identities, political organisation and leadership in the RAAN over time, blend historical and contemporary fieldwork material. Chapters 2, 5, and 8, in which present institutional, community and management issues and contexts are discussed, primarily depend upon contemporary fieldwork material.

Ethical concerns

Ethical concerns naturally arise when the objects of research are human beings. Extreme care must be taken in order to avoid causing any harm to informants, and to protect their right to privacy. In addition, informants should be fully aware of the identity of the researcher and the object of their research (Fontana & Frey, 373: 1994). In my case, I ensured that informants' identities would remain secret, by creating a separate code for informants by which to refer to each individual in my fieldnotes. The code and the original names of the informants have always been kept separate from one another. Numerous extracts from these interviews will be presented throughout the thesis, but only the general characteristics of the informants, not their names, are provided. Prior to all interviews, I made sure that my informants understood my identity and the purpose of my inquiry. Although their responses where quoted in this thesis, appear in translation, I have been very careful to preserve the original words and emphases of my informants. My personal interest in the indigenous peoples and the region itself naturally made me concerned to produce both an ethical and representative piece of work.

Overall, I found that the vast majority of people, particularly Miskitus, whom I approached were more than willing to talk with me. Being a woman was felt, an asset in my research, since it enabled me to interview and develop friendships with both indigenous men and women. Approaching men is not hard for foreigners to do in this region. However, the indigenous women I interviewed, and particularly those I became close with, would never have been able to be as open and honest with me had I been a man. Expected gender roles and sexual tension, in the majority of cases, present significant obstacles to the development of platonic friendships between white men and Miskitu or Mayangna women. As a researcher, I therefore enjoyed entry into both gender spheres.

I nevertheless had to ask myself if there were other reasons motivating the eager reception I usually received from indigenous people in the region, and to consider if their openness held any unethical or negative implications for my research. As a British-Canadian, I was arguably, in the eyes of the Miskitus, a special class of foreigner. Although Miskitus can today be quite critical of their colonial ally, Britain, or their erstwhile twentieth century protector, the United States, nationals from these countries are still more likely to receive positive receptions in indigenous communities today than Hispanic Nicaraguans from the Pacific Coast.
Indigenous historical resentment of both the Spanish and the Nicaraguan state, which will be discussed in subsequent chapters, combined with popular memories of past Miskitu alliances with English-speaking countries, continue to condition indigenous reception of outsiders. Moreover, the Miskitus and Mayangnas experience with foreigners over the centuries have been encouraged to perceive Europeans and Americans in general as sources of wealth and power - even if they are only lowly graduate students (Howard, 1993:27). In my case, it was often assumed that I had the influence to bring some *asistencia* or *proyecto* (financial help or a project) to the group or village in question. It sometimes took me a very long time to convince them that I was unable to do this. Even if people did accept this information, many would invariably continue to treat me with unwarranted levels of respect. I had not created this cultural assumption, and I did do my best to dissuade it, though many times, I consciously or unconsciously benefited from it (with rides, accommodation, information). I felt uncomfortable about doing so, but circumstances often made this difficult to avoid. The acceptance and help which I encountered in the region during my research was therefore undeniably in part, due to my identity as an English person (and moreover, as a woman, who needed to be treated with a particular care and protection), and the perceived status which this afforded me.

**Limits to research**

There are naturally limits to this research. As I discussed above, my status as an English woman, probably affected my informants' responses. They might have felt encouraged to stress their poverty, suffering, and helplessness, and to understate their own potential to effect change, in the hope that I might, despite my protestations, be able to bring them a project or financial aid. I would never deny that people in the RAAN deal with incredible hardship, but sometimes I suspected that people might be emphasising these circumstances in order to get me to help them. The respect which indigenous people in the RAAN often demonstrate for foreigners, though largely misplaced, also makes it conceivable that my informants might have at times provided me with responses they thought I wanted to hear.

Interview data can be inaccurate. Informants might report what they suppose had happened, rather than what they had actually seen; their memories might fail them; their accounts might be heavily coloured by bias (Bernard, 234: 1994). Furthermore, cultural differences might well have meant that I misinterpreted my informant's responses. In order to reduce the possibility of misunderstandings, I took various steps in my research:

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14 Indigenous attitudes towards foreigners in the RAAN are not necessarily true of *all* indigenous tribes; indeed, there are indigenous tribes in the Amazon who look down on foreigners for being generally so lost and helpless in the rainforest environment (Muratorio, 1998: pers. comm.).
• I spent as long a time as possible in the region, to improve my understanding of the area, and
decrease the potential for cultural misunderstandings to occur.
• I contacted a broad range of informants so as not to be dependent on any one perspective or
attitude (e.g. of leaders, political parties, ethnicities, generations, genders).
• Wherever possible, I would aim for more than one interview with informants where possible,
to reduce the possibility of mutual misunderstandings, and facilitate natural communication.
• I always sought to cross-check interview information with other informants or sources, in
order to improve the accuracy of my data.

Nonetheless, many would still argue that an outsider, by not being privy to the secrets of
a particular culture, can never truly understand or represent it. Research of a foreign culture can
be adversely affected by a variety of barriers, such as of language, meaning, custom and belief,
some of which the researcher might not even be aware of. How can an outsider present any
significant insights on another culture which its actual members cannot? I believe that the
outsider can bring something quite valuable, if ever so simple, to the analysis of another culture:
the outsider's perspective. All of us are in some way or other, trapped by our personal subjective
lenses, the member of the indigenous society as much as the outside observer. By being outside
a certain social group, one can make certain observations about it which its members, too caught
up within its actual dynamics, might not be able to. My research might suffer the limitations
inherent to my status as an outsider, but I have also seen the benefits of having a degree of
separation from the subject area of my research.

My own role in the research

In what ways have I, as the sole investigator, affected the focus and analysis presented in
this thesis? It is naturally impossible to separate myself from this research. I will therefore try to
make the reader aware of personal values, concerns and objectives, factors which have inevitably
affected the tone of this inquiry. I support the struggle for both indigenous and regional rights in
the RAAN, and am deeply concerned to see the development of socially and environmentally
equitable and sustainable norms of resource management assumed in the Atlantic Coast.
Ultimately, my primary interests and concerns lie with the indigenous peoples, particularly the
outlying indigenous communities. They will doubtless have been conveyed in a more favourable
light than for example, the regional or national governments. At the same time, however, I do
not believe that community problems will be resolved by presenting a glamorised picture of
indigenous culture and perspectives, and demonising other stakeholders' opinions and concerns.
I have therefore attempted to present both a sympathetic, and yet realistic, representation of
environmental perspectives and resource management contexts in the RAAN in my thesis.
Summary

In this chapter I have outlined the objectives, theoretical framework, case study and research methodologies which have shaped the development of this thesis. Inspired by the co-management conceptual framework, indigenous peoples in northeastern Nicaragua are being considered as potential participants and stakeholders in a progressive attempt to improve quality, communication and consensus in regional resource management initiatives. Although many stakeholders have a say in the management of natural resources in the RAAN, such as the Nicaraguan government, the Regional Council, and the municipal authorities, this thesis concentrates primarily upon indigenous concerns and perspectives.

By showing how important culture and context are to the formulation of indigenous environmental attitudes in northeastern Nicaragua (and therefore the relevance of these issues to both the research and practice of resources management) this thesis also aims to foster more culturally sensitive approaches to environmental policy, both in the RAAN and beyond. The integration of cultural and context-specific research into resource management initiatives should be seen as an essential prerequisite of sustainable environmental practices, since these depend upon the informed and consensual participation and support of local society (Buck, 1989).

With these considerations in mind, I selected four spheres of indigenous experience which over time, and in a variety of ways, have played an influential role in determining the formulation of indigenous environmental perspectives in northeastern Nicaragua. I am not, however, claiming to have developed the definitive analysis of indigenous attitudes towards the environment in the RAAN. I have concentrated on particular factors which I have deemed relevant to this discussion; others could no doubt be produced. Furthermore, differences of opinion exist (as will be demonstrated) between and within indigenous communities and ethnic groups in the RAAN. Exceptions to every observation made could no doubt be produced. Nonetheless, within a given cultural group, certain choices, as well as certain exceptions, are more to be expected than others. As Perry explains,

"..human choices are not random. They arise from circumstance, existing knowledge, a sense of appropriateness, perceptions of what one can get away with, guesses at what might work best, and numerous other factors. Most, if not all, of these considerations derive from experience. They are the consequences of history - long term and short term.... We can rarely know for certain precisely what has motivated the actions of an individual. But we can understand to some extent why certain choices on the part of numerous individuals are more likely than others, considering the circumstances."(1996:37)

Indigenous environmental perspectives in the RAAN are certainly not random, but are conditioned by culture, history and context, as analysis of the case study material will demonstrate.
Resource Management Context

Fig. 6. Institutions and Principal Stakeholders of Regional VATAMA, environmentalists, Pressure Groups - e.g., Elders' Council, Municipal Council, Coordinator, Reg. Gov't., President & Executive Board, Reg. Cil.}

Indigenous Communities

National Assembly

National President and Government

MARENA

Regional Society
Chapter 2  Policy Reform, Institutional Uncertainty and Community Alienation in the RAAN

This chapter has two primary objectives. The first is to develop the introduction to the case study and theoretical concerns of this thesis reviewed in Chapter 1. Through an examination of the institutional, politico-economic and social characteristics of the RAAN, this chapter will also provide contemporary reference points and theoretical observations to inform subsequent discussions of community-specific and historical material. The second objective is to consider the nature of and role played by national and regional institutions in setting the structural conditions of resource management in the RAAN, within which local perspectives are formulated. Governmental management policies are obviously significant factors in this analysis. However, management conditions are not determined by policies alone; the behaviour of political institutions themselves fundamentally influences the context of management regimes. Governmental institutions are often blandly portrayed as machine-like entities, which can be depended upon to enforce societal rules both consistently and predictably (Borner et al, 1995: 45). As this chapter will demonstrate however, institutions can be more than faceless and regimented bureaucracies: in practice, they can in fact function ineffectively, unreliably and even arbitrarily. Institutional behaviour has therefore a direct influence upon local level decisions, since it affects not only the enforcement of governmental rules, but how civil society perceives, responds to and respects them.

Institutions and local people

Poverty and economic need are the most obvious factors which encourage local peoples throughout the world to pursue short-termist, unsustainable modes of resource use. However, the economic conditions which provoke social poverty are not random, but the result of specific policies and governmental concerns. Political institutions therefore have a marked influence on resource management use strategies at the localities, as is the case in Nicaragua. But what kind of criteria should we use to consider how the relationship between institutional performance and local decision-making processes? A brief review of a number of conceptual points from literature on institutions and local community management systems presented below will be used to facilitate analysis in this chapter.

The viability of co-management regimes and local confidence within them are likely to be strengthened when larger institutional bodies recognise local resource rights, and provide practical support to make them effective. Unfortunately, as occurs in much of the world, national governmental institutions often obstruct, rather than facilitate, local control over resources (Ostrom, IASCP: 1998). If larger units ignore local rights, and exclude local people from the
management process, communities are less likely to respect governmental institutions. Moreover, if states view natural resources primarily as a revenue-generating sector for the state, rather than the means for long-term civic improvement, state policies can create particular income opportunities or investment avenues which leave users with few alternatives but to use their resources in unsustainable ways. When state policies limit local users' range of livelihood options in this way, people in effect rationally degrade the environment, since they must do what they can to survive (Baland & Platteau, 1996: 384). As Ostrom et al have argued:

".. in an optimal institutional arrangement, the incentives motivate the individual to generate net benefits, rather than net costs, for all. Few operational institutions, however, approach such optimality, and many generate incentives that lead to grossly suboptimal outcomes" (Ostrom et al, 1993: 9)

When considering how institutions affect resource use decision-making practices at the localities, it is also necessary to distinguish between the appearance and the reality of institutional support. Although institutions can offer the appearance, and deploy the terminology of sustainability and co-management, they might not in practice, be respecting them, or protecting the local peoples whose survival depends upon them (Campbell, 1996: 7). In the case of traditional communities, even where they have developed effective local management institutions to regulate human-environmental relationships, these can swiftly become untenable if threatened by external user intrusion, backed by national or regional governmental policies (Ostrom, 1990: 205). Exposure to new income-earning and consumption opportunities and possibilities can tend to erode the ability of rural communities to manage their common property resources successfully, and encourage more resource degrading practices to be pursued (Baland & Platteau, 196: 270-3). Moreover, these processes can lead to political and economic power differentiations within the community itself, which can undermine its ability to function as a collective unit in protecting the resources upon which their livelihoods depend (Ruttan, 1998: 51). Although these problems are not necessarily encountered by traditional communities, it is nevertheless important to consider the problems which they can experience in such circumstances.

It is also important to consider the relationship between the institutions and civil society, since this plays a significant role in determining the degree of local compliance (Ostrom, 1990: 214). If local people feel that government is not working for them, or even against them, they are more likely to defy institutional rulings and governmental management systems, whatever their nature. For example, a study of stakeholder conflicts over resource management in the Galapagos Islands concluded that the users' opposition to state-imposed policies was more the result of their anger at having been marginalised from the policy formulation process, than because they objected to the rules themselves (Heylings, 1998: IASCPr). In the absence of trust,
consensus and co-operation between local peoples and government institutions over resource management strategies becomes virtually impossible to achieve.

Institutions can therefore impede the development of sustainable co-management systems if they remain uncommitted to these principles, or if they fail to involve local users in the design of such initiatives. The management practice which local users then have to pursue in defiance of government, might not necessarily be the best for themselves or the environment in the long term. Institutions can create similar problems if their presence is minimal and ineffective. The more fragile the institution, the less incentive there is at the locality to abide by rules the state itself cannot enforce. Although communities in such circumstances might enjoy a large degree of self-determination, local users, particularly in the modern age, are rarely able to develop sustainable resource management systems on their own; particularly if they are faced with multiple pressures and incentives to exploit their natural resources. Local users, much as with local environments, need to be protected, and be able to benefit from guidance and protection from the regional and national institutions within which they are nested. The optimum institutional arrangement with local users, according to co-management principles, would therefore be one where responsibilities were shared, mutual legitimacy was respected and local empowerment and control was real, rather than fictitious. Analysis of the institutional arrangements and the political circumstances in the RAAN which influence the determination of resource use practices at the locality, will be developed in light of the theoretical observations developed in this section.

Nicaraguan national institutions

A cursory look at the history of Nicaraguan political institutions suffices to indicate why its political institutions and establishments have to date, been unable to effectively address the many problems of the Atlantic Coast region and indigenous peoples. The nation-state of Nicaragua was created in the wake, and arguably the image, of the weak, centralised colonial government which had preceded it. Nicaragua was not only structurally, but psychologically ill-prepared for independence. Its population was not united behind the ideal of an independent nation, but polarised, between the small, propertied and land-holding elite, and the large, rural underclass of mestizo and indigenous people. The Liberals and Conservatives of the upper class were moreover perpetually embroiled in bitter political feuds to control the young nation, from their respective strongholds of Leon and Granada. Nineteenth century Nicaragua therefore lacked both national institutions and a patriotic identity:

"..disunity among the patriarchal elites and between them and the folk remained the historical reality. As one major consequence, it deprived Nicaragua of the bureaucratic infrastructure and deference to unity needed to create the modern, Europeanized nation-state ... the Registro Oficial blamed disunity on the lack of "a national spirit," while de la Rocha lamented that
"The people are deprived of any spirit of Nationalism, which is the soul of the State" (Burns, 1991: 36).

Circumstances changed little into the twentieth century; if anything, they became aggravated. The ruling elite's policies continued to foster the exploitation of the large peasant class in the Pacific regions as before, but their intensity was arguably compounded by the United States, who since the end of the previous century in particular, wielded considerable control over Nicaraguan governance systems. Over the course of the twentieth century, class polarization between poor and rich, between the growing mestizo and indigenous populations, with the landowning class, were accentuated, particularly during the Somoza dictatorship. The popular Sandinista revolution came as relatively little surprise in 1979.

Although the Sandinistas aimed to reverse the trend of dictatorial, centralised institutional rule, to involve civil society in the collective process of government, their socialist objectives were not shared by all Nicaraguans. Many of the peasants who had fought in the Nicaraguan revolution had been fighting against landowner oppression, for their own land and right to self-determination, not for the Sandinistas themselves. Meanwhile, for the indigenous peoples of the Atlantic Coast, as we shall later discuss, it represented an opportunity to mobilise and acquire ethnic rights of self-governance and determination. Conflicting visions of the future within Nicaraguan society in the first years after the war arguably owed much to their disunited political and national heritage. The outbreak of civil war in the 1980s, precipitated by U.S. intervention, moreover meant that the Sandinistas were never really able to attempt to reverse institutional history, since the emergency circumstances led to another government from the centre, ruled by a particular, select elite.

Nevertheless, against the trend of both history and war, the Sandinistas developed a theoretically radical proposal which aimed to end conflict in the Atlantic Coast area, and in particular, to placate the indigenous insurrectionaries: regional autonomy. Autonomy aimed to convince the indigenous peoples that their interests could be addressed within, rather than independent of, the Nicaraguan state. In essence it represented a compromise agreement between the extreme positions of the two sides; those sections of Miskitu society wishing to create a sovereign nation on the Atlantic Coast, and those people from the Pacific who were suspicious of any expressions of regional separatism. Encouraged by their war-weary communities, most Miskitu leaders eventually accepted the Sandinista proposal. In 1987, an Autonomy Statute recognising many of the costeño's wartime demands for self-government, land rights and cultural identity was passed by the Sandinista government. Two separate Autonomous

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1 In Chapter 8, examination of the reasons for why the Miskitus joined the civil war against the Sandinistas will be provided.
Regional Councils would be created in the Northern and Southern sections of the Coast to determine regional affairs. Their decisions would be administered by an executive body known as the Regional Government. Partly to defuse the militant ethnic positions of the war, and also in the interests of constructing a more cohesive and cooperative regional society in which no single ethnic group exercised absolute hegemony, regional autonomy was founded upon the principle of multiculturalism, rather than indigenous rights alone.

The regional political context: institutional autonomy

On paper, the Autonomy Statute and related amendments to the Nicaraguan Constitution which both preceded, and became necessary following the approval of Autonomy in 1987, seem to provide ample and progressive rights to the Atlantic region and the indigenous communities respectively. Nicaragua's historical neglect of the Atlantic Coast appeared to have been reversed. Of particular interest to this thesis are the points which related to land ownership and natural resource management. The rights of indigenous communities to follow their own forms of communal land ownership within the regional and national systems, and to use and benefit from the natural resources located on their communal lands is upheld in Article 12 of the Autonomy Statute. Community rights to self-determination are also defended by Articles 5 and 89 of the Constitution:

"Indigenous people enjoy the right...to maintain the communal structures of land ownership, and to use and benefit from them...." (Art 5)
"Communities of the Atlantic Coast have the right to exercise their own forms of social organisation and administer their local affairs according to their own traditions." (Art 89)

According to Article 36 of the Autonomy Statute, communal land held by indigenous communities cannot be sold, seized or taxed, and only community members have the right to use and benefit from them. The rights of communities to benefit from the natural resources on their lands is further emphasised by Article 180 of the Nicaraguan Constitution.

There are also a series of laws pertaining to the rights of the Autonomous Region itself. Article 9 of the Autonomy Statute declares that:

"The rational exploitation of the mining, forestry and fishing resources as well as other natural resources in the Autonomous Regions of the Atlantic Coast must benefit its inhabitants in just proportions, in accordance with agreement between the Regional Government and Central Government"

Article 181 of the Constitution as a result of the 1987 legislation, moreover recognised that:

"The concessions and contracts granted by the State for rational exploitation of natural resources lying within the Autonomous Regions of the Atlantic Coast need approval from the corresponding Autonomous Regional Council"
Whereas the pattern of resource extraction from the Atlantic Coast had for centuries been determined by external markets and interests (see Chapters 3 & 6), the Constitution now provided the region with a legal standpoint from which to defend local social and ecological interests in the formulation of resource management policy. In theory, therefore, the Autonomy Statute and the Nicaraguan Constitution provide considerable protection to indigenous peoples rights and interests in regards to natural resources. Their ownership rights to traditional land and use of the resources upon them is upheld. Meanwhile an elected regional administrative body has been established, with the legislative powers to protect regional interests in the use of natural resources not lying within communal lands. However, the practical reality of the power-sharing arrangements in the post war era has unfortunately been the cause of great disappointment in the RAAN.

The Autonomy Statute was purposefully developed to be broad, so as to enable costeños themselves to work out specific details over time, rather than have them determined from the outset by the minority políticos (Freeman, 1988: 88, Llanes, 1995: 125). Its approval represented only the first step in what was intended to be a lengthy process, involving institutional development, legal refinement and local capacity building. Although the Autonomy Statute, in combination with the Nicaraguan Constitution, safeguarded the principles of community land and resources, and had established a regional government, the physical boundaries of indigenous community had yet to be determined, while procedures for how the regional and central parliaments were to cooperate, administer and define the management of land and natural resources in the Atlantic Coast had been left undefined. Translating the wide-ranging theoretical principles established by this legislation into concrete rights improvements for the region and its people has since proved a formidable task, which has often made a mockery of the optimism inspired by the 1987 agreement.

National government politics and autonomy in the 1990s

One of the major setbacks to the autonomy process coincided with the first elections for the Regional Councils in 1990. In simultaneous national elections, the Sandinistas suffered an unexpected defeat the United National Opposition party or ONU, led by Violeta Chamorro. The Sandinistas, who had conceived, developed and approved the Autonomy agreement, were no longer in government. The new ONU administration had not been involved in the autonomy process, and had no particular commitment to it. Then again, any Nicaraguan government elected in 1990, whatever their politics, would have been affected by not only centralised government traditions, weak institutions, and the devastation incurred by a decade of war, in not making the autonomy process one of their greatest priorities. Developing strong institutional structures able to operate on and coordinate between multiple levels of governance under any circumstances would be a difficult task to achieve. The introduction of a completely
unanticipated element, the Chamorro government, did however serve to make the prospects for radical institutional change and regional autonomy all the more bleak.

In order to become operational, the Autonomy Statute needed to be ratified by the national parliament in Managua; without additional legislation, it essentially represented a theoretical and abstract document (Llanes, 1996: 129). Ratification ultimately depended on the willingness and commitment of the new Assembly and Chamorro government to devolve national power to the Atlantic Coast regions. However, the Chamorro cabinet's main concerns were with revitalising the national economy, and reorienting it from a war to peace-time focus. In order to achieve economic stability and growth, the Chamorro government initiated one of the most extensive macroeconomic stabilisation programmes ever effected (Vickers, 1991/2; Borner, 1995). The harsh neo-liberal economic model being implemented in Nicaragua favoured a traditional, centralised approach to government, rather than decentralisation. Since only 5 out of the 92 deputies on the National Assembly are from the Atlantic Coast, it became very difficult for costeños to force regional agendas onto the National Assembly agenda, let alone to obtain the necessary support for their approval. The right-wing government of Arnoldo Aleman which replaced Chamorro in 1996 has so far continued the policies of its predecessor: pay lip-service to autonomy in the Atlantic Coast, but continue to operate in their own interests according to national agendas, and do little to further the decentralisation and regional empowerment process. Over a decade has passed since the Autonomy Statute was first approved; the principles it established are still awaiting ratification by Managua. As a Miskitu lawyer told me:

"in Nicaragua we make laws, we just don't implement them"  

Regional Council: Experiences in Government

The Regional Council of the RAAN therefore came into existence with only vague ideas of what their powers were, and almost no idea about how they could actually be exercised. Moreover, the vast majority of consejales or councillors had no experience of government and administration whatsoever; many parliamentary members were even illiterate. Regional autonomy was an experiment in the making for all participants; faced by a central government opposed to decentralisation on principle, it promised to be an uphill struggle (Hale, 1994: 197). The government in Managua appears to think that to further the ownership and management rights of the region and indigenous communities would constitute a direct threat to their own sovereignty, which they are unwilling to risk (Gonzales, 1998: 13). As such, the dominant, unresolved questions associated with regional land - what are the boundaries of communal land, does the state or the regional government wield ultimate jurisdiction over non-community land, and how should the natural resources on these lands be managed in the interests of both region and state - continue to overshadow the regional political scene. In the absence of property laws and administrative clarity, multiple social and ecological conflicts emerge between the national
government, the regional government and the indigenous communities themselves. Bereft of
institutional support or direction, a situation of confusion and lawlessness in the management of
natural resources unfortunately prevails. The circumstances being faced by the RAAN are
certainly not unique; similar examples can be found throughout the northern and southern
hemispheres. Conclusions drawn in such cases can therefore also be related to northeastern
Nicaragua, such as those produced by the research of Tubtim et al in the community of Nam
Ngum, Laos, southeast Asia:

"... the lessons of Nam Ngum lie in the importance of clarifying resource rights and
responsibilities between neighbouring villages, between local and state authorities and
between different claimants on the same resource. The vacuum of authority has been shown
to be the most pernicious problem facing rural people and the environments on which they
depend. Filling that vacuum effectively and equitably requires the establishment of a
flexible, detailed and participatory resource planning process." (Tubtim et al, 1996: 277)

Has the Regional Council shown itself in any way able to address the problems presented
by ill-defined systems of authority and rights regarding land use and ownership, in the face of
national government intransigence? On the basis of the Council's performance to date, one
would have to say that it has not. Although the calibre and experience of both consejales and the
regional institutions have reportedly improved, this would not have been possible without the
support of ASDI, a Swedish NGO, which has performed the role the national government should
arguably have assumed in attempting to strengthen regional institutions. Nevertheless, even with
ASDI's assistance, the Regional Council remains a weak institution, whose authority is not only
questioned at the national level, but within the region as well. Rather than follow the principle of
multiethnicity upon which autonomy was developed to create a united regional political
movement headed by the Regional Council, consejales have tended, particularly since 1994, to
follow national party affiliations instead. Political rivalries have prevented the Regional Council
from countering the pressure applied, and the example presented, by Managua, where politics
continues to be heavily influenced by interest groups, patronage and corruption. As a Miskitu
journalist told me:

"... things that are occurring in the RAAN, despite their regional particularities, are the same
as on the national level: politics are governed by political parties and private interests....
meanwhile, the people are desperate and are looking for means and ways to have their
concerns expressed, but so far to no avail...."

Many consejales are aware of this problem. At a joint session held in Puerto Cabezas
between the two Regional Councils in December 1996, various representatives expressed their
concern at how dependent, politicised and unimaginative the Regional Council had become. As
one consejal observed, the Regional Councils had become just another administrative branch of
central government. However, others took an alternative position. One consejal argued that the
region's interests were in fact best be served by an accommodating, rather than confrontational
position towards Managua. The experience of the war had shown costeños, he argued, the
dangers of pushing too hard for their rights, and that the Autonomy Statute could be ratified within a year if they presented a more conciliatory regional stance before the national government. Unsurprisingly, the consejal advocating this position was a Liberal Party member. Also unsurprising is the fact that 18 months later, during which time the Regional Council has acted anything but aggressively, the Autonomy Statute nevertheless seems no closer to being ratified (even though the same consejal saying that it would be is now a senior member of the Aleman government, and therefore in a very good position from which to realise his earlier prediction).

Internal as well as external factors inhibit the performance of the Regional Council. The executive wing of the Regional Council, the Regional Government, created in order to administer consejales' decisions, has in the last couple of years become more powerful than the Council itself. The Regional Government is headed by a Coordinator, more commonly known as the 'Governor'; from 1994, this post has been occupied by Liberal Party supporters, with the Regional Council dominated by Sandinistas. The rivalries and disagreements which have emerged between supporters of the two parties show how readily regional representatives have allowed the central government's 'divide and rule' policies to dominate the regional political scene. Once the Aleman government was inaugurated in January 1997, the balance of power turned decisively towards the Liberal contingent. In 1997, considerable proportions of the budget and salaries intended for the Regional Council began to be unlawfully withheld by Managua. What was delivered, was now being sent to the Regional Government, rather than the Regional Council. The Regional Council became effectively paralysed, and its autonomous rights transgressed. Until October 1997, the RAAN Regional Council had not met a single time in 1997, due to the financial constraints imposed by Aleman's budget freeze. As one consejal told me:

"...since Aleman took over government, the Council hasn't held a single session ... they've cut our electricity, they cut our phones, administrative staff has been made redundant, and many consejales haven't been paid... in essence, the central government's policy towards autonomy is to undermine it through abandonment."

As it became obvious that the constraints upon the Regional Council made it effectively unable to serve the interests of costeño people, early regional enthusiasm for the autonomy process faded. An extremely low turnout for the March 1998 regional elections, of only about 40% of those eligible to vote, was evidence of how widespread popular disaffection with regional politics had become in a society which since the war, had normally voted en masse. The results were nonetheless a victory for the political party of Arnoldo Aleman, the Liberals, creating a Liberal-dominated Regional Council and Government which makes it even more unlikely that regional institutions will be able, or even try, to resist central government policies, and develop their own. According to the regional newspaper Autonomia, Aleman had declared
prior to the election that if any other party than the Liberals won the elections, his government would give no further support whatsoever to regional institutions (Autonomia, 1998b: 18). The results suggest his warning might have been heeded; not only by the general populace, but by aspiring politicians as well. Politics is one of the few means of obtaining some power and employment in an incredibly depressed region. As another article in Autonomia lamented, in the 1990s, political affiliations can now determine whether or not you get a job in the region or not; something without precedent in Atlantic Coast society (Autonomia, 1998b: 7). This negative incentive means that rather than representing the interests of their constituents, elected consejales will more likely serve their political party agendas instead. Unfortunately, social conditions being as difficult as they are, it is therefore often very difficult for people to gamble with their livelihoods, and risk falling out of favour with the dominant power system. As one informant told me:

"all decisions are effectively taken in Managua, and our people haven't developed a determination to realise autonomy.... we still allow Managua to dictate everything"

The autonomy process remains an important vehicle for change and progress in the Atlantic Coast. Despite its many problems, the Autonomy Statute and the constitutional amendments represent important legislative landmarks from which indigenous communities and regional society can effectively struggle for their rights and interests. However, regional autonomy can only become effective with considerable support from the national government. The Regional Council's predicament shows that without financial and technical assistance from Managua and ASDI, it simply cannot function (Leger, 1994; Ortega-Hegg, 1996). Achieving radical institutional changes under the present, and indeed, historical conditions of Nicaraguan politics seems highly unlikely. Unless the regional authorities resist being co-opted by national government, manage to bridge local political or ethnic divides, and foster a region-wide interest to defend autonomy principles, the expectations created by regional autonomy will probably continue to be disappointed. Both regional and national space for the expression of local political agendas remains incredibly limited.

Land, resources and management in the RAAN

As already mentioned, the rights to land and resources remain the most controversial and divisive issues in the RAAN today. Both at the community and regional levels, development and future survival is seen as contingent upon securing the economic power base provided by rights over land and resources. It is therefore useful to describe the institutional and economic contexts of land proprietorship and resource management within which contemporary indigenous perceptions function.

Natural resources: a means to a future
Particularly in the urban sections of industrialised society, where livelihoods rarely depend upon direct expropriation of the environment, greater concern is often given to the recreational or ecological, rather than industrial significance of the natural world. Environmental conservation has become a morally correct position to adopt in modern day society; the wisdom of pursuing further development and wealth at the cost of irreversible environmental destruction is a hotly debated issue. However, it is much easier to make these choices in industrialised societies, where modern services and standards of living are on average much higher than in the "developing" countries of the world. This is certainly the case in Nicaragua, and the Atlantic Coast in particular, where the majority of natural resource reserves are located. Regional attitudes towards natural resources are primarily determined by economic, rather than ecological, considerations; natural resources are the region's main asset and means of development.

Since natural resources represent the region's main and only material assets, careful management procedures are required. However, as will be shown in Chapter 6, regional natural resource extraction has historically occurred in an unregulated institutional environment, which has discouraged the development of equitable and sustainable resource management. There are some indications that Nicaragua has in the 1990s, begun to move away from its past history of granting large-scale concessions to foreign institutions, paying more attention to local concerns and indigenous rights than ever before (see Chapter 9). The government learnt, after the international outcry which greeted its decision to grant a lumber concession of 250,000 hectares to a Taiwanese firm in 1991 (which was eventually withdrawn) that local consultation and ecological criteria would henceforth have to play a role in decision-making procedures (FAO, 1993: 32). In Chapter 8, we will examine the case of Awastingni, an indigenous community whose involvement in a contractual arrangement with a Dominican lumber company rests on governmental recognition of their customary tenurial rights, even though the community still does not hold a formal land title. There are indications that in Nicaragua, the government has begun to accept the wisdom and necessity of incorporating public participation into institutional arrangements regarding forestry.

**Institutional weakness within the developmentalist paradigm**

However, despite certain changes, many of the historical characteristics of the Nicaraguan forestry sector - top-down, export-oriented, closed to the possibility of power-sharing or public participation - have unfortunately persisted into the 1990s. The national government still appears more concerned with creating attractive conditions for foreign investment than with developing local markets, improving the regulatory environment or encouraging the development of alternative, less ecologically-destructive industries in the region. A study headed by Borner on institutional conditions and uncertainty in Nicaragua, following the policy reforms resulting
from the intensive structural adjustment drive of the early post-war era, provides explanations for why economic rather than social imperatives have continued to dominate national political considerations in the 1990s. The authors argue that agencies such as the IMF or World Bank, whilst urging countries like Nicaragua to provide the economic conditions to stimulate private sector growth and achieve national development, pay insufficient attention to the need for concomitant and complimentary institutional reform (Borner et al 1993: 44). Despite the Nicaraguan government having remedied macroeconomic instability and established the economic preconditions to stimulate the private sector, foreigners remained very reluctant to commit their resources to the country. A survey of foreign investors identified two principle reasons to explain their reticence: the outstanding, unresolved issue of property-rights, and the 'discretionary problem', whereby the institutions in Nicaragua themselves could be expected to either ignore their own laws and procedures, or liberally reinterpret them at will. Of the 29 "low-developing countries" where similar research was conducted, only 2 countries were considered to have higher levels of institutional uncertainty than those found in Nicaragua.

Nicaragua therefore remains a significant investment risk, and entrepreneurs in the lumber industry as in other sectors, as in the past, tend to only commit for the short-term, with their primary objective being quick profits, rather than long-term growth. Although this type of investment brings more damage than benefit to Nicaraguan society and environment alike, the elusive developmentalist dream means that foreign investment is usually accepted, irrespective of companies' intentions. Moreover, the fragility, and indeed, the corruption which bedevils Nicaraguan institutions at both the national and regional levels means that once such companies begin to operate, governmental control over their actions is very poor (see Chapter 8). As a Miskitu informant in Puerto Cabezas told me:

"Foreigners continue to come and use our natural resources as they please ... we have been incapable of telling them "look, if you don't respect our rights, you have to leave."

However, since the government has made no effort to foster an integrated local economy, and needs remain great, costeños often seem resigned to the fact that resource expropriation in the region continues to be dictated by external economic systems and incentives, rather than local needs (CIES, 1992: 33).

**Contextualising developmentalism**

After all, the contemporary regional economic and institutional environment, and the unregulated patterns of resource extraction which it fosters, have long-standing historical roots (see Chapters 3 & 6). These institutional trends have moreover structurally and ideologically functioned to limit progress, change and development in the Atlantic Coast (Gonzales, 1997b: 35). Structurally speaking, international and national policies have encouraged the entrenchment
of ecologically destructive, and socially detrimental forms of resource extraction in the region - patterns of resource management which over time, society has become dangerously accustomed to. As a result, not enough time is spent discussing and exploring alternative ways of using natural resources for long term common interests. Invariably, the commercial value of environment is perceived in terms of its potential for straightforward extraction. In a region where (even by the dubious prices set by the global market economy) resources are pitifully undervalued, attitudes and economic incentives combined have worked against sustainable use of the environment.

Over the centuries, the Miskitus have made significant ideological accommodations to the commercial opportunities presented by foreign companies extracting resources from their region. As a result, indigenous society has become responsive to the goals and values introduced by the global developmentalist discourse. Moreover, given the pressing and immediate needs of the regional population, indigenous peoples included, concern with how the returns from natural resource industries are distributed throughout society is more prevalent than concern with the ecological consequences of industrial extraction itself.

The developmentalist policies pursued by the Nicaraguan government in the 1990s, and the economic characteristics prevalent in the RAAN are by no means unique. Throughout the globe, natural resources are being exploited in the interests of capitalist enterprise, rather than local peoples and local economies. Davies and Young's analysis of the nature of Australian economic policies, and their impact upon aboriginal peoples, could be easily transplanted to the Nicaraguan context:

"..regional planning by government agencies could do much to redress aboriginal marginalisation, but this has not occurred - instead planning has focused almost exclusively on large-scale resource development and has largely ignored the needs and aspirations of the region's aboriginal population." (Davies & Young, 1996)

The institutions of management

Article 102 of the Nicaraguan Constitution declares that "natural resources are national patrimony" and that the state is legally entitled to grant contracts for their "rational exploitation" (my emphases). Given the absence of a developed regional administration able to assume the task of monitoring resource use, the institution responsible for establishing and enforcing environmental regulations in the RAAN remains the Nicaraguan Ministry of Natural Resources, or MARENA. MARENA however, wrestles with a somewhat contradictory mandate. The Ministry is responsible both for granting resource exploitation contracts to resource extractive companies, as well as for protecting the natural environment. In practice, the former responsibility has arguably tended to take precedence over the latter. In response to institutional trends of the 1990s, MARENA has become an increasingly centralised ministry over the decade,
with limited technical staff based permanently in the departamentos, including the RAAN. As a consequence, MARENA's ability to monitor company activity is extremely limited; according to concerned costeño:

".. the State does not have a legal-administrative institution able to guarantee an adequate balance between conservation and development ... [MARENA] is becoming a marketing body for natural resources, which makes a ... legal entity able to guarantee sustainable use and protection of the environment increasingly necessary." (Romero & Cunningham, 1992: 55)

As the regional delegate of MARENA admitted to me, MARENA offices in the RAAN suffer from a shortage of staff, particularly professionals. As a result, he declared, civil society now had to start taking much more responsibility for environmental protection and regulation. Although this might in theory appear a reasonable suggestion, it cannot occur if the government does not itself set an good example of sustainable management, and prevents local involvement in the formulation of management practices. Interestingly, even the forestry professionals in MADENSA, the most active lumber company in the region, complained of MARENA's shoddy work, which made working in the region unsettling and unpredictable; similar complaints were voiced by representatives from the South Korean company, SOLCARSA. The weak institutional context means that despite the multiple tax breaks and lax regulatory environment, foreign companies are reluctant to make long-term investment commitments to the region, and continue to seek quick profits by extracting the most precious woods as quickly as possible. As a member of the Regional Council observed, regional resource management was largely a misnomer:

". we are simply giving all our resources away to the companies, and serving private interests, rather the [indigenous] communities'."

Institutional inflexibility

Even when regional authorities have made attempts to become more involved in the monitoring of natural resources, MARENA has taken steps to resist change. For example, in 1996, an initiative was made to develop a Committee of Natural Resources in Puerto Cabezas which included the regional MARENA delegate, representatives of the regional government, municipal authorities and members of civil society. The objective of the Committee was to develop common principles to regulate resource use in the region. According to one participant, the Committee was unable to develop beyond the first few meetings because the MARENA delegate refused to support it. Without MARENA's albeit limited technical backing, there was therefore little point in proceeding. Coordination between MARENA and the regional authorities to develop and implement management policies remains virtually non-existent. This is particularly true in the case of forestry resources. Although the regional government receives a proportion of the taxes paid to MARENA from the mining and fishery industries, only the municipal authorities benefit from taxes upon the lumber industry. This prevents the benefits accrued from natural resource extraction from effectively benefiting the region as the Autonomy
Statute had stipulated. In 1996, from approximately $5,000,000 generated by registered lumber extraction, less than 1% was reinvested into the regional government (Regional Council, 1996; pers. comm.). By not making a proportion of the material benefits accrued from natural resource extraction available to the regional authorities, both regional improvements, and the process of autonomy itself, will continue to be piecemeal.

**Land in the RAAN**

Land in the RAAN is interpreted in a variety of ways: it can be presented as community, municipal, regional or national land depending on the perspective of the observer. Municipal boundaries are perhaps the clearest boundaries of them all. Within municipalities, however, we find land which is primarily under the jurisdiction of the indigenous communities; the municipalities might receive taxes from lumber felled in these areas, but they are not able to determine how it should be used. As discussed earlier, the Autonomy Statute and Nicaraguan Constitution give legal rights to indigenous peoples over their traditional communal lands. However, the specific boundaries of these community lands remains to be determined. Although this issue remains at the forefront of most indigenous, and indeed regional agendas, no concerted initiative to resolve the land question has yet been undertaken by the national government. A National Commission for Land Demarcation was set up in August 1996, but it was opposed by the indigenous communities for being largely government-controlled, and ultimately made little practical progress in achieving its mandate.² In the meantime, a combination of factors, including population increases, regional immigration, and a reevaluation of traditional land ownership patterns and natural resources have made the resolution of regional land ownership an urgent necessity.

**Indigenous communities within the regional / national institutions**

How do indigenous communities perceive the regional / national institutions within which they reside? Although indigenous communities have been affected by the economic incentives fostered by national institutions, they have nevertheless retained a physical and psychological separation from the institutions themselves. Their relationship with regional institutions in the 1990s, particularly once these had failed to improve conditions in the RAAN, has been largely similar. The disillusionment suffered by the indigenous communities, who had expected great changes from the war, has been instrumental in encouraging their disaffection with both regional and national politics and governments. From the 1970s through to the end of the 1980s, indigenous communities in the RAAN were generally, extremely interested in political affairs, and eager to participate in them (Gonzales, 1997: 32). However, the 1990s have brought communities back to a situation of isolation and limited political involvement. The

² See Chapter 7 for more detail.
autonomy process has been primarily concentrated upon developing the regional administrative bodies in Puerto Cabezas, or attempting to resolve the disputes between region and state. The primary fault - and weakness - of the Regional Council has in fact been its inability to communicate with the regional population, and to develop a popular base of support within the RAAN itself. Not only would this help strengthen their position before the national government; it would also encourage their policies to become more reflective of regional opinion. At present, however, indigenous communities tend to present the Regional Council as working against rather than in their interests:

"We don't know what the Regional Council is.... I don't know who our representative is... they [the consejales] haven't presented themselves to the people, and the people don't know what they are up to.." (Francis Sirpi, 1996)

And as another informant said to me:

"Autonomy is only a word. It should mean control of our own resources for a better life ... but we haven't seen this happening, we see other people benefiting instead." (San Carlos, 1997)

The opinions of these informants were echoed by countless others through the region during all my field work visits, and therefore appear fairly representative of public, and particularly indigenous, perspectives on the regional government today. This does not necessarily mean that autonomy itself was a poor idea. Although traditional patterns of leadership, authority and representation in Miskitu and Mayangna cultures are quite different from the Western political democratic system encapsulated by the Regional Council (see Chapter 7), the main source of popular dissatisfaction does not seem to be with autonomy itself, but an ineffectual political system which has made autonomy appear so meaningless to so many costenos. As a Miskitu professional told me:

" .... autonomy is a significant achievement for us, but we don't have the important things, which are human and economic resources, to make it work....we need to restructure these organisations [of the regional government], to fight for economic strength, on the basis of our regional natural resources .... this is our only route to salvation .... but restructured in another way, not like it is now.... "

The Regional Council needs to act soon to bridge the growing gulf between government and civil society, while this is still possible. At the November 1996 Joint Session between the RAAN and RAAS Councils which I attended, various consejales spoke out on this issue, saying that they needed to start paying more attention to the communities, rather than the national government and international investment. However, while the President of the Council admitted that they had problems with the communities, this lack of communication he argued was the fault of the national government, who gave them such a limited budget, and made the costly exercise
of regional travel virtually impossible. Indeed, he did have a point; regional travel is a tiresome, lengthy and expensive exercise, requiring good vehicles able to tackle the poor roads, while petrol for both land and water transport is incredibly expensive. A passenger traveling to Asang, in the upper River Wangki, from Waspam, a journey of about eight hours with a medium power engine, will spend about $12, practically the same amount as an average monthly income. Nevertheless, it is also a question of choice: some consejales, once elected, opt to move to Puerto Cabezas, and others do not. As the consejal from San Carlos, a community just before Asang on the Wangki, told me, the majority of consejales chose to live in Puerto Cabezas, rather than spend most of their salaries travelling back and forth between the regional capital and their communities. As a result, only three out of the nine consejales from the Wangki district actually lived in the area itself. As a result, the legitimacy of consejales to pose as their leaders becomes openly questioned in those communities who never see their representatives. The locality remains ominously alienated from both regional and national governance systems.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an analysis of the institutional environment in which resource management policies in the RAAN are developed and implemented. It has also served to provide a general introduction to the contemporary political and economic framework which influences the formulation of contemporary indigenous environmental perspectives. Despite an impressive record of policy reforms providing considerable rights to self-governance and resources for both the Atlantic regions and indigenous communities within them, successive Nicaraguan governments have blatantly failed to implement them. Rather than facilitate local empowerment, and incorporate local concerns within management processes, weak political institutions have been either unable or unwilling to modify traditional centralist approaches to governance. As a result, the relationship between central government and indigenous communities remained by and large, exceptionally poor. Since government itself is questioned, the rules which it applies (but cannot itself enforce) are not always respected at the locality. For example, isolated communities resent governmental decrees limiting the amount of wood they are able to sell from their forests, and since they know these rules are rarely enforced, have a double incentive not to uphold them.

If possible, the relationship between the regional government and indigenous communities is even worse. Perhaps because the indigenous peoples had such high expectations of the Regional Council following the war, its subsequent ineffectiveness has represented an exceptional disappointment to them. Regional autonomous institutions remain defenceless before arbitrary political decisions from Managua as was clearly demonstrated in 1997, when the

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3 This statement was moreover made before the unilateral cuts on the Regional Council's budget were made by President Aleman.
new President Aleman's decision to withhold the Council budget provoked little resistance from within the RAAN itself. Although the Regional Council can enact legislation, it is palpably unable to implement it. In 1997, it only convened once, and then at the instigation of the national government (see Chapter 8). While it remains an important legal instrument for local self-governance within the federal state of Nicaragua, regional autonomous institutions have in practice, been little more than extensions of national government will in the RAAN, which has hardly managed to endear them to the indigenous communities of the region.

Local resource decision-making processes are therefore conditioned by a weak institutional environment, developmentalist economics, political systems they feel little allegiance to, and management policies determined without their participation, which they frequently defy. Without external support, it is unlikely that the indigenous communities will independently manage, or even attempt to galvanise progressive changes in institutional and governance systems. At present, indigenous peoples' main efforts are directed towards protecting themselves from the state, by obtaining community land titles, which despite their constitutional right to land, is proving an arduous enough task in itself. Improving the management system itself is not necessarily their greatest priority at the moment. Moreover, given the historical indigenous experience of resource extraction for commercial purposes, institutional and economic incentives, current levels of poverty in the region, conditions seem more likely to encourage exploitative, short-termist and ad hoc patterns of resource use, than sustainable management regimes.

As long as indigenous communities continue to perceive the government as unwilling to fulfill their greatest collective concern, to receive titles for their community lands, then relations between state and the locality will remain uneasy. Indeed, in the last few months, members of a Miskitu political organisation founded during the war, YATAMA, frustrated with government intransigence over this issue, decided to return to its paramilitary roots. Reinforcements from the national army have taken positions throughout the RAAN where the situation could, according to the Nicaraguan national newspaper *La Tribuna*, turn explosive at any moment (*La Tribuna*, 02/07/98). Many of the central institutional conditions for sustainable co-management regimes - recognised property rights, a developed hierarchy of supportive institutions with clearly defined respective responsibilities, and perhaps most importantly, trust between government and people (Heylings, 1998: IASCP) - do not presently exist in the RAAN.

In later chapters, local environmental perspectives and agendas within the regional and national institutional contexts described here will be examined in relation to specific case study examples. This has not been attempted in this chapter, which was primarily designed to introduce and discuss the regional, and particularly the institutional characteristics of the RAAN.
An additional reason, however, which has already been stated in this thesis, is that indigenous perspectives can simply not be appreciated when abstracted from the historical and cultural conditions from which they have originated. State institutions and policies after all represent only one of the many reference points which shape indigenous attitudes towards resource use. The following three chapters will therefore analyse the historical and contemporary relationships between Miskitu values, organisation, livelihoods and beliefs and environmental perspectives within indigenous communities themselves.
Communities and Culture

This chapter examines the historical antecedents of contemporary Miskitu culture and environmental attitudes within indigenous communities. Communities are integral to the indigenous experience in northeastern Nicaragua, as a prominent Miskitu professional has argued:

"the community is the basis of the Miskitus social organisation, and represents the guarantee for their survival" (Cunningham, 1994: 19)

In Chapter 1, we presented various observations by Butz on indigenous communities and cultures, which will inform analysis in this chapter. Most relevant amongst these is his argument that resource management decision-making is ultimately determined at the community level according to indigenous cultural norms, cultural norms which are in turn, determined by both material and ideological concerns. The Miskitus' concern to pursue livelihood strategies which are both materially efficacious, and ideologically efficacious, has continuously influenced their resource use practices. However, since indigenous culture has in itself, been constantly modified over time, the nature of their material and ideological concerns have also changed according to historical circumstances. It is therefore important not to make assumptions about indigenous culture when incorporating them into management processes, since this can serve to mitigate against the benefit of their inclusion. The first part of the community battle is being won. Communities which a few decades ago were perceived by the development paradigm as symbols of backwardness, anachronistic to modernisation objectives, are now being recognised by organisations such as the United Nations and World Bank as providing the locus for social action and basis of resource management arrangements (Mosse, IASCP: 1998). However, sensitive appreciation of community culture, histories and values by governments and organisation still needs to improve. Although developmental workers and governments now realise the importance of incorporating community concerns into projects and policy designs, they nevertheless often end up misrepresenting local systems, since they fail to appreciate the origin, nature and implications of their cultural perspectives. Analysis of Miskitu history, culture and community perspectives in this chapter aims to inform and contextualise subsequent consideration of Miskitu behaviour as stakeholders in contemporary resource management situations.

Three aspects of indigenous community culture deemed most relevant to this inquiry are being used to guide the discussion. The first theme concerns Miskitu *livelihood systems,*
exploring the relationship between culturally-defined needs and resource use strategies pursued by the Miskitus over time. Since needs are culturally relative concepts, this inquiry will also allow us to reflect upon community values, and their implications for resource use strategies. Finally, we shall consider the forms of social organisation which the Miskitu have employed to secure livelihood needs, in accordance with their community values. Since these three themes - livelihood strategies, organisation, and values - function simultaneously within Miskitu culture, they will be analysed simultaneously in this chapter.

Both endogenous and exogenous factors are considered to have shaped Miskitu culture, and therefore livelihoods, organisation and values, at the community level. Miskitu environmental perspectives have therefore emerged from the meeting of local and external influences. Past research on the Miskitu has indeed placed great importance on the influence played by contact with non-indigenous society in the formulation of their culture; subsequent research remains incomplete without consideration of this issue. The cultural contact process indeed represents a central analytical concept both in this chapter, and throughout the thesis.

The different ways in which the cultural contact phenomenon, and by implication, indigenous culture are treated by researchers, can result in very different perspectives on indigenous peoples, in this case, the Miskitu, being presented. Since academic representations of indigenous culture can have significant political repercussions for the human society under consideration, influencing the way indigeneity itself is viewed (e.g. in relation to land claims or demands to be included in resource management negotiation processes), I feel it is important to present, through an analysis of the culture contact phenomenon, my overall approach to Miskitu culture itself. A review of how the concept of culture contact is used in this particular thesis becomes a necessary entry point for this chapter, not only because of its political implications and the significant role it has played in previous research on Miskitu culture, but also since it represents a central analytical device in considering the relationship between Miskitu culture and environmental perspectives.

The "purchase society" theory of Miskitu cultural change

Mary Helms, an anthropologist who conducted research in the Miskitu community of Asang during the 1960s, proposed a new sociocultural category - the "purchase society" - to describe Miskitu culture, based upon the experience of contact. This theory influenced many subsequent interpretations of Miskitu culture, and therefore provides us with a useful starting point from which to consider the nature and significance of early Miskitu attempts to reconcile pre-contact cultural norms and perspectives, with external practices and knowledge.
How did Helms define a "purchase society", and what implications did her theory have for Miskitu culture? The "purchase society" theory is best explained by Helms herself:

"The definitive characteristic of any purchase society is the articulation of local society with the wider complex world through economic channels of trade and wage labour, while political autonomy and a stable social organisation are maintained... local adaptations will be directed... to 'purchase,' through one means or another, foreign manufactured goods which have acquired the status of cultural necessities...." (Helms, 1971: 7).

According to Helms, the indigenous purchase society's involvement with the "wider complex world" after culture contact implied fundamental cultural change, a whole new direction and rationale for indigenous culture. The 'definitive' cultural characteristic and objective of Miskitus society became the *purchase* imperative; Miskitu livelihoods, values and social organisation all became geared towards obtaining the benefits afforded by culture contact. However, since the Europeans did not *colonise* the region, indigenous political autonomy at the community level was maintained. This meant that a *separate* realm of social experience, in which pre-contact cultural norms persisted, was able to co-exist with the tumultuous changes otherwise affecting indigenous society.

To a large extent, I agree with Helms' representation of the conditions according to which Miskitu culture subsequently evolved. However, whereas Helms seemed to imply that the two realms of the Miskitu experience - economic involvement with European trade, local political autonomy - were maintained separately, I see them engaged in a constant process of interaction. Although the Europeans introduced commercial enterprise to the Miskitus, the more "complex" society was not necessarily able to dictate the terms of transaction; the local indigenous people assumed this process, and made it their own. By the same token, although local indigenous political autonomy was generally maintained for centuries after contact, nevertheless, changes - for example in indigenous leadership, values, and intracommunal social organisation - which infiltrated local indigenous society could be traced back to the experience of external contact. Contact with the outside world had lasting repercussions for Miskitu culture. However, the modifications to Miskitu culture which developed from this experience evolved gradually over time, in response to local cultural considerations as much as external impositions by European society. Contact did not result in an immediate and radical overhaul of Miskitu culture.

Helms' belief that culture contact produced a radical overhaul of Miskitu society led her to declare that:

"Miskitu culture did not exist before European contact....in contrast to societies with aboriginal bases, Miskitu culture originated as a direct response to European colonialism" (Helms, 1971: 4)
Since Helms was writing at a period when anthropologists were paying particular attention to the role of colonialism in shaping, and indeed, creating new patterns of group affiliation or tribes which would subsequently be regarded as traditional, it is not surprising that she identified and emphasized the clear role played by European contact in shaping Miskitu culture and identity. However, I would argue that she takes this argument a little too far, when she states that Miskitu culture did not exist before European contact. Although exogenous influences have undoubtedly been instrumental in producing contemporary Miskitu culture and perspectives, it would be a mistake to imply that the Miskitus entered relationships with the Europeans without any distinctive cultural traditions of their own. It seems logical that in order for Miskitu culture to adapt to the European contact experience, they had to have a prior cultural identity from which to do so. As Nietschmann argues:

"...there have been many social and economic changes by the Miskito to culture contact, but these have been adaptations - not spontaneous creations" (Nietschmann, 1973: 24)

Although Helms' work otherwise demonstrates a clear and deep appreciation of Miskitu culture, by contrasting the Miskitus to societies with aboriginal bases she nevertheless seems to be implicitly stating that since exogenous influences have been so instrumental in formulating Miskitu identities, the Miskitus should not really be seen as indigenous peoples at all. The contentious nature of this assertion gives even greater cause for concern if one considers the potential political and ethical ramifications of culturally-oriented research. To treat Miskitu identity and culture as merely a by-product of colonialism is not only inaccurate; it could moreover severely undermine the credibility and legitimacy of Miskitu struggles for land rights and cultural recognition today, both of which depend upon their identity as indigenous peoples. Although it is unlikely that the question of Miskitu indigeneity could ever be seriously contested in Nicaraguan political circles, given the often unscrupulous actions of the Nicaraguan government, researchers in this area must nevertheless err on the side of caution, and remain aware of the potential political implications of their work. As Wilmsen has seen:

"studies of isolated communities have been used politically all too often by governments as legal buttresses for disenfranchising such people further" (Wilmsen, 1989: 7)

My position on the culture contact phenomenon is that although contact with Westerners has, through time, led to significant developments in Miskitu culture, exogenous influences have been assumed and modified to become their own: the Miskitus are no less indigenous because of this experience. Ultimately, indigeneity should not be conceptualised according to stereotypical norms, but rather in response to the particular circumstances and characteristics of the specific indigenous group in question. Indigenous cultures have not survived to the present day by remaining immutable throughout time, but by learning to adapt to new circumstances and
opportunities presented by each new historical context. As Bebbington has concluded from his research in the Central Andes of Ecuador, tribes from this region believe that:

"Modernization, far from being a cause of cultural erosion, is seen as a means of cultural survival" (Bebbington, 1996: 56)

It is therefore important not to approach indigenous cultures according to the preconceptions which we, as outsiders, might expect them to conform to.1

Miskitu culture has therefore been engaged in a constant process of modification and reaffirmation through time, in response to both local and external considerations; from which their environmental perspectives have also been produced. Historical inquiry will begin by considering indigenous society prior to contact with the Europeans, in order to present the context from which subsequent culture change, adaptation and persistence developed.

**Pre-contact indigenous society**

The information available on pre-contact indigenous society is practically nonexistent. Researchers must therefore rely on sources dating from the early periods of contact between indigenous peoples and Europeans, to try and understand this earlier era. Although these sources are limited, and are heavily affected by cultural biases of the time, they are nonetheless important sources of original data from which to develop our analysis (Vargas, 1995: 39).

The sources concur in identifying more numerous indigenous groupings than presently exist on the Atlantic Coast, the Miskitus, Mayangnas and Ramas. Partly given the limits of this thesis, and partly because the sources present confusing and even conflicting descriptions of the names and locations of the various indigenous tribes, the complex ethnic picture will necessarily have to be simplified. From the various groupings of pre-contact indigenous society, two main streams emerge: the indigenous tribes most closely affiliated with the Europeans known as the Miskitus; and the numerous other tribes, the Ulwas, Twahkas, Alboawinneys and so forth, whose descendants today refer to themselves as the Mayangnas. The Ramas are located in the southern part of the Atlantic Coast, and will not feature in this discussion.

**Pre-contact society: organisation and values**

What do we know about the organisation and values prevalent in pre-contact indigenous society? Although one must be wary of over-simplification, according to both Helms (1978: 128) and Vargas (1996: 57), it is likely that the various indigenous tribes located in Eastern Nicaragua traditionally lived as egalitarian tribesmen in small kinship groups. Exquemeling

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1 I do not mean to imply that Helms is guilty of this, but that others, less informed than herself, might independently develop such conclusions from her statements on Miskitu culture.
even made a point of noting the appearance of gender equality within indigenous society (Exquemeling, 1980: 264). Tribal egalitarianism was not necessarily the regional norm; the Kuna Indians who lived further south, in what is today Panama, lived by contrast in a stratified and rank-based society (Helms, 1978). In contrast, the tribes of Eastern Nicaragua were united by horizontal ties of kinship, which provided the context and ideology for reciprocal exchanges and a predominantly egalitarian co-existence (Novacek, 1988: 19). The observations of coastal society provided by M.W., an anonymous British pirate who visited the region in the seventeenth century, appear to confirm the theory that indigenous peoples lived in a largely autonomous, communally-oriented, self-regulating but relatively free society:

"The plain dictates of natural or moral honesty, are the law of these people amongst themselves, without having any courts of judicature, or office of justice. They live peaceably together in several families, yet accounting all Indians of one tongue, to be the same people and friends, and are in quality all equal....unless it be at such times when they make any expeditions against the Alboawinneys; at that time ... they obey the orders of their king2 and captains; yet on no account do they pay any taxes, rents or do any sort of services, but have all the country in common (excepting their dwelling-house and small plantations)" (M.W., 1699: 293)

Ideological equality was also mirrored by material equality. Land was treated by indigenous communities as a common resource. Within the area of common land used by a community, all members had equal rights to individually clear and claim parcels of land. The tradition of holding land in common appears consistent with the image of the egalitarian, mutually supportive indigenous tribe; it was also a pragmatic system of land tenure to have given the nature of swidden agriculture. The swidden agriculturist cultivates different tracts of land each year; in northeastern Nicaragua, insla prata or untouched land, is considered the most fertile and therefore most valuable. Swidden agriculturists have no need for private ownership over a fixed parcel of territory; they are interested in securing equal rights of access to cultivable land. As Cattle remarked:

"... under this system of cultivation, private ownership of swidden land is not only unnecessary, but totally impractical. Thus the village is the landholding unit rather than the individual." (Cattle, 1977: 47)

The ethic of communal equality in the case of land tenure therefore performed both ideological and material roles in Miskitu society. Holding land in common fostered ethics of equality and cooperation and set moral standards of behaviour within indigenous society which encouraged the peaceful communities observed by M.W. It also made practical sense, given that subsistence agriculturists' pattern of land use was extensive, rather than intensive. Indigenous ideological values and practical livelihood strategies therefore operated in conjunction to determine social

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2 The Miskitu king was a post-contact development in indigenous society, which will be discussed in Chapter 7.
organisation patterns for use of natural resources. Cultural values can even be said to have regulated indigenous-environmental relations. Although each individual enjoyed the same access to land, and was responsible for their own livelihoods, yet communal ethics of equality and cooperation functioned as a safeguard - not only against individual excesses and competition, but also against individual losses. Freedom was exercised within the ties of kinship and reciprocity created by community membership itself. Arduous tasks, such as planting or harvesting, were often performed collectively, under a system of labour reciprocity known as *pana pana.*[^3] The ethic of reciprocity also encouraged people to share hunting spoils with one another, and care for the elderly when they were no longer able to work. Given the ideologies of local indigenous culture, values which moreover functioned in the practical context of a small population to land ratio, disputes over land and resources were probably very infrequent. The ethics of traditional indigenous society were more likely to have stimulated co-operation than competition amongst community members.

**Intertribal relations and organisation: historical foundations of regional discord**

Internal tribal equality appears to have been mirrored by a balance of power between tribes, without, however, the same element of intracommunal respect and reciprocity. The various indigenous tribes were by all appearances, engaged in a perpetual standoff with one another, only occasionally suspended at particular times of the year in order to trade. The majority of the time, however, members of opposite tribes frequently attacked, enslaved or killed one another. If outright war broke out between two tribes, the usual egalitarian structure found within them would be suspended, and a war leader would be selected to lead the warriors (Exquemeling, 1980: 262). However, this post was only temporary, and once peace had been restored, the war leader would once again occupy the same social rank as the rest (Vargas, 1996: 29). Inter-tribal or ethnic relations, characterised by discord, rather than harmony, therefore had the potential to disrupt community egalitarian organisation, even if only for short periods. The balance of power between the various regional tribes, as well as the impermanent nature of indigenous leadership, are two aspects of pre-contact society which would change in the wake of the European arrival.

**Livelihood strategies: indigenous subsistence**

What were the livelihood strategies of pre-contact indigenous society; how did they use the environment; what kind of demands did they place upon it? Environmental use patterns were largely defined by indigenous subsistence strategies. By subsistence, we will be referring to those uses of the environment designed strictly for auto consumption, and not for trade. The appropriation of resources for trade will be referred to as commercial activities; both subsistence

[^3]: *Pana pana* literally means "friend-friend." The term implies reciprocity - a favour for a friend, for a favour for a friend in return.
and commercial activities today form part of overall indigenous livelihood strategies. However, in the pre-contact period, it appears that trade was not a significant aspect of livelihood strategies, hence the sole concentration upon subsistence activities in this period.

The main subsistence activities pursued by regional tribes in the pre-contact era were hunting, fishing, gathering and swidden agriculture. The indigenous peoples traditionally lived near water; their settlements tended to be located near rivers and lagoons, with temporary shelters near the sea. The extensive regional waterways along which they resided gave them a means of transport to other communities or hunting grounds, a source of fish, and were also located near the most fertile, alluvial lands of the region. Men's labour was primarily dedicated to hunting and fishing; as Dampier tells us, there were a variety of wild game and fish in the region for the indigenous man to target:

"Sometimes he seeks only for Fish, at other times for Turtle or Manatee, and whatever he gets he brings home to his Wife, and never stirs out to seek for more till it is all eaten. When hunger begins to bite, he either takes his Canoe and seeks for more Game at Sea, or walks out into the Woods and hunts for Peccary, Warree, each a sort of wild Hog, or Deer; and he seldom returns empty-handed, nor seeks for any more so long as it lasts" (Dampier, 1729: 16)

The allocation of hunting time was therefore determined according to the most fundamental of human needs: to abate hunger. The subsistence system was designed to address immediate material needs with the least expenditure of energy possible; men would only hunt when the family had run out of food. Exquemeling, Dampier, De Lussan and M.W. all indicate that the indigenous population was relatively small; given that they only hunted or fished when pressed to, the local fish and fauna populations were probably not greatly affected by human exploitation. Hunting and fishing conditions could change between different months and seasons; the climate, combined with these subsistence pursuits meant that the indigenous population was semi-nomadic, with settlements in the pre-contact era unlikely to have represented permanent, year-round residences.

Resilient and perennial crops, such as plantains, bananas, cassava or manioc played an important part in indigenous nutrition, as did the wild fruits and plants gathered by the women (Cattle, 1977). Nevertheless, agriculture, a more time-consuming pursuit, involving greater changes to the local ecosystem, was not a favourite past-time of the men, and was an activity largely attended to by indigenous women. Formal cultivation was therefore limited, even though there appeared to be no shortage of land (Nietschmann, 1973: 28). There were both practical and ideological reasons for the low scale of indigenous agriculture (Dejour, 1995: 5). In practical terms, their semi-nomadic existence defied intensive cultivation; besides, the women, having countless other chores to attend to, could not have been expected to dedicate more time to agriculture than was absolutely required. Dampier tells us that
"After the Man hath cleared a Spot of Land, and hath planted it, he seldom minds it afterwards, but leaves the managing of it to his Wife, and he goes out a striking....their Plantations are so small, that they cannot subsist with what they produce..." (Dampier, 1729: 16).

Moreover, the poor quality of much of the soil in the region, particularly on the extensive pine savannas stretching from the coast inland towards the tropical forests, probably discouraged the indigenous peoples from wasting too much energy on agriculture:

"...the great savanna or barren plain ... is generally not habitable, unless on the very borders thereof, near some great river-sides. The soil is so barren and parch'd with the sun, that no plantation of fruits or corn can be made thereon..." (M.W., 1699: 290).

Furthermore, game was reportedly abundant in the area, and hunting represented a central subsistence strategy pursued by the men of the communities. Meat was both materially and ideologically significant to indigenous society. Sources indicate a cultural preference for meat prevailed amongst the indigenous tribes of the Atlantic Coast, which combined with an overall livelihood objective of meeting immediate needs with as little expenditure of energy possible (hunting could take time, but arguably no where near as long as cultivating land did), helped determine the proportion of time dedicated to each particular strategy. Given these considerations, it is not surprising that agriculture remained an understated element of indigenous livelihood strategies.

Indigenous subsistence systems were therefore characterised by a variety of environmental use strategies designed to meet immediate livelihood needs, according to a flexible, mobile and opportunistic cultural outlook. Their resource use strategies have much in common with those described by optimal foraging theory, whereby individuals try to maximise their returns according to the least possible effort (Gibson, 1998: 15). Individual actions, were, however, constrained by ideological considerations: the values imparted to them as members of a community organisation, which did not associate personal prestige with material possessions. The incentive to accumulate for accumulation's sake, under these cultural circumstances, did not therefore exist. In pre-contact indigenous society, need was a literal, rather than a relative concept. The human impact on the environment of a small, scattered and nomadic population, employing an array of different means to appropriate natural resources for immediate needs, is not likely to have been too significant during this period. Indigenous ideological values and normative behaviour therefore served to encourage environmental use patterns which were consciously collective, cooperative and limited, and by implication, albeit unconsciously, conservationist.

*The environmental limitations of indigenous livelihood*
The rich natural environment described in this period undoubtedly furnished its human occupants with a variety of roads to securing subsistence. So why did the indigenous people prove so responsive to the new commercial opportunities presented by the Europeans from the seventeenth century in particular? If they were comfortably meeting their livelihood needs already, one might assume that their decision to trade with the Europeans was motivated by a cultural desire to accumulate, discrediting the previous argument that their needs were limited. However, appearances could be deceptive. Despite the Mosquito Shore's fame for abundant natural resources, the unpredictable, often violent tropical environment could make survival extremely difficult. By pursuing a variety of subsistence strategies, pre-contact indigenous society was attempting to safeguard their livelihoods: the environment was so changeable that no single one could be relied upon. The exploitation of particular resources and ecozones viable in the dry months, could be made impossible by the high winds and torrential downpours of the rainy season. Periods of abundance would be replaced by seasons of scarcity, with hurricanes, floods and storms underlining the untamable power of the natural world. Schramm, a Moravian missionary who worked in the region in the early twentieth century, described the environment as unaccommodating and extreme:

"...one notices two very great contrasts. One is the exuberance of life in both the animal and vegetable kingdoms; and in contrast with that is the amazing rapidity with which everything passes away in death. The sun and rain which produce from the earth the luxuriant forests and make possible the very prolific animal life, are at work here burning and rotting all nature away. An iron tool or a frame house which ought to last a century are old here in a decade with rust or rot. There is an ant which in a short time, if not discovered and destroyed, riddle every board in a house, and which destroys everything which is soft, as wood, clothing, books. This country, the Mosquito Coast, does not possess a single feature that could recommend it as a country in which to settle.." (Schramm, 1936; ix-5)

In a changeable environment, the indigenous subsistence system had to be adaptable to remain viable. Moreover, foreword planning made little practical sense: immediate needs and opportunities were of the essence. Human beings had little power to control their environment, they were merely trying to survive in it. Human existence was probably not miserable, but it certainly was not secure. Given the nature of indigenous relations with the environment at this time, it is understandable that conscious conservationist attitudes did not become culturally required (Vargas, 1995: 3). Moreover, as their livelihood strategies depended upon the opportunistic exploitation of whatever chances arose, it seems reasonable to assume that the indigenous peoples had their own reasons for responding to the new livelihood alternatives presented by the Europeans.

4 The most glowing accounts of the ecological riches found here, however, date from the 18th and 19th centuries; a period when the great European powers were seeking to establish colonies in the New World (Dejour, 1995: 4). Their exaggerated accounts of the "natural paradise" and easy lifestyle of the Mosquito Shore encouraged some ill-prepared colonists to emigrate here, with disastrous and usually fatal results.
Culture contact

Contact with non-local systems, values and behaviour would have wideranging effects upon both the ideological and material considerations of indigenous culture in northeastern Nicaragua. This section will consider these new orientations in Miskitu culture with particular reference to various secondary sources dating from this period. Historical accounts, albeit sometimes indirectly, can provide us with valuable insights into contemporary indigenous culture, to consider the manner and extent to which the Miskitus culture and environmental attitudes adapted or persisted, in light of the alternative examples set by the European systems and values they were being exposed to.

An unusual colonial experience

The unthreatening disposition of the Europeans who arrived on the Mosquito Shore undoubtedly encouraged the indigenous inhabitants to pursue ties with the outsiders, and explore different ways of making the environment serve their livelihood needs. The first Europeans to regularly frequent the region were pirates seeking a temporary safe haven (Lussan, 1930: 283):

"some English and French privateers whom necessity has driven on this coast .. have been relieved by these natives" (M.W, 1699: 287).

The pirates' primary destination on the Coast was Cabo Viejo or Gracias a Dios, located on the sea at the mouth of the River Wangki (see Fig. 5). Since they were few in numbers, and had no intention to conquer the region, they strove to establish friendly relations with the indigenous people they encountered. Although initially seeking refuge, the pirates soon became interested in acquiring particular resources found in the region for trade, such as furs, feathers, sarsaparilla, rubber and palm oils (Offen, 1994: 3; Vargas, 1996: 37-8). These items were easily procured by the indigenous peoples, who in exchange, became interested in acquiring European manufactured goods which they could not produce, particularly metal tools, such as knives, hatchets and machetes. Transactions were in material terms, mutually beneficial:

"...the necessity of a friendly intercourse with the Indians ... in process of time extended to a communal communication, of benefit to both parties" (Wright, 1808: 20).

The emergence of the Miskitus

Out of all the various regional tribes, the particular group which showed the greatest levels of responsiveness to European contact, and which would subsequently emerge to dominate the regional political scene, came to be known as the Miskitus. The Miskitus were a tribe found occupying the main strategic coastal settlements by 17th and 18th century travellers, who were reportedly an ethnically mixed group of indigenous natives and escaped African slaves. Besides furnishing the Europeans with items of trade, the Miskitus also became employed as fishermen in their ships, for which skill they were "esteemed and coveted by all Privateers; for one or two of them in a Ship, will maintain 100 men" (Dampier, 1729: 15). We indeed hear a great deal from
historical accounts about how useful the Miskitus were to the Europeans, supplying them with local resources both in trade and consumption.

**Contact: a mechanism of defence**

While Spaniards were exterminating Indians on the Western highlands in the sixteenth century, the Miskitus were being treated with the utmost respect by Europeans visiting the Atlantic Coast. The indigenous people on the eastern seaboard are reported to have known the fate of the western tribes, perhaps encouraging the Miskitus to forge alliances with non-Spaniard Europeans for protection (Hale, 1987a: 35). The accommodating attitude of Europeans arriving on the Atlantic Coast in this period was instrumental in encouraging Miskitu to see the practical advantages, rather than the drawbacks, of fostering ties with their visitors.

The first formal trade contacts between the indigenous population and Europeans were instigated by the short-lived Providence Company, in the seventeenth century. The Company was targeting primary materials for export to Europe, and sent an expedition to the Atlantic Coast to assess the region's potential for trade. The members of the expedition were given strict orders to be friendly, flexible and respectful in their dealings with the indigenous population, characteristics of European behaviour towards the indigenous peoples which had already been pursued by the pirates, and which would persist over the next two centuries (Oertzen, 1986: 25). This cordial treatment likely reinforced the Miskitus' reported sense of self-worth, respect, and independence, which stood in stark contrast to the broken-spirited, enslaved and massacred indigenous tribes from the Pacific. The different historical experiences of the Atlantic and Pacific indigenous peoples were instrumental in fostering or undermining indigenous cultural integrity of these tribes; Orlando Roberts would later describe the Indians from the Mosquito Shore as the

"free tribes...[I] had a good opportunity of observing...and contrasting their present state of civilisation, with that of their subjugated brethren in the Spanish American provinces" (Roberts, 1827: 30).

European trade therefore did not only provide the Miskitus with material benefits, and protection from the Spaniards; association with outsiders gave ideological reinforcement to Miskitu culture at a time when other indigenous tribes in the region were dying off or being exterminated. England would emerge as the closest Miskitu trade partner, as well as ally or protector, during this period.

**Cultural value of indigenous identity**

Historical evidence indeed suggests that rather than perceiving themselves as inferior to the Europeans, the Miskitus retained a strong sense of cultural pride and self-worth during the first two centuries of concerted contact with the Europeans. They were not just the passive
recipients of European cordiality; indeed, they came to demand it. As William Dampier observed, the Europeans were careful not to offend the Miskitus, for that could spell an end to the relationship, irrespective of the material loss to the latter:

"The Moskito's are in general very civil and kind to the English, of whom they receive a great deal of Respect, both when they are aboard their Ships, and also ashore.... We always humour them, letting them go any whither as they will, and return to their Country in any Vessel bound that way, if they please...For should we cross them, though they should see Shoals of Fish, or Turtle, or the like, they will purposely strike their Harpoons and Turtle-Irons aside, or so glance them as to kill nothing" (Dampier, 1727: 17)

Although the Miskitus welcomed the opportunity to supplement subsistence strategies by trading, or working for the Europeans, material rewards could not entice them to work if their cultural pride and integrity had been offended. Raveneau de Lussan, a French pirate operating in this area at the same time as Dampier, elaborates on this theme:

"They frequently render assistance to our filibusters when taken on board and when given promises of being allowed to participate in the prizes captured, promises which must be faithfully executed; for let them be deceived just once and they can never be relied on in the future." (Lussan, 1950: 287).

The Europeans might have initially treated the Miskitus with respect as part of a shrewd imperial policy; they soon found this approach was not merely a shrewd tactic, but an absolute necessity. The Miskitus' early experience of cultural contact and resource trade therefore did not appear to them as exploitative, although it is often characterised as such in the twentieth century. Indeed, they appeared as much, if not more, in control of the relationship than their European counterparts. The Miskitus' favourable experience of European contact (in contrast to those many tribes who were exterminated by Europeans, or those others who remained hidden from them) helps explain how external trade and ties over time, became integral aspects of their cultural identity; to the point that they were prepared to change settlement and livelihood patterns, and upset the regional tribal balance of power, in order to do so.

Changing settlement patterns, livelihood objectives and inter-ethnic relations

As often occurred, if one particular facet of indigenous culture accommodated the European experience, a wide number of other, related changes, were also as liable to be generated. Indigenous settlement patterns, which changed around the time of European contact, represent one such case in point. Changing patterns of indigenous settlement were indicative not only of new livelihood strategies, but also of a developing imbalance of power between local tribal groups, which would continue to place strains upon regional inter-ethnic relations to the present day.

*The strategically placed Miskitus - and the inland tribes*
In contemporary times, Miskitu villages are located along the coastal littoral and the main rivers, the principal access points in the region. The Mayangna, the only remaining descendants of all the other tribes which also used to inhabit the area at the time of contact, have their settlements far inland, in the uppermost reaches of the rivers and jungle interiors. The division of indigenous settlement patterns between Miskitu on the coast, and all the others inland undoubtedly appears to be a post-contact development. This change did not occur overnight; towards the end of the seventeenth century, M.W. tells us of a small indigenous settlement, inhabited by:

"not above 20 more families of Mosquito-men in all; and they live in continual danger and fear of their neighbours the Alboawinney, who, in dry times, come down to the sea-side to make salt" (M.W., 1699: 288)

Non-Miskitu Indians still came to the shore in the dry seasons to make salt, and presumably also to fish, as was their tradition. Nevertheless, as the Miskitus amassed both material and ideological advantages over the other tribes, because of their ties with the Europeans, traditional patterns of tribal mobility and equal access to the various ecozones changed.

**New livelihood orientations**

Whereas populations had previously been oriented towards inland riverine areas, ecosystems able to maintain all the various aspects of the indigenous subsistence strategies - hunting, gathering, agriculture and fishing - following contact, the Miskitus developed a more concerted focus upon the coastal littoral, where contact with Europeans took place. Although it has often been assumed that the Miskitus were traditionally coastal dwellers (Nietschmann, 1971: 27) both Helms and Magnus have disputed the idea that indigenous society was in general, coastally oriented prior to experiencing external cultural contact. They argue that the indigenous peoples had traditionally been inland or riverine-based, and only moved to the coast for short periods during the dry season for fishing, particularly of turtle and to collect salt. The inclement weather of the wet seasons made permanent settlements on the coast impractical, while the poor, sandy soils of this area made it difficult to meet the agricultural component of indigenous subsistence systems. The establishment of permanent settlements only occurred when the Miskitus decided to add variety, and therefore resilience to their subsistence strategies, by trading natural resources coveted by the Europeans for manufactured goods. This decision had long-term repercussions for Miskitu livelihoods and structure, as it demanded that they:

"modify their subsistence pattern radically to fit this new way of life" (Magnus, 1978: 79).

By reorienting their subsistence system beyond the ecological confines of their traditional inland habitat, Helms and Magnus argue that a fundamental shift in indigenous livelihood strategies had taken place.
Although adapting social organisation to become responsive to the opportunities presented by commercial trade might have increased the array of quick and easy livelihood options available to the Miskitus, subsistence strategies had been subtly undermined. Coastal settlements were putting greater distances between themselves and the inland regions most suited for cultivation and hunting. As we have already mentioned, the sandy soils of the coast and savannah were less than ideal for agriculture. Moreover, by living nearer the coast, Miskitus would soon be exposing themselves to numerous environmental hazards brought by the inclement rainy season, probably one of the principal reasons dissuading indigenous coastal settlements in the pre-contact era. M.W. indeed suggests that the indigenous subsistence systems of coastal communities might have been very delicately balanced:

"[they] have plenty enough for themselves; though a small number of strangers to stay some time with them, would soon make a scarcity" (M.W., 1699: 297).

Nevertheless, the Miskitus seemed prepared to take these risks, suggesting they were more willing to find a way around the ecological disadvantages of the coastal zone, than to forgo the opportunities presented by trade. The practical disadvantages posed by their new settlement patterns had therefore been outweighed by the material advantages of trade. The Miskitus nevertheless now had to devise a mechanism to secure access to the inland ecosystems they needed for subsistence. Perhaps for the first time in regional history, conscious strategies to obtain access to natural resources had become necessary, and moreover, an issue in intraregional relations. In order to resolve their problems of resource access, the Miskitus used the sources of power afforded them by European ties to upset the intertribal balance of power, and develop a dominant position in the regional political scene.

**Regional indigenous relationships: Miskitu hegemony**

External trade, and in particular the acquisition of guns, provided the Miskitus with the means to attain regional hegemony. M.W tells us that the Miskitus already had guns by the late seventeenth century, (1699:293), and that moreover, the other Indians were dreadfully afraid of them, believing that evil spirits emanated from them when fired (1699: 290). The Miskitus were able to exploit the other tribes' fears of guns to the point where the traditional practice of enslaving captured members of other tribes was only performed by the Miskitus on other tribes by the eighteenth century. Ethnic relations and the social order on the Coast were modified in light of the slave trade, despite this being in one sense, a continuation of pre-contact practices (Vargas, 1995). Although inter-ethnic regional relations had never been exactly harmonious, they would become significantly more antagonistic from this point onwards.

Historical accounts show how extensive the Miskitus' sphere of influence had become by the eighteenth century, stretching far beyond the confines of their traditional areas in Nicaragua.
and Honduras. In this period, their raids were taking them all the way up the coast of Yucatan, and down south to Costa Rica, judging from Spanish complaints. Moreover, rather than killing, torturing or setting free adult male captives as was traditional practice, they were treating their captives as commercial commodities, selling them to the British for the Jamaican slave market, or to foreign settlers on the Miskito Coast (Helms, 1983: 10). Orlando Roberts, in the 19th century, tells us how the Miskitu slave trade had had a devastating effect upon the other indigenous tribes of the region:

"the infernal policy of the Mosquito chiefs...[was] to make frequent incursions upon the neighbouring tribes of Cookras, Woolwas and Toacas...for the sole purpose of seizing and selling them for slaves to the settlers, and chief men on different parts of the Mosquito Shore. Much misery has here resulted to these poor people, who though now seldom annoyed, have withdrawn themselves far into the interior; and hold very little intercourse with the Indians on the coast" (Roberts, 1827: 116-7).

By terrorising, enslaving and dominating the other indigenous tribes, the Miskitus were in fact pursuing an effective strategy allowing them to obtain interior resources, for trade or their own consumption, in the form of tribute (Bard, 1899: 126; Bell, 1899: 127). Over time, the Miskitu population itself expanded to cover all the principal access points and coveted ecozones, leaving the other decimated tribes no other option but to retreat deep into the mountainous interior of the tropical jungle. As the Miskitu population became more coastally oriented in response to the opportunities presented by external trade, territorial spheres of influence, based upon ethnicity, began to emerge. As Helms observed, the rise in Miskitu hegemony fostered

"a redefining of ecological zones and potentials as well as a new pattern of ethnic distribution [occurred] .... the coast and its resources now provided a new econiche for the Miskito as a new and rapidly growing social group" (Helms, 1983: 19).

The Miskitu slaving raids provide an example of how further cultural adaptations would develop at the local level, because of the initial decision to accommodate European commerce into Miskitu livelihood systems. External trade and regional hegemony assumed both material and symbolical importance in the process, and became defining characteristics of Miskitu culture itself. The raids can therefore be seen as

"an outgrowth of European contact and ...an adaptive mechanism utilised by a rapidly expanding local population in the process of acquiring a new ethnic identity and redefining resource utilisation" (Helms, 1983: 1).

The "new ethnic identity"

As Helms observed, a further consequence of changed Miskitu settlement patterns and growing regional hegemony was the emergence of a new ethnic identity, which in turn, would influence their treatment and attitudes towards other ethnicities, as well as the way in which Miskitus' would come to conceptualise and present their particular rights over lands and resources in the future (see Chapter 7). As with other factors being discussed in this chapter, the
ramifications of cultural change or persistence for Miskitu indigenous attitudes was not necessarily immediately apparent; their significance in the present day will be revealed in subsequent chapters.

The Miskitus' relationship with the Europeans began to assume not only material, but also ideological value, fostering a new projection of indigenous identity. The Miskitus began to take pride, and feel different from the other indigenous tribes, because of their relationship with the Europeans (Helms, 1983:5):

"The Indians on the coast think themselves entitled to assume a superiority over these 'Montanios' in consequence of their connection with the traders" (Roberts, 1827: 57)

It appears that the Miskitus actively promoted a separate identity for themselves before the Europeans, in order to distinguish them from the other Indian tribes. Although M.W. readily referred to them as the Miskitus as Indians in his account, yet he also noted that the Miskitus began rejecting the term "Indian", and were asking the Englishmen and Frenchmen to call them Mosqueto-men instead:

"Mosquito Indians ..... are as brutishly negligent in their ways of living as the [other Indians], yet, in regard that they have some small commerce with the English, they esteem themselves to be a very notable sort of people, affecting much to be call'd Mosquito-men, and distinguishing their neighbours by the names of wild Indians and Alboawinneys" (M.W., 1699: 285-6).

On first impressions, the Miskitus' reasons for distancing themselves from their traditional cultural identity, and aping Europeans' cultural norms instead, might have been motivated by their belief that this other society was superior to their own. However, given the strength of Miskitu cultural self-pride discussed in the previous chapter, this explanation seems unlikely. Imitation is also an effective form of flattery; it is equally possible that the Miskitus' were pursuing a pragmatic strategy designed to endear themselves to the Europeans, and thereby consolidate their hold over the commercial advantages which this relationship provided. However, once the decision to accommodate indigenous culture to external cultural norms had been made, the process and repercussions of cultural adaptation could easily assume a rationale of its own.

Indeed, over time, the Miskitus would appear almost psychologically dependent upon their ties with the outside world. On reaching the Atlantic Coast in 1839, Orlando Roberts' noted that

"much pleasure was manifested at our arrival, as we had long been anxiously looked for...the natives...were inspired with the idea that they had not been forgotten, as they had feared they had been by their friends the English" (Roberts, 1839:13).
Material concerns - the desire to maintain trade channels - were no doubt of primary importance. Nevertheless, the ability to trade as equal partners with the most powerful nations of the world in itself, came to be seen as a source of cultural strength. Pride in the Miskitus historical role as partners and traders with great nations, despite vastly changed circumstances, remains powerful in indigenous society today. During the 1980s war, one of the leaders, Steadman Fagoth used the image of the Miskitus as equal partners and traders with foreign nations, determining their own destiny, to inspire the Miskitus with the idea that they had once been a strong and independent nation, active members of the international sphere, a past which they should fight to regain. As he wrote in his 1985 book, the Miskitus long involvement in external trade

"... without any doubt whatsoever, strengthened our economic resilience as a nation. Moreover, our autonomous self-governance has been consolidated ever since by the external relationships we have maintained." (Fagoth, 1985; my translation)

The commercialisation of resources therefore became a cultural necessity for the Miskitu peoples during this period; both materially and ideologically.\(^5\) Moreover, the Miskitus responded to the notion that they enjoyed cultural superiority over other indigenous tribes, and set about actively exploiting the practical advantages at their disposal, destroying the traditional system of intertribal equality and equal access to resources and ecozones in the process. The influence which the Miskitus' sense of ethnic superiority had upon their subsequent political positions in land and resource disputes will be considered in Chapters 7 and 8.

Non-Miskitu indigenous change: The Mayangnas

Ethnic hierarchies instigated by the Miskitus' relationship with the Europeans meant that traditional indigenous nomadic behaviour became restricted. As Roberts confirmed, the other indigenous tribes which in M.W.'s time had come periodically to the coast to fish and make salt, had by the nineteenth century, retreated far into the interior of the country, to escape Miskitu raids, and were rarely to be found on the coast (Roberts, 1827). Roberts noted that many of these tribes were no longer to be seen; not just because they were in hiding, but also because their populations had decreased. Disease introduced by the Europeans, restricted access to resources and the slave trade provided a variety of explanations for why the populations of the other indigenous tribes of the region declined. The Miskitu population would also suffer from European diseases, but trade and free access to resources appeared to have enabled their numbers to be maintained at a healthy level over time.

The cultural identity of the descendants of these tribes, the Mayangnas, stems from this historical experience of subjugation; by Miskitus, as much as by Europeans. The Mayangnas, or

\(^5\) Today, when indigenous peoples in the RAAN conceptualise development, the terms of reference provided by their historical experience, and their identity as Miskitus, invariably means that they expect development to be fueled by the extraction of natural resources.
Sumos as they were until recently known, have since this time, lived in dispersed communities located in the most inaccessible regions, in the tropical forests of the interior. Topographic evidence however, shows that their geographical reach used to be far greater than today; Bilwi, the indigenous name for the regional, and coastal, capital of the RAAN, is in fact a Mayangna, and not Miskitu word. However, the new indigenous ethnic hierarchy which emerged on the coast from the close association between Miskitus and foreigners left the other tribes in an extremely vulnerable position. Coastal sites such as Bilwi, or primary riverine locations such as Wasla or Asang (on the Rio Wangki) had to be abandoned in the interests of survival. Even so, their numbers depleted rapidly, whilst the Miskitus status and presence on the Coast was being solidified. According to various historical accounts, the Miskitus' hegemony was resented by the other Indians. The Woolwas, Bard observed, were 'pure' Indians, who:

"entertained a feeling of dislike, amounting to hostility, to the Mosquito men." (Bard, 1899: 126)

Ultimately, many of these tribes were wiped out: the scattered and depleted tribes which survived would, over time, become collectively known as the Mayangnas.\textsuperscript{6} Contemporary material will show how the violent history between Miskitus and Mayangnas continues to complicate resource management negotiations today (Chapter 8).

Cultural exchange and cultural accommodation

The preceding section examined ways in which Miskitu livelihoods, values and organisation were modified as a consequence of European contact. However, historical accounts also provide us with many examples to show that cultural exchange and accommodation was not only a two-way process, but moreover that despite surface appearances of change, pre-contact indigenous practices and values could nevertheless persist. In this section we will examine instances of mutual cultural exchange and accommodation between Miskitu and European societies. The ensuing section will consider the implications of persistent pre-contact practices and values for Miskitu culture and their environmental perspectives.

European adaptation to indigenous cultural norms

The Atlantic Coast, initially only a temporary point of refuge for pirates became a permanent settlement from the mid-seventeenth century onwards, particularly after buccaneering became outlawed by all the major European powers in 1685 (Helms, 1983: 3). Sources show that rather than imposing their own customs upon indigenous society, these European settlers had

\textsuperscript{6} Ironically, the discrimination and isolation experienced by the non-Miskitu tribes since the 18th century have helped them considerably in the 20th. Not only is their history more "typically" indigenous than the Miskitu (they have had less contact with foreigners, they have not mixed racially, and so forth). They are also found inhabiting the tropical forests of the interior, considered both the "natural" habitat of indigenous peoples in popular imagery, as well as one of the most valued and coveted ecosystems today, both materially and ecologically speaking (see Chapters 7 & 8).
to accommodate to *local* customs and culture, in order to be accepted by the Miskitus. According to Exquemeling:

"when the buccaneers live amongst these people, they take their daughters, and marry them according to the Indians’ own custom. After her husband's death, the Indian widow carries out all the traditional ceremonies as if the deceased had in fact been Indian" (Exquemeling, 1980: 267, my translation).

John Holm's research supports this argument. As Holm argued, these pirates,

"for as long as they chose to remain - and some chose to remain the rest of their lives - .. they were members of an Indian household, with all the intimate cultural and linguistic contact this implies" (quoted in Oertzen, 1986: 36).

There are also many counter-examples showing how the Miskitus emulated European habits, such as dress or use of weapons, forms of leadership and even political positions (see Chapter 7). However, in the home, at least until their conversion to Christianity (see Chapter 4), indigenous custom largely prevailed. England, who played a prominent role in the Coast during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, might have had far greater material wealth and strength in global terms than the Miskitus, but since the region never represented a focus for colonisation, her colonial methods remained informal. The number of English traders frequenting the Mosquito Shore was always limited, with few actually settling; the indigenous population therefore vastly outnumbered the visitors. The isolation, autonomy, and continued mobility of indigenous communities defied European control, preserving the traditional context of cultural reproduction and Miskitu identity itself.

Reports of European traders assuming indigenous cultural practices can be found well into the twentieth century. In 1936 the Moravian Reverend Schramm criticised the many foreigners who, rather than teaching the indigenous peoples modern, Christian customs, had rather "dropped their knowledge and ways to become indian" (Schramm, 1936: XVI:3). Moreover, Exquemeling also tells us that the members of the Miskitu tribe who were descendants of escaped African slaves had appropriated the language and customs of their indigenous brothers, and had lost all memory of where they were from and how they had come to the Atlantic Coast (Exquemeling, 1980: 268). Exquemeling's observations are further substantiated by Hodgson:

"The natives or Mosquito people are of two breeds, one the original Indians, and the other a mixture of those and negroes, called Samboes. The latter originated from the cargoes of two Dutch ships filled with negroes, which were cast away on the coast... the negroes had wives and ground gave to them; since which they have greatly multiplied, and there is now no distinction between them in their rights and customs" (Hodgson, 1757: 357-8, quoted in Bard).
It would therefore appear that despite the lengthy experience of contact, outsiders were not able to simply impose their norms and practices upon indigenous society.

Although Miskitu society had become part of external trade channels linking them with the outside world, commercial success in the region nevertheless depended as much, if not more, upon local than European criteria. Perhaps the most crucial factor bestowing economic advantage upon European traders, as for indigenous livelihoods, was membership of an indigenous clan, with all the concomitant advantages which this afforded them. Roberts tells us that the traders who settled on the Coast often married into indigenous families, thereby integrating themselves into the indigenous kinship structures (Roberts, 1827). As Oertzen and Rossbach argue, marriage helped traders establish monopolies over a given clan and afforded them all the benefits of operating within kinship framework, such as indigenous reciprocity and support (Oertzen, 1996; Rossbach, 1986: 106). The criteria for economic success did not, therefore, conform with the type of assets useful in a European mercantile context, such as capital or political influence, but were determined by membership of, and allegiance to, the extended family unit and community structure. However, the infiltration of Europeans values into indigenous social networks would also over time, serve to modify traditional egalitarian kinship structures, fostering new forms of indigenous power and leadership, and undermining kinship reciprocity and cooperation in the process.⁷

**Outlook: Indigenous values and motivations**

The appearance of Miskitu subsistence had indeed altered since pre-contact times. Moreover, the Miskitus' new orientation towards European trade did not necessarily indicate that all their underlying livelihood values and motivations had changed. The Miskitus might have begun exchanging resources as commodities, and begun to value, and take pride in, the special relationship they enjoyed with the English. However, although both material and ideological aspects of their culture were modified, in many ways, the pre-contact cultural framework informing indigenous livelihood remained unaltered. As Helms herself observes, although contact with Europeans

"initiated new native coastal adaptations, many of [these], however, can be understood as variations on traditional themes" (Helms, 1978: 132).

It is important to remember that although different societies might find themselves performing similar actions, the underlying cultural significance and intent in each case are not necessarily the same. The Miskitus were becoming involved in the European commercial world, but retained their own cultural motivations and rationales for doing so. The Miskitus' separate realm of cultural reproduction continued to maintain a distinctive indigenous identity. In this section, we

⁷ See Chapters 4, 5 and 7 in particular.
will consider certain aspects of indigenous culture, as described by the historical accounts, indicative of pre-contact facets of indigenous cultural. We will also consider the implications of these examples for indigenous environmental attitudes.

**Indigenous cultural reproduction and the role of women in indigenous society**

Indigenous cultural reproduction primarily takes place in the home. It therefore largely occurred removed from the sphere of European influence on the Atlantic Coast. Furthermore, this task was mainly the responsibility of indigenous women, who were themselves far less exposed to representatives of foreign trade and culture. Having much less contact with the Europeans than the men, the perspectives and values which they brought their children up according to were likely to remain consistent with pre-contact indigenous practices.

Miskitu society is moreover matrilocal, which means that married couples tend to reside in the same village as the wife's parents, and that hence the stable residential core of a village is comprised of groups of related women. According to Helms, matrilocality in Miskitu society has favoured the retention of traditional cultural norms, since women, who are in charge of rearing children and therefore of social reproduction, are less exposed to non-Miskitu values, behaviour and practices than men (Helms, 1971: 23-4). Miskitu men have historically been much more likely to travel beyond the physical and cultural confines of the community than are the women, a practice has persisted right up to the present day. This means that despite historical exposure to external cultural influences, Miskitus can nevertheless retain a strong sense of cultural identity:

"...no matter how far or how long their wanderings, generation after generation of Miskito men seem to have maintained a sense of ethnic identity and cultural distinctiveness as Miskitu, speaking their own language and generally following their own customs." (Helms, 1968: 460)

As Helms tells us, the women are

"the conservative element in Miskito society, maintaining traditional customs and socializing their children according to these patterns..." (Helms, 1971: 24-5)

Women's role in maintaining the distinctive realm of community culture, a level removed from non-indigenous influences, facilitated the maintenance of a Miskitu distinctive cultural identity, despite centuries of contact with outsiders. As pointed out in Chapter 1, the norms, values and lifestyles held within indigenous communities in the region today remain quite different from those found in the regional capital of Puerto Cabezas. The persistence of a distinctive indigenous cultural identity gives credence to the argument that despite increasing involvement in the European world of commerce, and although the Miskitu have been trading their natural resources for goods or money since the seventeenth century, they nevertheless maintained particular cultural objectives while doing so. It is important not to lose sight of the stabilising factor
provided by Miskitu households and communities, which although ravaged by a multitude of pressing social problems in recent years, nevertheless continue to underpin indigenous cultural identities.

**Indigenous livelihood strategies: subsistence vs. accumulation**

One of the crucial factors allowing the Miskitus to maintain a distinctive ideological perspective despite entry into the European commercial sphere was that they remained materially independent of such opportunities. Unlike the European traders, they did not cater to their livelihood needs solely through commercial channels. Although subsistence practices had been modified and somewhat undermined by new coastal orientations, the resilience of pre-existing patterns of social organisation meant that even if the ideological importance of subsistence had somewhat decreased in the indigenous value system, subsistence strategies continued to provide the material foundations of indigenous livelihood requirements. While Miskitu men left their communities, sometimes for months on end, in search of commercial opportunities, the women, elderly and children would tend to the agricultural plots which provided the essential basis of indigenous nutritional intake (Cattle, 1977). This meant that whatever the outcome of his endeavours, and even without a regular intake of meat (women did not hunt, although they sometimes fished), Miskitu society was able to subsist in the absence of men. Moreover, although a growing interest in manufactured goods led to Miskitus pursuing commercial opportunities, once the particular coveted goods had been acquired, the men were likely to return to their communities forthwith, to engage in their favourite occupations of hunting and fishing activities. This practice of dipping in and out of the commercial world at will, according to need, persisted well into the nineteenth century, as Thomas Young, a British trader, attests:

"no positive dependence could be placed on the Mosquitians for labourers, for although they will in general hire themselves for a month or two, in exchange for goods, yet, perhaps, when the planter required his crops to be housed, they might refuse to work" (Young, 1847: 108-9).

The commercialisation of natural resources might have become a culturally acceptable livelihood strategy, but environmental exploitation nevertheless appeared primarily geared towards the provision of livelihood necessities. I would argue that livelihood needs, both before and after contact with the Europeans, continued to be conceptualised in the short-term. Accumulative impulses and long-term objectives were no more compatible with the Miskitus' material objectives - to meet immediate livelihood needs - than they were with their ideological concern to maintain an egalitarian and cooperative position within the communities themselves. The ethics of commercialism did not necessarily accompany entry into the commercial sphere, as illustrated by this quote from Young:

"Without the skill and perseverance of the white man, the natural resources of this fine country will never be brought to light .... at present, I am sorry to say, that every thing left to
the native inhabitants is wasted, and the advantages offered by nature, however easy the attainment, however abundant the supply, are refused" (Young, 1847: 16-17)

Traditional terms of reference regarding subsistence activities and ethics in Miskitu society meant that they continued to use the environment according to short-term material needs, social ethics of equality, and therefore did not tend to over-exploit their resources. Nevertheless, over time, as they became increasingly integrated into the expanding commercial sphere, and reliant upon the benefits it provided, the balance between collective human exploitation of the environment, and its ability to regenerate afterwards, would become increasingly more fraught with tension, as subsequent chapters will demonstrate. In this period when environmental exploitation occurred on a relatively low-scale, a short-termist approach to resource use complemented environmental sustainability. Different conditions in the twentieth century would however undermine the logic of this approach.

**The indigenous work ethic**

The indigenous work ethic also seems to indicate a very different approach to livelihood strategies and needs than the value system followed by the Europeans. M.W. was indeed very critical of the indigenous people's attitude towards work:

"these people live a very idle life, not taking any pains, except in hunting, and going to fish in their doreas\(^8\) or boats...what they get they bring home to their wives to dress for them; which victuals may serve them perhaps for two days, with some fruits; during which time the men have no more work to do, but to swing in their humackies" (M.W., 1699: 293)

Lussan reported much the same scene:

"they are extremely lazy and only plant and cultivate sparingly. They lie all day in hammocks... while their wives do the work. Only when pressed by hunger do they embark in their boats and go fishing... they do not work again until faced by the pangs of hunger" (de Lussan, 1930: 287).

What to European eyes seemed a lazy disposition, was perfectly consistent behaviour for a subsistence paradigm designed to address immediate needs, but not concerned to accumulate for the potential long-term. Indigenous peoples would continue to be accused of laziness into the twentieth century by Church and company representatives alike, suggesting that the traditional cultural attitudes encouraging environmental use only in the short-term, was a fairly persistent aspect of their culture (Young, 1847: 28).

**The distinctive indigenous value system**

Indigenous society, at least until the nineteenth century, did not adopt European monetary and value systems simply because they were economically involved with them. Trading patterns

\(^8\) Small canoes, hewn from the log of a tree.
continued to adhere to traditional forms of barter exchange, indigenous society attributing only decorative value to European money:

"some of them [have] Spanish dollars and royals of plate beat out very thin and flat, hanging at their necks (which is all the use they have of money)" (M.W., 1699: 294).

Value was still more likely to be defined according to indigenous than European criteria. Young expressed amazement at the "foolish bargains...sometimes made by the improvident creatures", exchanging pounds of crops or wild fruits "merely to obtain" a fishing net or blanket (Young, 1947: 19). It is however equally conceivable that the indigenous traders might have thought the Europeans were underselling their own products. After all, they had only had to collect what nature had already provided them with; the items they received from the Europeans were however, manufactured, seemed more difficult to obtain, and were therefore more esteemed by the indigenous culture.

Over time, as the region became increasingly integrated into the global capitalist economy, the indigenous peoples' undervalorisation, in Western terms, of the region's natural resources, would unfortunately fuel the development of social and ecological exploitation. Countless mahogany and cedar trees would be felled without reimbursement to indigenous communities, who, not perceiving their value in the same terms as the lumber companies targeting them, without experience of environmental devastation, and not finding their subsistence systems threatened by logging enterprises, saw no reason to intervene. Ironically, at times the persistence of particular traditional indigenous attitudes towards the environment, in vastly changed contexts, have seemed more likely to foster, than resist, environmental degradation.

**Indigenous values in the commercial sphere: final considerations**

Having developed a flexible, and non-intensive subsistence strategy, in response to a changeable and unpredictable natural environment, the indigenous people had both the time and disposition necessary to adapt to new circumstances where they arose, including involvement with trade and service engagements with foreigners (Helms, 1978.; Oertzen, 1986: 2). The incorporation of commercial activities into the indigenous subsistence system did not necessitate an automatic reevaluation of traditional work ethics and material concerns. As Hale observed, English trade at this point was relatively small, "demanding little more from the indigenous peoples than an extension of their traditional subsistence activities" (Hale, 1987a: 36). Perhaps for this reason, traditional livelihood ethics also remained largely intact, in spite of indigenous involvement in the European mercantile world.
Implications of indigenous adaptations: separating meaning from actions

What implications for indigenous culture should we draw from the Miskitus' exposure to, and indeed, active engagement with, external economic, political and social spheres? Should we believe that their decision to engage in external economic and political spheres meant that their values and strategies had overnight, become synonymous with those of the mercantilist and colonial world? Or are we making assumptions about the underlying meaning behind particular indigenous adaptations, which are more representative of our own, than their cultural perspectives? Although we might often assume that other cultures attribute the same meaning and intent to actions as we do, this is not always the case. The process of cultural modification and accommodation indeed, makes this issue far more complex.

For citizens of industrialised countries, it is sometimes difficult to understand how traditional indigenous values could cohabit the same spheres as industrialisation or modernity. According to the norms of industrialised society, tradition and modernity are incompatible, the evidence from both the Atlantic Coast and other contexts suggests the same is not necessarily true for the indigenous paradigm. Indigenous peoples are continually aiming to reconcile knowledge and practices acquired from nonnatives with traditional cultural norms and beliefs, and do not necessarily consider that development, consistent with traditional cultural norms, to be an impossible goal (Feit, 1989: 71; Bebbington, 1996: 53). The adoption of new modes of behaviour or actions by indigenous peoples does not necessarily mean the underlying meaning or intent they attribute to them is necessarily the same as ours, or that they have somehow become assimilated by the dominant other culture (Bebbington, 1996: 52). We must be aware of how our own cultural perspectives can prevent us from appreciating that cultures other than our own can perceive social experiences and realities quite differently from ourselves (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994: 3). In order to try and avoid making hasty assumptions, we must learn to separate meaning from action.

Summary

So how does historical material inform our understanding of the evolving relationship between indigenous culture and environmental perspectives in northeastern Nicaragua, over time? In this chapter, we have reviewed information regarding the livelihoods, values and organisation of indigenous culture prior to, and during the early stages of contact with, external economic, political and social influences. The evidence suggests that although new opportunities for addressing the material needs of indigenous livelihood had led to modifications in traditional forms of social organisation and settlement patterns, regional inter-ethnic relations, and self-identity, cultural change was nevertheless balanced by the persistence of pre-contact material and ideological approaches to livelihoods and social reproduction at the community level.
European commercial demands prior to the nineteenth century remained modest; the Miskitus were never faced with the choice of cutting back on their traditional subsistence activities in order to fulfill them. Having already a great deal of spare time on their hands, the men were able to do both. Entry into the European commercial sphere of activity did not, however, mean that the indigenous culture was immediately modified to fit European standards and values. European environmental perspectives characterised by the goal of achieving unlimited exploitation of natural resources, for the purpose of accumulating wealth, and thereby social power, had not been assumed by the indigenous culture. As Melissa Lucashenko, an Aboriginal researcher on indigenous politics and identity in Australia has argued, "it is not possible to talk of a linear history of invasion" when attempting to determine the impact of the colonial legacy upon indigenous cultures (Lucashenko, 1996: 4). On the Atlantic Coast, cultural reproduction continued to occur at home, largely according to the Miskitus' own criteria. The Miskitus' traditional short-termist, and non-accumulative livelihood values persisted, meaning that they continued to favour the non-intensive use of the environment, often to the frustration of the industrious Europeans, who were primarily interested in making easy and swift profits.

However, in other respects, indigenous culture, livelihoods, values and organisation were modified by early contact experiences. Whereas prior to contact, indigenous livelihoods had solely been geared towards subsistence, commercial trade had become a new incentive for resource appropriation. At the time, this new orientation did not seem to require a radical change of pre-existing cultural practices, since indigenous values still upheld social equality and non-accumulationist ethics, whilst work was still organised by kin affiliations, to achieve immediate livelihood needs. Nevertheless, entry into commercial transactions augured many changes for indigenous culture, including growing cultural needs, wage labour, authoritative and permanent leadership structures, cash transactions where reciprocal labour once existed, and many more besides, as subsequent chapters will demonstrate.

It is important not to consider cultural persistence or cultural change as either positive or negative developments for indigenous environmental perspectives and resource management initiatives today. After all, indigenous peoples can often assume non-native skills and adapt to external systems to defend their identity, so that their culture will still remain viable despite changed circumstances. Successful indigenous survivalist strategies today:

".. require access to modern technologies, knowledge and resources, and will not be entirely native (although it will be locally controlled)....but such political and economic integration will not necessarily lead to dependence and cultural assimilation. Rather it involves the incorporation of non-local resources and ideas into the strategies for surviving as an indigenous [producer]." (Bebbington, 1996: 58)
Moreover, even where traditional values and practices, such as holding land in common, using the environment for immediate needs, and reliance on subsistence strategies for survival, have persisted to the present day, though these might appear to have promoted equilibrium between human society and the environment in the past, are now operating in entirely different circumstances, and may be less able to function in the same manner. Traditional values do not necessarily make it any easier for indigenous peoples to devise resource use strategies able to promote sustainable environmental management in the present day, as is often assumed (Howitt, 1996: 25). There is:

"a tendency to overstate the potential of traditional knowledge in contemporary political, economic and ecological conditions." (Bebbington, 1996: 51)

Cultural adaptation can therefore be a sign of cultural vitality, as much as cultural subordination. The main objective of this chapter has not been to judge the process of cultural change and persistence as a good or a bad process, but to consider the historical evolution of Miskitu culture in relation to their indigenous environmental perspectives. The main spheres of indigenous experience considered have been social and economic. To strengthen appreciation of the complexity of indigenous environmental perspectives, the next chapter will examine the relationship between indigenous cosmologies and environmental attitudes, both with regards to the pre-Christian indigenous belief system, and their subsequent conversion to Christianity.
Introduction

This chapter considers the relationship between the indigenous beliefs and religious identities, and their environmental perspectives. Cultural beliefs shape the way a social group perceives and relates to their natural environment, and are therefore extremely relevant to our inquiry (Butz, 1996). Whereas the previous chapter primarily considered the role played by temporal factors in formulating indigenous culture and environmental perspectives, this chapter focuses upon influences related to the spiritual domain. First of all, the relationship between the indigenous cosmology, and their environmental perspectives will be explored. As we shall argue, the contemporary Miskitu belief system represents a complex syncretic blend of perspectives drawn both from Christian and pre-Christian indigenous cosmologies, which influence the goals, towards their environment. This approach represents somewhat of a departure from mainstream research on the Miskitus. Scant attention has been paid to indigenous belief systems, and their implications for indigenous resource patterns. This is perhaps more a reflection of researchers' tendency to discount indigenous beliefs as folklore, than a true representation of how traditional beliefs about the natural world influence Miskitu culture and perspectives. Since examination of the ideological consequences of indigenous conversion to Christianity leads us to consider the role of the Moravian church in Miskitu history and culture, the second objective of this thesis is to consider how indigenous livelihoods, values, and organisation were modified at the instigation of their new religious leaders, and as a result of their new identity as Christians. Although the role played by the Moravian Church in shaping indigenous politics and identities has frequently been discussed (see Chapter 7), far less is said about how the Church encouraged structural and ideological reorientations in indigenous culture, and by implication, indigenous environmental attitudes. Both historical and contemporary material are used in this chapter.

Cultural cosmologies, conservationism and perceptions of scarcity

The role of indigenous cosmologies in shaping attitudes towards the environment is particularly relevant in determining cultural understanding of scarcity. According to Gibson, communities do not create institutions around a particular resource unless two conditions apply: the community depends materially upon the resource, and secondly, that the community perceives the resource to be scarce (Gibson, 1998: IASCP). These two conditions are considered to be necessary, if not sufficient, prerequisites for the construction of local management institutions. These considerations encourage us to return to the misrepresentations of indigenous environmental attitudes discussed in the opening chapter. Although the cultural perspectives of many indigenous groups towards the environment reflect particular belief systems and values
which make them distinct from those held in industrialised societies, these do not necessarily foster consciously conservationist societies (Baland & Platteau, 1996: 186). Certain aboriginal belief systems can indeed actively discourage indigenous societies from assuming responsibility for environmental protection and management. For example, they might hold animistic perspectives of the environment, and believe that resources are owned, and natural processes controlled by supernatural agencies. As Baland and Platteau observe, such a perspective might lead indigenous peoples to consider that:

"... If at all resources have to be conserved, it is a task for the gods, not for the humans." (Baland & Platteau, 1996: 211)

It is understandable that with such beliefs, resource users might not consider themselves responsible for ecological degradation. For example, in Algonquin culture, game animals killed by hunters were believed to spontaneously regenerate after death. Central to Algonquin culture, these authors surmised, was the belief that their environment was one of "primordial abundance" (Baland & Platteau, 1996: 215). If animals, or spirit-owners, were considered masters of the natural environment, then it is understandable that cultural readiness to perceive ecological scarcity might be slow, or if scarcity was perceived, cultural behaviour would not change since this trend had been determined by supernatural forces which were beyond human control. These supernatural forces were moreover as likely to be feared as respected. Fear of vengeful animal spirits amongst North American indigenous cultures could in fact encourage conservationist tendencies in tribes fearful of being punished by the spirits for hunting or fishing in excess (Baland & Platteau, 1996: 211). However, should this fear be discarded by the indigenous belief system over time, their resource use practices, previously indirectly conservationist, could conceivably become directly harmful to the environment.

There are many ways in which cultural perceptions of scarcity can be fostered, in both natural and controlled ways. Changes in communities' subsistence habits, for example, from a nomadic hunter-gatherer to agricultural society, involving more intensive patterns of land use, can lead cultures to perceive fertile land as finite, and thus encourage the development of stricter rules of access to protect what is now considered to be a scarce common resource (Baland & Platteau, 1996: 223). Formal education is also very important in changing local perspectives, and developing recognition of human responsibility in maintaining ecological health. Moreover, whether societies perceive resources to be scarce or not, traditional communities nevertheless tend to devise rules to organise the manner and extent to which they use and interact with the natural environment. The incentive to construct local institutions in such circumstances can be seen as both symbolic, a practical manifestation of cultural unity and strength, and instrumental, designed to protect and maximise the viability of the collective quests for livelihoods and survival. Although local institutions might not have been designed to specifically protect the
natural environment, but in the interests of the indigenous society itself, they can provide an extremely useful social base and resource from which overt management systems can develop.

Ultimately, the extent to which indigenous cosmologies incorporate beliefs of human agency would therefore appear a significant factor in determining how readily the process of ecological degradation itself, as well as the role of human agency in this process, recognised and acted upon. Naturally, even if indigenous cosmologies have not traditionally acknowledged the role played by people in destroying the environment, they can learn to appreciate it over time, with changed circumstances and education. It is nevertheless interesting to consider the historical nature of the relationship between indigenous cosmologies and environmental use patterns from which current perspectives have developed. These theoretical considerations will provide a useful conceptual framework for analysis of the relationship between Miskitu cosmologies and indigenous environmental attitudes in northeastern Nicaragua.

The Pre-Moravian Belief System

In order to appreciate the Miskitu belief system today, we must begin by considering the nature of indigenous cosmology prior to the Moravian conversion. Historical accounts provide us with some useful observations in this respect. Dampier tells us that the Miskitus had no organised religion or tradition of worshipping a god or gods, that he:

".. could never perceive any Religion nor any Ceremonies, or superstitious Observations among them....Only they seem to fear the Devil, whom they call Wallesaw; and they say he often appears to some among them, when they desire to speak with him on urgent Business; but the rest know not anything of him, nor how he appears, otherwise than as [their] Priests tell them. Yet they all say they must not anger him, for then he will beat them, and that sometimes he carries away these their Priests" (Dampier, 1729: 16).

M.W. substantiates Dampier's observation that the Miskitu had no organised religion (M.W., 1699: 296), while Bard tells us that the Miskitus were still in "great awe" of evil spirits, such as the water-ghost called liwa, in the mid-nineteenth century (Bard, 1855: 249). The Priests mentioned by Dampier were shaman known as sukia by the Miskitu:

"The persons of greatest consequence, next to the principal chiefs, are the Sookeah-men, who are both physicians and priests. These persons are supposed to hold communication with an invisible agent, or great spirit, and to be empowered, through its means, to foretell events. They have acquired some knowledge of the medicinal virtues of some plants, and are thereby enabled to cure wounds, and also some of the disorders incident to the climate. They are, consequently, held in much esteem and veneration..." (Roberts, 1827: 48)

The indigenous pre-contact belief system did not produce a formal, institutionalised religion similar to the various Christian denominations in Europe. They did not perform collective rituals or ceremonies designed to elicit the help and protection of a god or gods. Instead, they entrusted to powerful and charismatic shamans the responsibility of regulating community relations with
the various gods or spirits they believed inhabited the natural world around them, known collectively as *lasa nani*\(^1\) in Miskitu, whom they lived in great fear of. Their pre-Christian belief system therefore provided a further ideological dimension to human relations with the environment, beyond their material concerns and traditional subsistence ethics already discussed in the previous chapter.

*Pre-Christian indigenous perspectives on the environment*

Integral to the indigenous peoples' pre-Christian spiritual outlook was a pronounced animistic view of nature. The indigenous peoples of the Atlantic Coast believed that all the elements of the natural environment were either owned or inhabited by a spirit-owner (Young, 1847: 72-3; Bell, 1862: 253; Grossman, 1940: 42). For example, the fish were owned by the water spirit *Liwa*, wild game was owned by the *Duhindu* or dwarf, who inhabited the mountains, themselves owned by *Aubiya*, another spirit of indigenous cosmology. Meanwhile, the storms, hurricanes and tornadoes which periodically threatened indigenous communities and livelihoods were attributed to other spirits: *Alwani*, god of the lightning, *Prahku*, god of the wind (Cox, 1997). The spirit-owners of the natural resources were not seen as benign gods, but rather as very powerful and malevolent entities liable to inflict great pain and hardship upon human existence without a moment's notice (Young, 1847; Bell, 1862; Grossman, 1940; CIDCA, 1983: 4). Given how extremely unpredictable and destructive their tropical habitat could be (see Chapter 3), it is not surprising that the indigenous people should have considered the environment to be not only alive, but also animated by hostile intentions towards them. This interpretation is confirmed by Guido Grossman, a regional Superintendent of the Moravian Church in the early twentieth century. He tells us how:

"the indians hear the voices of the spirits everywhere; in the whisper of the breeze, in the rippling of the waters, and in the crashing of thunder, and feel constantly threatened by them" (Grossman, 1940: 55)

Grossman is a particularly reliable witness to support the assumption that pre-Christian attitudes towards the natural world continued to animate indigenous consciousness until quite recently; as a member of the Moravian order, he would arguably be more likely to emphasize the Christian, as opposed to what he would consider to be the "heathen" qualities of the Miskitus.

Given the characteristics of the environment in which they lived, it is not very surprising that the Miskitus developed feelings of awe and trepidation towards it. The indigenous tribes lived in a very real state of dependence upon the natural world, without having developed the conditions, such as existed in Europe, to enable them to feel dominant over it. Human existence

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\(^1\) In Miskitu, *nani* denotes plurality, like "s" at the end of an English word. For example, one spirit would be a *lasa*, whilst two or more spirits would be *lasa nani*. 

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remained eminently vulnerable, and a cultural rationale able to bestow some order on the chaotic and unpredictable environment in which they lived was no doubt a source of some comfort (Ortega-Hegg, 1981: 38). As a result, natural forces became represented in indigenous cosmology as an array of different spirits, such as Alwani or Liwa, who were much more powerful than human beings, and ultimately, beyond their control. They did not only bring tornadoes, flooding and storms, but human sickness and death as well. Only the sukia had access and influence in the supernatural world, which gave him or her inordinate influence in the indigenous communities.

The sukias

The sukias' primary role was to mediate relations between the human and spiritual-natural world, as was perhaps underlined by the means of their conversion. Sukias did not become adepts through apprenticeship with older sukias, but learnt their art from the spirits themselves, through dramatic near-death experiences, such as being struck by lightning. After such an event, they would often spend a period of days or even weeks in a deep coma. When they finally awoke, they would have visionary and healing powers, particularly attuned to the natural spirit which had caused their transformation (e.g. Liwa, the water god, had they almost drowned). Sukias were powerful and respected individuals in the indigenous community, as they were trusted to provide balance and meaning to human relations with the environment. In Asang, the authority on the early history of the community was considered to be an elderly gentleman, born in 1910, who told me that:

"people believed in the sukia like a god. Sometimes people would get lost in the mountains, and the sukias would be able to rescue them even three or four days later." ²

The sukias' affiliation with the spirits of the natural world meant that they could move without fear or danger in the environments which other indigenous peoples avoided, and were moreover able to interpret the spiritual significance of natural phenomena, and address the repercussions of damage caused by natural-spirit agency (Ortega-Hegg, 1981: 34). For example, after a death in the community, the sukia might determine that a particular god had been offended, and that it was necessary for the whole village to move location entirely (Bell, 1862: 253). The sukia could also cure human sicknesses, invariably considered to have been caused by a natural spirit, either with herbs, or through the use of massage, smoke and incantations (Conzemius, 1932: 141). Often, the choice of cure would come to him through his dreams, when the spirits would talk

² The isolated community of Asang did not become permanently settled in its current location until 1914, nor was it visited by the Moravian Church until the 1920s. Moreover, no resident pastor being installed for some time afterwards; the nearest pastor was located in Sangsang(ta), a number of hours paddle down river (see Fig 2). It is therefore still possible to speak to informants with personal memories of pre-Christians beliefs and behaviour, who moreover directly experienced the early stages of indigenous-Moravian interchanges.
directly to him. However, the suokia could not control the natural spirits; they could only operate within the confines acceptable to the natural spirit himself.

As informants in Asang told me, when the community had moved to its present location in 1914, they had been troubled by the many spirits, particularly the liwa mairin or water goddess. They had therefore asked the powerful suokia Clemens, from Kisalaya, to come and help them. Clemens stayed in the community for some days, beginning work at six in the evening, when everybody else was retiring to their houses, for fear of the spirits who were strongest at night. Clemens got into the river, and would go under the surface for long periods, with the use of a breathing pipe, to talk with the liwa mairin. Eventually, Clemens managed to convince her to leave the community alone, and although they still believed that she was there, she had become weaker, and never troubled them as she had before Clemens came to help the community.

Therefore although pre-Christian indigenous beliefs provided meaning and some order to indigenous relations with the natural world, they did not encourage them to consider themselves masters of it, such as tended to occur in Christian societies (particularly when coupled with industrialisation and modernisation). Rather than visualising themselves in control of the environment, the indigenous peoples saw the environment controlled by powerful and supernatural beings. Not even the suokia were stronger than them.

**Relationship between ideology and practice: Pre-Christian beliefs and unconscious conservationism**

Pre-Christian indigenous perspectives on human relationships with the environment were therefore characterised by conflict, rather than harmony. With this cultural ideology in mind, and moreover given that their traditional subsistence activities and low population levels had little lasting impact on local environmental resilience, it is not surprising that their cultural beliefs and experience did not encourage the emergence of reverential or conservationist indigenous attitudes towards the environment. Feeling part of nature does not necessarily mean one seeks to conserve it, as can often be assumed. Surviving in and of the environment remained the central goal for indigenous peoples on the Atlantic Coast, from both a material and ideological point of view.

However, it would also be wrong to assume that survivalist cultural ethics and fear of the natural world necessarily led to environmentally destructive practices. The ecological consequences would depend upon, among other factors, the type and intensity of environmental use, and the cultural needs resource expropriation was designed to meet. As already discussed, indigenous technology, and use and needs of the environment were all limited, and the impact on
the environment, at least until the nineteenth century, appears to have been minimal. Moreover, fear of the environment could operate unconsciously in favour of environmental conservation.

Fear of Aubiya, the mountain god who came out of his resting place only after three in the afternoon, encouraged people to finish work in their often distant plantations before this hour, and head home. In this manner, work not only became regulated, but more importantly, people did not get lost, have accidents or get attacked by wild animals on their way back to the village (Cox, 1997: 59). Fear of the Duhindu, or dwarf, the owner of all deer, meant that Miskitus were encouraged not to kill too many of his herd; the same applies for the liwa mairin (mermaid) and over-fishing, as well as for particular trees, with powerful and jealous owners (Cox, 1997: pers. comm). As another old man in Asang told me, only the sukia would roam far, and for extended periods, into the forested, mountainous interior; he would warn the others against following his example:

"the sukia would say for example "don't go to that place, on that mountain live devils, they could take you, your village could disappear, they could kill you." So only the sukias went into the mountains for long, because they had an understanding with the evil spirits, but the only people who weren't sukia didn't stray far into the mountains, for fear of the devils the sukia had told them about".

As Ortega-Hegg argues, the Miskitus' beliefs did not merely serve to provide meaning and structure to human existence; they also functioned as a means to "ensure the survival of the group" (Ortega-Hegg, 1981: 39).

Moreover, their limited technological development and reliance upon an unpredictable, if bountiful, natural environment encouraged mutual dependency and cooperation, and reinforced kinship ties. The traditional communal ethic and work system, pana pana, probably owes a great deal to these circumstances. With so many conflicts in the spiritual realm, group solidarity would appear a vital prerequisite for survival. A cooperative ideology therefore enabled deviant individual behaviour to be regulated (Ortega-Hegg, 1981: 40). As Bard observed in the nineteenth century, indigenous communities were based upon collaboration:

"All the labour of the community was performed in common, and all shared equally in the results" (Bard, 1855: 298)³

So although the indigenous culture feared rather than revered the natural environment, the indigenous cosmology, in combination with cultural disposition and technological means, tended

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³ Bard however probably exaggerated the extent of inter-communal collaboration; although community members undoubtedly collaborated in many areas, particularly in periods of intense activity, such as agricultural harvests, they nevertheless also and performed many tasks, such as hunting, on an individual basis. Land was also used according to usufruct rights by families, rather than collectively. Nevertheless, communal ethics of mutual support and co-operation coexisted quite easily with these types of individual expression.
to mitigate against excessive use of the environment until the nineteenth century. However, this did not mean that their culture was consciously conservationist, which is not surprising, given that they had no first-hand experience of environmental destruction. As Baland and Platteau have noted:

".. in traditional village societies awareness of ecological stress under increasing human pressure on natural resources grows only slowly, and typically requires concrete, visible experiences of depletion or degradation to be stimulated" (Baland & Platteau, 1996: 226 - their italics)

The Indigenous Conversion to Christianity

Until the 19th century, no concerted effort to evangelise the indigenous peoples of the Atlantic Coast had been mounted. Settlement had hitherto not been a feature of colonial plans for the area, being merely an individual decision. Indigenous exposure to the white man's religion was therefore limited to sporadic conversations between individuals:

"They seem very willing to believe any matters of religion, and thank you for telling them, unless that they will not believe there can be any hell or future place of punishment...for they apprehend whom we call God Almighty to be the great king of the next world, and positively affirm, that he will not punish a poor Indian for nothing ... for that they can do him no harm. If a man should affirm the contrary to them, they ask you the question, For what he should do so? without listening to any further answer, looking on you as a fool or madman, or one that designs purposely to mock them" (M.W., 1699:295)

The Miskitus might have been afraid of natural-spirits in their everyday existence, but the afterlife failed to concern them unduly. They seemed far more concerned with suffering than death itself; according to Bell, their "childish" fear of sickness seemed paradoxical given their "fearless defiance" of death in other circumstances, such as navigating over the most treacherous of rapids (Bell, 1862: 251). Although M.W. reported that the majority believed in the "immortality of the soul", he gives us little indication that the Indians believed they would suffer any consequences in the next world for their actions in this one (M.W., 1699: 295). So did their conversion to Moravianism, practically en masse, two centuries later mean that they had suddenly begun believing in an afterlife that required certain behaviour on this plane to obtain? Or were other factors involved? And was the indigenous-environmental relationship altered in any way by their becoming Christian, and if so, in what way? These questions and others will be addressed in the rest of this chapter.

The Moravian Church

Britain's decision to consolidate her position on the Coast in the 19th century created the political conditions to encourage the Moravians to try and establish a mission in Nicaragua. Patrick Walker, the principal British diplomat on the Coast during the period of the British
Protectorate, wanted to keep the region under British influence. A Protestant mission complemented his strategy, for it represented a useful means of developing a "new social order" on the Coast (Rossbach, 1986: 4). Conversion to Protestantism, it was hoped, would not only result in an ideological transformation, but serve practical purposes as well: the indigenous peoples had retained their semi-nomadic existence, which made them very difficult to control. The first Moravian missionaries arrived to the Coast in April of 1847 (Wilson, 1989: 101).

For the first few decades, the Moravians made limited progress with the indigenous population. Being primarily based in Bluefields, they only had contact with those few who did venture into the largely Creole and foreigner-inhabited town. The Church remained strapped for resources and had too few missionaries for the task, and so had made limited progress by the 1870s. The indigenous population had little need of the Church, and so conversions did not occur.

**The Great Awakening 1881-1896**

After 30 years of uncertain progress on the Atlantic Coast the Moravian mission suddenly witnessed an upsurge in popular interest in the Church from the 1880s. Whereas there had only been a trickle of conversions until this point, they suddenly took on a momentum of their own. In only 10 years, membership of the Church had increased from 1,030 to 3,294, with many more informal affiliated members (Vargas, 1996: 118). By 1940, the Moravian Church had spread into even the most remote indigenous communities, with most Miskitus considering themselves Christians by 1950 (Hawley, 1996: 321). A radical revision in indigenous opinions of the Christian religion and the afterlife had ostensibly occurred since M.W.'s time.

**Why did the Miskitus convert to Christianity?**

The factors motivating the Miskitus to convert to the Moravian faith however had little to do with changing religious convictions, or at least in isolation from contemporary social experiences. The Great Awakening is best understood within the context of the general crisis besetting Miskitu society during this period. The Miskitus suffered a severe decline in regional power and status during the nineteenth century, as economic and political activities became more complex, and their regional ethic hegemony and special relationship with Britain became usurped by the Creole population. The Miskitus were being made to feel weak and powerless in a world beyond their understanding or control (much as they did in the environment on a day-to-day-basis). Indigenous knowledge and experience appeared incapable of resolving their problems; in these circumstances, cultural adaptation became a necessary survival strategy (Ortega-Hegg, 1981: 37).

4 1820 - 1860s.
6 A number which included both indigenous peoples and Creoles.
Cultural crisis at the community level

Many Miskitus living in the remote indigenous villages might not have perceived the crisis in terms of their eroding regional status. Their concerns might well have been more immediate: by all accounts, sicknesses, as well as alcohol, introduced by the Europeans had been wreaking havoc on the indigenous population. According to Bell,

"...evidences of the rapid decay of all the Indian tribes in the Mosquito territory are painfully numerous" (Bell, 1862: 260).

Their fears were therefore not merely about status, but survival. And in this turbulent world, the individuals most expected by indigenous society to provide explanations and solutions for the problems being faced, the sukia, seemed as lost as everyone else. Roberts was already noticed that the sukias were experiencing problems in 1827:

"All [the sukias'] knowledge, however, has been insufficient to contend with the diseases introduced by the Europeans, many of the natives having been carried off by the small-pox, measles and other complaints for which they know no cure, and by which their numbers have been greatly reduced" (Roberts, 1827:49).

Forty years later, the sukias are presented as both disoriented and disheartened by Bell:

"the Sookias confess that the land is possessed by legions of evil spirits, whom they have no longer [have the] power to resist as their forefathers did; and I have heard many of them, when reflecting on their younger days, prophesy that before many years the land would be without an inhabitant." (Bell, 1862: 260-1)

Changed circumstances meant that the traditional mediators between the indigenous communities and the natural world now seemed out of their depth, unable to provide guidance to their people. Indeed, the sukias were primarily engaged in presenting apocalyptic visions of the future, which were no comfort to them whatsoever. It is therefore not surprising that the Miskitus should have looked outside their traditional framework for solutions to their tangible and existential crises.7

The Moravian appeal

Of singular importance to the Moravian appeal was their ability to communicate in Miskitu. Although the Miskitus had known non-Miskitus to speak their own language before, the majority were Creoles or traders; conversations were either informal, on an individual basis, or were concerned with trade. The Moravians however delivered the Christian message, in the Miskitu language, in an extremely formal manner, thereby imbuing the subject matter, and by

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7 A similar process occurs today: indigenous cultures appropriate external knowledge, skills and ideology, such as environmentalism, in order to strengthen their own cultural interests - e.g. to obtain rights to land or self-determination (Brown, 1993).
implication, the indigenous audience for whom it was intended, with added authority and legitimacy. As Muratorio observed in Ecuador, the use of the indigenous language in foreign religious rituals or in the translation of the Bible becomes a means of reaffirming and legitimising the language, when the culture of those who speak it is being discriminated against (Muratorio, 1981: 120). To a certain extent, this experience could be interpreted by the Miskitus as a reaffirmation of their self-worth, and rightful position alongside the dominant culture (Rossbach, 1986:60). In addition, given the increased activity of US companies in the region, particularly from the 1880s onwards, the Miskitu were being confronted more than ever before with the power and wealth of European culture. They might have felt that by making one of the symbols of white power, the Bible, their own, they were thereby increasing their strategic position in these changed circumstances (Hawley, 1987: 324). Moreover, there was the fact that the Moravian faith was Protestant, not Catholic; by converting to Moravianism, the Miskitus were in a sense reconfirming their historical ties with Protestant Britain, in opposition to the Roman Catholic Spanish and Nicaraguans.

"To an extent not yet adequately appreciated, Protestant conversion may have led indians to mark themselves as different from, and morally superior to, the largely Roman Catholic majority population." (Brown, 1993: 315).

In many respects, the Moravian missionaries were the only ones able to offer the indigenous peoples a transitionary perspective which both reinforced held Miskitu identities, and provided them with tools and ideologies for coping with their cultural crisis (Rossbach, 146: 1975)

Missionaries and sukias

Despite their appeal, the missionaries did not always enjoy a smooth passage into indigenous communal life. Not surprisingly, the greatest opposition came from the sukias, who given the similar nature of both pastors and sukias as priest-physicians, were those most likely to lose authority because of the pastors' presence. Indeed, the pastors' particular blend of secular and spiritual activities paralleled the sukia's multiple communal functions in so many ways, that the Moravians were able to represent a strong and viable alternative to the traditional priest-physicians precisely at a time of cultural upheaval and change (Rossbach, 1986: 5-6). Given the similarity between sukias and pastors, indigenous conversion to a Christian faith did not necessarily constitute to them a radical cultural change. Religious syncretism would foster an indigenous spirituality which can neither be characterised as strictly Christian or pre-Christian in outlook. In order to appreciate the nature of transformed Miskitu cosmologies, and their relationship to indigenous environmental perspectives, consideration of the factors and process of change is appropriate.
Sickness

Moravian missionaries perhaps challenged the sukia's authority most directly in their role as healers. According to the traditional indigenous cosmology, there was little to distinguish healing from ritual; the Miskitus believed that the natural spirits of the environment made people ill, and the sukia's ability to cure them through incantations, massages or the application of herbs convinced them of his authority in the spiritual world. As the missionary Grossman observed:

"they believe all sicknesses to be caused by evil spirits" (Grossman, 1940: 42)

Sickness therefore signified both a corporeal and spiritual imbalance. People were terrified by the unknown diseases brought over by the white man which were afflicting them, diseases which their sukias appeared unable to cure. The sukias' inability to deal with these illnesses was therefore symbolic of his loss of authority in the spiritual world as well. Where this occurred, the alternative cures presented by the missionaries were likely to be welcome, and when they were successful, would be taken as confirmation that their spiritual message was both effective and valid. For example, the first missionary permitted by the people to enter the coastal community of Pearl Lagoon only received permission in the wake of a cholera epidemic which was devastating the community. In Tasbapauni, the missionary Renkeitz became known as the sukia-wihta, or head sukia, after impressing the village inhabitants with his miraculous ability to cure sicknesses (Rossbach, 1986: 87). In Wauhta-Haulover, the missionary Lunberg gained acceptance after having cured the nephew of a sukia, who had not been able to make him better. In the Moravian missionary reports, Lunberg declared that

"the local sukia is angry with me, as because of my actions, he has lost the confidence of the people" (cited in Rossbach, 1986)

The missionaries themselves did little to discourage the people from believing that their medicine had magical properties, and were a sign of divine power and intervention; Rossbach reveals how the missionaries talked of their medicines being "blessed by god", and how they brought both "spiritual and physical health", in a manner extremely resonant of the sukias'. Missionary Schramm was invited by the Mayangna Chief of Musawas 1929 to preach the word of God to them after he had fallen sick, and had decided to turn to the Christian faith after a visionary experience. As if conscious of the association between sickness and spiritual beliefs in indigenous cosmology, Schramm taught the Mayangnas the hymn "Our Lord, the Great Physician, is now near" (Grossman, 1929: 110). The missionaries' exploitation of indigenous spiritual beliefs appeared a conscious strategy, designed to increase their own influence and prestige within the communities at the expense of the sukias'. As an elderly informant in Asang recalled, missionaries had told the people that

"the sukia worked for the devil, that he was the devil himself, and that they had to reject him and accept Christ... The missionary brought the people medicine, clothes, and many other presents.. Slowly, people stopped believing in the sukia"
As another informant confirmed, the missionaries argued that:

"the sukias only evoked evil, they had nothing to with God, they were doing Satan's work, and that we had to reject them"

It is interesting to compare the generational differences of opinion concerning the sukias: whereas the son of the elderly informant-authority on community history told me that the sukias had worked with Satan, his father disagreed saying that people were not afraid of the sukia, and that they were kau lilia, or happier, during his time. Although the last real sukia in Asang, Adrian, had died in 1918, the village would sometimes be visited by the sukia Clemens, from Kisalya (down river, near Waspam), to the community's delight. However, the latter's positive recollections of sukia taim (era of the sukias) represented the exception, rather than the rule. Another son of his told me that:

"none of the sukias were good, because they didn't speak God's word, none of them explained about God, in this time, the Bible didn't even exist"

The very different opinions expressed within the very same family suggested that traditional indigenous belief system had undergone serious revisions, even in the short time span between two generations.

Natural-spirits demonised

The Moravians considered indigenous beliefs in natural spirits of the wind, water, mountains and so forth pure superstition, but nevertheless found them hard to eradicate. Hampered by the limited resources at their disposition, they were unable to install a pastor in every community, and although they traveled extensively, preaching the word of God, and were visited by community representatives from all corners of the region, many converted villages were nevertheless left independent of missionary presence for many years after the Great Awakening. As a result, pre-Christian and Christian messages became easily syncretised in indigenous perspectives. After receiving some exposure to Christianity, villages would then be left to rationalise the teachings they had received on their own. As the missionary Grossman himself recognised,

"on returning to their homes, many would mix the old with the new" (Grossman, 1940: 70).

Many sukias began adopting Christian symbols and discourse, blending traditional spiritual beliefs with the new, and presenting themselves as spirit-uplika (spirit-people) or prafits (prophets) to underline their Christian affinities. The missionaries were well aware of the syncretic nature of conversions: missionary Berkenhagen admitted that despite the many conversions, in reality there remained very few "real Christians" amongst the indigenous population (Missionblatt, 1884: 13, cited in Rossbach). The Miskitus were converting to
Christianity, but on their own terms. Given that the Moravians were aware of this, it is not surprising that their chosen strategy for dealing with indigenous peoples' beliefs in the spirits-owners of the natural world, was rather than deny their existence outright, attempt to rationalise them according to Christian, rather than pre-Christian perspectives.

According to pre-Christian perspectives, the spirit dawan or spiritual owners controlled the natural environment, and would punish those who used their property in an inappropriate manner. The missionaries, however, explained to the people that these spirits, rather than being owners of the natural world, were supernatural trespassers of it, and associates of the greatest evil spirit of them all, the Devil himself (Ortega-Hegg, 1981). And since the sukia worked with these spirits, he was also an associate of the Devil. As an elderly woman explained to me, the parson had told them that the spirits were:

"the work of Satan, and that we needed to pray so our community could be liberated from their evil power"

Popular understanding of these natural spirits were subtly changed at the Church's instigation, encouraging a new relationship between indigenous peoples and the environment to develop (Cox, 1997: pers.comm). Indigenous cultural intellectuals today suggest that although people did fear the natural-spirits in the past, they nevertheless believed that the punishments they inflicted were given for a reason. For example, if a person had fished beyond their needs, and then fallen sick soon afterwards, the sukia would interpret his illness as the product of the liwa mairin, or water spirit-mermaid, being angry at them, for having abused her resources (Cox, 1997: pers.comm). In Miskitu kisi or stories, those being punished were always the ones who had cut too many trees, hunted too many animals, or fished too many fish (A. Fagoth, 1997: pers.comm). However, awareness and acceptance of spiritual retribution appear to become blurred by the Moravian influence, as this extract with an elderly Asang informant suggests:

"he says that one day when he was out hunting, the lasa nani in the mountains began to scream at him, and he suddenly realised that he was being surrounded by all types of animals and birds, which were coming closer and closer to him .... he shot at them a number of times but he didn't hurt any of them, they kept him surrounded as he walked back to the village .... his uncle at home knew what was happening to him because he was sukia; he went and told his mum that her son was fighting with the spirits in the mountains .... when he got home, he couldn't speak and he had a high fever... his uncle prepared some herbs for him and so he sweated out the fever, and the next day, was able to speak again ....the lasa nani had come in the night to take him away, but the sukia fought hard against them, and so they eventually left him alone.... the sukia told him that he shouldn't ever go into the mountains to hunt again, but since he was very brave, he did anyway. Many others would give up when they had this experience, but brave men didn't...."

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8 This interview was translated directly into Spanish for me by his son, whose words I have recorded.
As this story shows, people continued to believe that spirit-owners of the animals could punish hunters with sickness or death. However, this particular informant did not modify his behaviour because of this experience, and rejected the advice of the *sukia*. Arguably, once the Church had successfully managed to associate these spirits with the Devil, justification for their harmful actions could no longer be accepted (Cox, 1997: pers.comm). As a result, the sense of divine punishment was lost, and today, although people still believe in the natural-spirits, they characterise them as Devils, who inflict harm on human beings out of pure maliciousness. This interview extract suggests that natural spirits, rather than perceived as regulating indigenous relations with the environment, are more likely to be seen as interfering with them. The same informant told me that all the spirits, including *Liwa, Aubiya* and *Prahku*, once were angels:

"...but they rebelled against God, so God cast them down upon the earth along with Satan. They know that we are sons of God. So what do they do - they create obstacles to prevent us going to heaven, where they once were... as they won't be forgiven by God, they want to take us with them to hell"

The natural-spirits might still attempt to punish people for excess hunting or fishing, they were now seen as associates of the Devil, who was ultimately less powerful than God. As the Miskitus now had God on their side to protect them, their fears of the natural world diminished.

**Relationship between beliefs and environmentally destructive practices**

Many informants in Asang told me that in the past, before they became Christian people believed that evil spirits inhabited the forests, and so they were afraid to cut down the trees. Today, they believe in God, and are more educated, and so they no longer believe the spirits will harm them; as a result, anyone will now cut down a tree for money. The increased rate and scale of resource extractive practices in community areas which occurred during the twentieth century has much to do with the economic incentives and conditions of this period, as we shall discuss in subsequent chapters. However, we must also consider the role played by indigenous consciousness in allowing such practices to appear culturally acceptable.

According to informants in Asang, popular beliefs in the natural spirits of the environment decreased not only with Christianity, but as a consequence of increased levels of environmental exploitation itself. Within the life span of his father, as the great trees or the ferocious wild animals disappeared, so too did fear of the environment in general. For example, in the time of the old man's father, there had been no demand for tiger skins, so people had no reason to hunt them. They did not usually eat tigers, and since they were very much afraid of them, they tended to avoid them. However, in the 1960s, an American in Waspam began to offer money for tiger pelts, which encouraged people to overcome their fears. Armed with guns and traps, they found, somewhat to their surprise, that the tigers were relatively easy to capture and kill. This encouraged a reorientation in indigenous perceptions, according to the son:
"as the tigers were killed off, the fears which people had of the tigers began to disappear, and the devil himself began to disappear"

This informant's response appeared to suggest that the feared spirits only existed *because* of the natural resources they were owners of, and therefore killing animals, or cutting down trees might appear, at least in the short-term, to be positive acts making the world a safer place for people to live in. This assumption appears confirmed by another informant, when asked if people in Asang were afraid to go into the mountains in the past:

"yes they were, they were afraid of *lasa nani*, tigers ... but now there aren't any left, people say they've all been run off."

It was interesting to see how my informant spontaneously linked fears of the spirits with wild animals in his response. The association of practical and ideological considerations - tigers kill you, so they are to be feared, tigers are associates of the spirits, so are to be feared - appears logical from the indigenous perspective. The Asang expert told me that people were very afraid of the spirits who lived in the big trees, such as mahogany, cedar and Sisin, and so only cut down a select few, after the *sukia* had performed a ceremony to attain the spirit's permission. However, once they saw that the entrepreneurs extracting precious woods from the vicinity of Asang during the 1950s were not being harmed:

"people saw that Satan wasn't in the trees, and they lost their fear."

A group of men in Asang told me that as the population of Asang increased, and the houses necessarily extended further and further inland away from the river bank into areas that their grandfathers said were inhabited by the spirits, peoples' fears also abated. Not only were they visiting these areas; they were even building their houses in them, without coming to any harm. Growth, experience and education, they said, were changing their old beliefs. Moreover, as they say, they are now Christians, and so they no longer believe that such things exist. Indeed, discarding past beliefs can even be perceived as a sign of cultural development and sophistication:

"as time passes, and as science advances, people don't believe in these things anymore ... now men, boys, go and cut mahogany, and they don't think of these things, with science, they don't believe in these things any more"

That Miskitus today can sometimes present environmental destruction as signs of progress sanctioned by "science" is surely a tragic consequence of the myth of modernisation. I

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9 In 1914 there were only 8 families in Asang (pers. comm); Helms recorded 665 inhabitants here 1971; according to a 1996 governmental report, the population was over 1,000, with 210 families in the community (MINSA, 1996).
asked an elder from the community of Raiti, further upriver from Asang, whether he thought they had more of an understanding with the natural spirits in the past. He replied

"it could be .... now we believe more in science, but in those days, they could do many things... which we no longer can. There were people who knew how to cure when they didn't even know how to read or write, but they could see things... now that's very unusual... so we believe they still exist though we can't see them, science obscures them, as do people because they don't believe, or because we can't imagine how to direct such things anymore, we don't do them ... but there are other things as well, the elders in the past were very respectful and so friendly they would take anyone into their homes, happily and enthusiastically, not because they loved money ... so I think that the spirits are leaving us now, because people are only interested in business, they have bad thoughts, they only think in damned things, not in higher things .... the bible is the reality, but people are more interested in business .... and science as it develops teaches us different ways..." (P. Cabezas, 1997).

New packaging for old beliefs

Pre-Christian beliefs were not, however, eradicated overnight from indigenous culture and perspectives; many persisted, some became modified. For example, during the 1950s when lumber contractors were cutting mahogany in the vicinity of Asang, if a person died in the lumber camp or got lost in the forest, the Miskitus might believe that the white man had sold that person to the tree-spirit-Devils, in order to make himself rich. To this day, people believe that the qua dus tara, a particular type of large tree, is inhabited by a devil, as it secretes a white sap which burns the skin. Despite the frequent protestations by certain informants that as Christians, they no longer believed in the natural spirits, there were just as many others who demonstrated their continued beliefs in various ways, for example by attributing certain personal or general disasters to the spirit agency. As a Miskitu professional from Asang, who now lives in Puerto Cabezas, told me, despite their denials, many of the older people still lived in fear of the spirits. Indeed, the persistence of pre-Christian fears had in fact made them be all the more dedicated Christians, since Christianity and God provided far more effective means of defence against the Devil and his cohorts than the sukia had been able to. Indeed, as we will discuss in the next chapter, new forms of the pre-Christian belief system are in many ways stronger today that they were before the war, during which period many pre-Christian practices were unearthed by a people under siege. And although the last authentic sukia in Asang, Adrian, died in 1918, he had nevertheless been succeeded by spirit-uplika or curanderos: spirit-people or healers who used many of the practices of the former sukia. The only significant difference was that these successors evoked God, rather than the spirit-owners, in their work. The term sukia is still applied to certain people though, to signify those shamans who work with the devil rather than God. Today, there are still curanderos in Asang and elsewhere, who draw on a combination of pre- and post-Christian perspectives in their work. Many people still consider certain illnesses to

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10 I was told by a number of informants in Asang that the duhindex or dwarf had been spotted in the last few weeks near Santa Isabel, further upriver.

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be caused by spirits or curses, which only the sukia, not modern doctors, can cure. Traditional beliefs therefore persist today in indigenous communities, though often under a different guise, or in less overt forms. As one informant told me:

"...yes, they still exist, because the Devil doesn't die, the dwarf, the liwa mairin, they carry on making pacts with people, or they fall in love with people, they even have sexual relations with them. These people get sick, thin, because a good spirit cannot live with a bad spirit. So their family look for sukia because he has relations with the evil spirit, and he can cure them...."

**The younger generations**

However, for each passing generation, the natural spirits are more likely to be perceived as fairy tales than real entities; young people told me they would sleep without fear in places their grandparents told them were inhabited by spirits, without coming to any harm. Apparently, when a young girl had drowned fairly recently in a deep part of the river, many of the elder people had blamed the liwa mairin or water spirit for her death. But even if younger people might like to joke that the liwa mairin could carry them away when swimming in the River Wangki, this possibility is not taken seriously. As a community leader in Asang told me, the younger people have sins wala, or another way of thinking, from the older generations; as he was nearing his 60s, he was not merely referring to those in the their 20s, but 30s and 40s as well. According to Avelino Cox, a Miskitu expert in cultural affairs, indigenous attitudes changed greatly by the 1950s:

"...the people began discarding many of their beliefs and traditional practices, their love, their fraternal spirit, and respect for the environment...it's really incredible today....there's no respect any more, we're losing everything now." (Cox, 1997; pers. comm).

As historical beliefs and fears in the environment abated, beliefs which if unconsciously, had contributed to maintaining a balance between human being and the environment, it arguably became easier for the indigenous people to actively participate in environmental exploitation.

**Indigenous adaptations to Christian lifestyles**

The indigenous conversion to Christianity did not merely encourage modifications to traditional cosmologies. Their livelihoods, values and patterns of organisation were also notably affected. Within the villages themselves, the Moravian pastors targeted numerous 'un-Christian' indigenous habits and attitudes, thereby altering many aspects of traditional communal living and approaches towards the environment. Missionary reports allow us to identify areas in which indigenous accommodation to missionary demands are likely to have conditioned their environmental perspectives.
Changing settlement patterns and livelihood orientations

As mentioned previously, one of the principal British reasons for encouraging the establishment of the Protestant mission was to counteract the persistent semi-nomadic existence of the indigenous peoples. The Mission encouraged indigenous peoples to establish and become associated with permanent residential locales, seeing their instability as both a moral and a practical obstacle to their evangelical work. Although indigenous peoples lived communally, the location of communities themselves often changed, as the population persisted with traditional migratory patterns. Through their pedagogic work, the missionaries managed to restructure a rural and semi-nomadic population into permanent settlements, and to motivate them to actively participate in the construction of a physical, ordered villages (Rossbach, 1985: 3). Their success in stabilising the regional population was most probably due to the population's desire to have permanent access to the services and goods provided by the new priest-physician figure (Rossbach, 1986). As Missionary Ziok explained,

"...the fundamental reason for why many ask for a permanent missionary is their wish to be able to have on hand at all times medicine, munitions and other such objects." (Missionblatt, 1882: 103, cited in Rossbach)

Settlement was probably also encouraged by the Mission stores established in various communities by the Moravians, which provided those communities with reliable access to valued material goods (Helms, 1978: 136). The stores moreover introduced the economic monetary system into the community context for the first time, presenting the first challenge to the barter system of exchange which sustained kinship structures within the communities, but which the Church however disapproved of.\(^\text{11}\) Other aspects of indigenous livelihood patterns and behaviour were also modified by the process of settlement. The appearance of villages themselves changed, becoming more structured and permanent as a result. The range of environmental habitats used for livelihoods became less extensive and more intensive, with more attention being paid to agriculture, livestock and gardening than had previously been the case (Rossbach 1986). Population levels also appear to have increased since Bell had remarked on the declining level of the indigenous populations in the mid-nineteenth century eighty years later, Conzemius was estimating that the number of Miskitus had more than doubled (Conzemius, 1932: 13). Naturally, all these changes were relative to the culture in question; the population to land ratio of the region remained the lowest in Nicaragua, whilst the indigenous peoples continued to expend much of their energies in hunting, fishing and commercial pursuits. Nevertheless, new directions were being taken by Miskitu livelihoods, which encouraged a more concentrated patterns of environmental use, not only a practical consequence of settlement and

\(^{11}\) As is discussed in Chapter 7, the Church had good intentions in this respect, hoping that the introduction of the monetary system would help protect the indigenous peoples from exploitation at the hands of the foreign traders. However, by encouraging this process, they nevertheless furthered the Miskitu and Mayangnas' integration into external economic systems and norms.
growing populations, but because of the developing ideological importance of material concerns to indigenous livelihoods and identities. It is significant that objects - medicine, commodities - played such a significant role in encouraging indigenous communities to settle, and that the indigenous population was prepared to make so many significant cultural accommodations in order to secure their access to them.

**The construction of Christian communities**

Missionaries frequently complained of the scruffy, makeshift appearance of indigenous homes and communities. Proper Christians maintained certain living standards, which indigenous society was falling far short of. In his 1940 book, Grossman describes how simply houses were built in previous years, often being no more than lean-to's, with no walls, and roofs built of bark or palm leaves. The women would cook in the middle of the house, and the family would eat around the fire, where they would also lay down to sleep.

"They soon learnt from the missionaries how to use saws and to work with the plane and hammer. They could therefore construct planks, and build houses upon stilts about a metre high, upon which they would fix beams, and on top of them, planks...they slowly learnt how to make steps up to the house, and built the kitchen apart from the home." (Grossman, 1940: 38).

The missionaries transformed indigenous households, replacing temporary structures with permanent constructions made out of wood. They encouraged furniture and utensils to be built, so that families could sit and eat like proper Christians, using cutlery and plates, either bought or carved, rather than eating with their hands off of leaves (Grossman, 1929: 39). As an elderly informant in Asang told me, the village had changed enormously in his lifetime; when he was young, they used to build their houses out of mud and bamboo, but since they became Christian, they were all made out of wood (Asang, pers.comm., 1997). One of the most significant changes they introduced to the village landscape was the Church building itself, which was to become the principal focus of community activity. Building a Church could become an enormous undertaking. In Bilwas, on the Rio Coco, Brother Danneberger had an enormous church built to replace the bamboo lean-too which was deemed no longer sufficient to hold the 'crowds' amassing to hear the blessed gospel. The story of the construction of the Bilwas church is told by Reverend David Haglund:

"..the Christians had to rip more lumber, and still more lumber, and plenty more lumber....our people had to walk far into the forest or travel several days journey up the river to find cedar and mahogany trees from which to make shingles....logs cut far up the river were floated down and cut up at the landing. Shingles made far away in the jungles were carried for hours by the women. It was an enormous undertaking...." (Annual Report of Moravian Mission, 1928: 114).

Although it is impossible to make a quantitative assessment of the environmental impact created by increased resource extraction for daily community use, the multiple areas of construction
initiated by the Church changed indigenous ideas of what a proper community and home should look like. Missionaries made the appearance of communities become a point of pride, and we shall argue in Chapter 6, parishioners were encouraged to seek cash-earning employment in order to finance the church establishment, and make their homes more presentable as well. Community lifestyles were becoming more complicated.

**Changing material and ideological orientations in indigenous livelihoods**

As already mentioned, the missionaries encouraged the indigenous populace to dedicate themselves more to agriculture, particularly the cultivation of rice and beans. Agriculture was promoted not only to encourage communities to become more settled, but also since toiling the soil was considered appropriate Christian labour (Wilson, 1989: 164). The indigenous diet, which had previously consisted primarily of tubers and wild meat or fish, would gradually change during the twentieth century to become increasingly dependent upon cultivated products. Rice and beans, initially introduced by the Moravians to the Miskitus as a cash crop, would eventually be considered integral elements of the indigenous diet. As a young man in Asang told me:

"..before, people only ate wabul, and said that things like rice and beans are for the white people, but not any more, now they are for us as well."

However, since rice and beans demanded more careful and intensive cultivation techniques than perennial and resilient tubers, indigenous settlement habits changed to accommodate what were initially cultivated as cash-crops, but later become indigenous household staples. The Moravian Church therefore simultaneously encouraged more extensive, intensive and permanent patterns of land use amongst the Miskitus and Mayangnas. In the process, both the composition of indigenous diets and dietary preferences changed. Although the older generation in Asang said they had eaten much better in the past, younger people can dispute this assertion, because since their parents did not eat beans or rice, their diet must necessarily have been inferior. Although admitting that people probably ate less meat in the present day, a young man in Asang nevertheless asserted told me that:

"..we eat better today - before they only had meat with tubers ... today we have complete food, like gayo pinto,13 onions ..... "

**Material accumulation and intracommunal inequalities: new sources of cultural tension**

Indigenous anti-accumulative values, which fostered community equality, were also significantly modified by Moravian intervention. Traditionally, upon death, the custom of the

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12 Wabul is a traditional beverage made by boiling bananas or plantains, and mixing them with water or coconut milk.
13 Refried rice with beans.
indigenous tribes of the Atlantic Coast had been to bury all the deceased's possessions with him, while their fruit trees, plantations and boats were also destroyed. M.W. describes these funeral rites in 1699, although he does add that if the deceased left behind a gun, it would not be destroyed. The gun therefore had become an exception to this indigenous tradition in the 17th century; otherwise, it continued relatively unchanged up until the arrival of the missionaries. Bard assisted one of these ceremonies in the locality of Bluefields, at which even the palm trees around the deceased's house were cut down (Bard, 1855: 72). The non-accumulative disposition of the indigenous people was underlined by their practice of destroying personal possessions after death.

The missionaries, perceiving this practice as both wasteful and heathen, and an impediment to indigenous civic development, strove to eradicate this custom from the communities. Karl Brezenger, son of the missionary killed in 1931 during the Sandino disturbances, wrote in his thesis for the Moravian seminary in 1948 that:

"...the customs of the natives and their reasoning often kept them in poverty. If a man had a good garden his neighbour might do him the favor of breaking down the fence so that the animals could destroy the garden. This was to keep the man from becoming proud. When a man dies all his property is destroyed. Hence children do not become rich by inheritance but have to make or earn all their possessions themselves... it is no wonder the indians remain poor. The education by the missionary slowly broke down some of these ridiculous customs and helped to raise the economic status of the indian." (Brezenger, 1948: 27 cited in Adams, 1987)

As Brezenger observed, the non-accumulative indigenous ethic could even lead to open attacks on the more materially-disposed, designed to maintain the community on an egalitarian footing. The Moravians did manage to transform the funeral practices of the indigenous peoples, so that today, possessions are not destroyed along with the deceased. However, they had less success in reconciling indigenous culture to accumulation itself. As we will discuss in Chapter 7, Miskitu leaders often lose legitimacy in the eyes of their followers if they appear too concerned with amassing personal wealth and power, instead of devoting their energies to community interests. Anti-materialistic ethics also functioned as social restraints at the community level. The Moravian mission reports in 1977 stated that although the indigenous people

"...recognised individual property, they had no concept of accumulation." (Missionblatt, 1977: 100, cited in Rossbach).

According to Helms, the Miskitus "simply have never learnt to economise" (Helms, 1973: 141). The Moravians might have eradicated the most overtly anti-accumulative traditional practices, but they never managed to make indigenous culture fully reconciled to the development of internal class hierarchies, determined by material status, within indigenous society,
Indeed, in indigenous villages today, anyone who quickly attains a higher-than-average living standard, arouses suspicion and envy amongst their fellow. Helms noted that in general, shops run by non-Miskitus fared better than those run by Miskitus, as the former were not subject to the same demands from kin, to borrow cash, or get goods on credit, faced by the latter (Helms, 1971: 154). If the Miskitu entrepreneur chose to ignore the obligations of kin, and aim for profit instead, he or she could be considered to have sold out their people for money. In such circumstances, persistent beliefs in the natural spirits can serve to make the individual's crime of self-enrichment even more culturally unacceptable. Miskitu villagers will tell you that the natural-spirit devils have the power to make a person rich, if the person agrees to sell their own souls, and the souls of other villagers, to the spirit in question (pers. comm, Asang; 1997). Conversely, an informant in Asang who had been experiencing some success in setting up a small shop in the town, said she had suddenly lost everything, because other villagers had become jealous, and had harnessed evil spirits to destroy her business. I asked one of my Miskitu friends in Waspam if it was true that people believed sudden prosperity was caused by a person making a pact with a devil. She replied:

"...of course, people start asking themselves - how could this person have become rich overnight ... he was poor, he was nothing before, so how could he have become rich out of nothing; people realise that he has to have done something bad, he has to have had contact with the devil, to get himself so rich."

Although enterprise, development and accumulation have in some ways become accepted goals of indigenous society today, on another level, they rest uneasily with unrelinquished concepts of communal equality. On a regional level, those in power are primarily accused of having been corrupted, having sold out materially or politically,\(^{14}\) or of not actually being Miskitu at all.\(^{15}\) In the communities however, success can be seen as proof that the individual has sold not only his own soul, but those of his family and friends as well to one or other of the natural-spirits, in order to get rich. This evidence suggests that community solidarity has become severely disrupted by the partial relinquishment of accumulative ethics and egalitarian principles, which not only encourage people to use resources for profit rather than immediate need, but also seem to undermine community solidarity, by challenging traditional values of equality, reciprocity and cooperation.

**Work, development and poverty ethics**

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\(^{14}\) The former Governor of the RAAN, and former military leader of the Miskitu during the war, Steadman Fagoth, is however, widely considered to have made a pact with the Devil for money and power.

\(^{15}\) Fagoth, who has a fairly Germanic physiology, and Brooklyn Rivera, who is very dark, have both been accused of not being Miskitu, but Germans and Creoles instead.
According to the Moravian outlook, a Christian demonstrated his spiritual dedication to God in his everyday work as well as through prayer. One of the missionaries' main objectives was therefore to transform the "lazy" work attitudes held by the indigenous peoples:

"Brother Schramm pointed out .. that the natives were very much like children ... just as parents find it is easier and quicker to do many things themselves ... so the missionary is often tempted in like manner to save time and strength by doing many things themselves...[However, the native] ... can be taught to overcome his natural indolence and shyness and become self-supporting and self-reliant." (Muller, 1928: 101)

The missionaries therefore encouraged their indigenous congregations to work for work's sake, beyond the confines of livelihood needs:

"...we have to have patience with the people here, who have been living in a land where nature has been so good to them and where she provides daily food for them with very little effort on their part. We have to show them that work and honest gain is something for which to strive." (Grossman, 1923: 79)

The missionaries aimed to transform indigenous work practices discussed in Chapter 3, which remained primarily geared towards meeting immediate livelihood needs. They encouraged the communities to assume responsibility for building and maintaining their Churches financially, by increasing the productivity of the land in which they lived. As we shall discuss in Chapter 6, the Moravian influence was instrumental in encouraging increasing levels of indigenous participation in the commercial world. The missionaries' intention was however not to encourage indigenous-environmental exploitation, but prevent it. As mentioned before, they represented a transitional perspective: they believed that by improving the indigenous communities' material standards and understanding of commercial procedures, they would be less likely to be victimised by entrepreneurs seeking quick profits from the appropriation of local natural resources.

"..seeing this, should we not ask ourselves the question, and very earnestly, whether we cannot help our people to a position where they will be able to have a greater financial part in our work on this Coast.. It is quite evident that as long as our natives do not or are unable to make greater use of their rich soil, they themselves will remain poor, no matter how many 'companies' come from outside to develop the natural resources of the country." (Grossman, 1928: 99)

The missionaries were therefore genuinely concerned to see both their Church, and the region in general, develop in a complementary material and spiritual sense. However, the Church was not able to control the way in which their messages were understood by the indigenous population, nor were they able to greatly influence economic regional trends and processes. Many negative consequences of the Moravian perspective can be traced to contemporary indigenous consciousness - for example, the idea that the region was backward, lacking the material comforts appropriate for proper Christians, might have played a hand in fostering the poverty ethic, noted by Helms (Helms, 1970: 156). Although the land still continued to cater to
indigenous livelihood needs, living standards in themselves would nevertheless appear psychologically dissatisfying. Meanwhile, according to a reformist-minded Moravian pastor from Asang, the majority of pastors have tended to tell the people in their sermons that they are poor and humble people, *umpira* in Miskitu.\(^{16}\) This pastor believed that this message has over time, undermined Miskitu self-value and belief (P. Cabezas, pers.comm., 1997). However, as will be discussed in Chapter 7, members of the Church were also instrumental in *fostering* indigenous political consciousness and organisation in the 1970s, crucial precursors of contemporary struggles for land and resource rights in the RAAN. The legacy of the Moravian Church for indigenous culture and environmental attitudes in the region is therefore anything but straightforward.

**The Moravian influence: an overview**

Miskitu environmental perspectives and identities today owe much to the cultural influence of the Moravian Church. By adopting Christianity, the Miskitus acquired the means to deal with the political and spiritual crises, providing them not only with a Christian identity equal to their European counterparts, but also various tools - education, medicine and a new cosmology - to cope with rapidly changing circumstances unfolding around them.

In many practical ways, the Moravians helped the indigenous peoples adjust to changed circumstances. Indeed, the leadership, moral support, medical assistance and education provided by the Moravian Church to indigenous communities helped them to continue to assert local autonomy well into the twentieth century. However, the Moravians also greatly increased the rate of indigenous cultural accommodation. During this period, indigenous populations discarded their semi-nomadic lifestyles, becoming more settled upon particular territorial locations. Permanent homes were constructed, which the indigenous peoples were taught to take pride in. The household, moreover, began to be divorced psychologically from the workplace, as Moravians underlined the gender division of work appropriate in Christian families.\(^{17}\) Meanwhile, the Miskitus, encouraged into greater involvement in the cash economy by the missionaries, were attributing greater importance to those activities, primarily performed by men, which afforded them purchasing power. Moreover, as these activities invariably involved resource extraction, the environment itself arguably assumed a direct monetary value, something without precedent in indigenous society. Therefore although the Moravians helped equip the indigenous peoples of the Atlantic Coast region to deal with modernity, they also encouraged indigenous society to make further accommodations to external economic and political systems and values, detrimental to human-environmental equilibrium. Indigenous community demands

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\(^{16}\) *Umpira* means both humble and poor, in a financial sense.  
\(^{17}\) As one Moravian pastor declared: "Let the boys learn how to make a house and the girls how to keep it." (Grossman, 1928: 106)
upon the environment would be increased, while traditional belief systems regulating indigenous relations with the natural world were weakened by modification. Nevertheless, although the indigenous belief system and Moravian identity did not seem to foster conservationist attitudes amongst the Miskitu, various factors, including the experience of war, heightened levels of popular consciousness and political disaffiliation, more intensive patterns of land use and growing populations would encourage awareness of ecological scarcity to develop in indigenous society, as the following chapter will demonstrate.

Conclusion

Pre-Christian beliefs led Miskitus to view the environment as inhabited by multiple supernatural beings, who rather than humankind, governed, affected or owned the resources and cycles of the natural world. As a result, the Miskitus did not develop a particular sense of responsibility for "managing" the natural environment. Indeed, the concept of resource management itself would have probably made little sense to them. Nevertheless, the community institutions which they developed in order to safeguard and enhance the collective capacity for survival, out of fear of the vengeful and unpredictable environment they inhabited, unconsciously functioned to regulate human use of natural resources, which particularly combined with low populations and primitive technologies, meant that the impact of indigenous communities upon the local environmental were most probably negligible.

Conversion to Christianity seems to have encouraged the Miskitus towards much more intensive uses of the environment, both domestically and commercially. At the same time, cosmologies and the regulatory patterns of environmental use which they encouraged in indigenous societies held prior to the missionaries' arrival were gradually being undermined. Nevertheless, while it was undermining indigenous social capital for management in one direction, the Church was promoting it another, by providing the Miskitus (and Mayangnas) with many important means to defend their environmental interests and agendas in the later twentieth century: literacy, a written language, organisation, leadership skills, an international support network, and confidence. As will be shown in Chapter 7, the support of the Church would prove instrumental in the emergence of the first regionwide indigenous political resistance movements in the 1970s.

Although the Miskitu belief system and has been influential in shaping community lifestyles, patterns of resource use, and cultural perceptions of environmental scarcity in the past, and would arguably continue to affect the level of concern paid by indigenous peoples to conservationist issues in the late twentieth century, other factors which in recent years have proved extremely influential in reorienting indigenous environmental perspectives at the community level must also be considered. Particularly following Christian conversions,
indigenous communities became much more sedentary and agriculturally-oriented, while their populations grew. As the twentieth century progressed, however, these larger, more stable communities would find that the unlimited land and resources of the past were no longer as easy to find or control. Encroachment not only from the state, resource industries and immigrant populations, but neighbouring indigenous villages as well was by the 1950s and 1960s, making indigenous communities acknowledge, to an unprecedented extent, the reality of ecological scarcities. Communities would subsequently begin to reevaluate the land and resources upon which their livelihoods depended, and develop defensive attitudes towards them. In Chapter 7, the role of the intrusive state in reorienting indigenous perspectives will be examined, while in Chapter 6, a detailed examination of the economic circumstances from which these changes occurred will be provided. However, in order to continue and complete examination of community-level perspectives which have dominated these last two chapters, contemporary attitudes held in the community of Asang will be analysed to demonstrate just how local Miskitu outlooks on land, resources and indeed, community itself have been affected by more recent experience.
Fig. 7 Schematic Diagram showing the Indigenous Communities of the upper River Wangki area

Raiti
Siksa Yari
Andres Tara
Karizal
Awas Bila
San Pedro
S. Isabel
Asang
Krasa
S. Carlos
S. Esquipulas
Sang Sang
Kitaski
La Esperanza
S. Fe
S. Alberto
El Carmen
S. Jeronimo
Leimus (Nicaragua)

NICARAGUA

Rapids
Road to Puerto Lempira
(Honduras)

WANGKI

RIVER

OR

COCO

HONDURAS

Road to interior of Honduras

Suhi

Leimus (Honduras)

Road to Puerto Lempira (Honduras)

Adapted from Cunningham & Cunningham, 1993
Introduction

In this chapter, the contemporary relationship between indigenous culture and environmental perspectives at the community level will be examined against the backdrop of the regional institutional framework presented in Chapter 2. Indigenous perspectives in Asang will be presented on two levels: those held within the community itself, and those presented by Asang villagers as a community unit, before the outside world. In order to provide continuity between this and the previous two chapters, the four themes of Miskitu culture considered - values, beliefs, organisation and livelihoods - will inform analysis in Chapter 5. Contemporary perceptions of scarcity, and how these have functioned to encourage new indigenous perspectives on land and resource issues will also be discussed. Examination of perspectives and dynamics in Asang will show that although communities (particularly, but not necessarily indigenous) are often treated as natural and harmonious social units, tension and difference can nevertheless exist within them. It is vital that management policies acknowledge and adapt to the various areas of conflict and consensus which exist both within and between communities.

Situating Asang

Asang is a community of just over 1,000 people, which is located on the upper, or westward section of River Wangki, which was founded in 1914. Asang is principally accessible by water; a journey from Waspam to Asang by outboard motor takes around 10 hours. The community is therefore quite isolated, both politically and economically, from the municipal centre alone; Puerto Cabezas is a world far removed from Asang. The norms, values, behaviour and lifestyles found in Asang are therefore distinct from those encountered in Puerto Cabezas, or even Waspam. The community has traditionally been self-sufficient, although in the 1920s, subsistence strategies were supplemented by cash income from the banana boom, and employment in mahogany camps. In the 1950s, commercial mahogany came right to Asang's doorstep, when NIPCO contractors targeted forestry reserves near the village. Over the decades, villagers also supplemented family incomes by selling rice and beans to tradesmen in Waspam who regularly bought from communities along the Wangki. Despite their physical isolation, Asang nevertheless was integrated into the regional economy. However, by the 1960s and 1970s, the regional economy suffered a decline, and Asang livelihoods became primarily dependent upon subsistence strategies once more. According to Helms, although villagers at this time had plenty to eat, they nevertheless considered themselves to be poor:

"An ethic of poverty exists, which reflects a general feeling of deprivation and frustration regardless of the soundness of the subsistence economy. Almost any topic of conversation is introduced with the statement: "We are poor, we are miserable people; we have no money, we have no work, we have no food." (Helms, 1971: 156)
By the 1970s, Miskitu livelihoods were no longer psychologically satisfying if they were deprived of the opportunity to participate in the market economy, and earn cash to purchase coveted manufactured goods. These problems would, however, pale into insignificance in the 1980s, in face of the widespread popular suffering experienced during the Sandinista-Contra war.

In the 1980s, the Rio Wangki became a war zone between Contras in Honduras, and Sandinistas in Nicaragua. Asang was the first community on the Rio Wangki to begin being evacuated in 1981, once open conflict had developed between the indigenous MISURASATA leadership and the Sandinista government (see Chapter 7). The community spent the war years divided; half the community went, or were taken north by the Contra; the other half were taken south to the settlements of Tasba Pri by the Sandinistas. Although a minority began to come back from 1986 onwards, the majority of Asang inhabitants did not make the journey home until 1990 and 1991. On their return, they found their community destroyed and completely overgrown. Their possessions, their homes, their gardens and their animals had all been lost. The village of Asang had to start all over again. As a pastor from Asang told me:

"the war destroyed and repressed the poor people and the communities ..... they had built their houses themselves, planted their fruit trees and bought their animals, with no help from any Pacific government .... and now the Sandinista government was destroying everything of theirs, which hurt them very deeply." (P. Cabezas, 1997).

Considering that the community had been divided in half for most of a decade along opposing political sides, the tense process of intracommunal reconciliation was nevertheless resolved relatively swiftly in Asang. As a senior male figure in Asang told me:

"when we came back, people were divided. However, bit by bit, we became united again, and now people are calm, we work together, we no longer hate one another"

Indeed, according to many informants, both sides had tricked the people into fighting one another. Having lost trust in their former leaders, and the political establishment in general (see Chapter 7), today, Asang villagers say, they can only trust one another. Nevertheless, despite the united community front over shared concerns relating to the outside world, life within the community itself is not always so harmonious. Contemporary political contexts, economic incentives, and social conditions mean that the community is finding it difficult to maintain a meaningful level of community cohesiveness and integrity, whilst at the same time, responding to the limited range of options available to them to convert their resources into commercial value and safeguard the communities' material interests, as this chapter will demonstrate. The nature of community perspectives and agendas held in Asang can therefore not be separated from the external conditions and contexts which influence their formulation.
Contemporary challenges: reconciling symbolical with instrumental concerns

In many respects, the problems being faced by Asang today have many parallels with those observed by Butz amongst the Shimshali pastoralists in Northern Pakistan. According to Butz, although the Shimshali were being presented with new ways of using their resources more profitably, these new options threatened to:

"disconnect instrumental resource use from its source in indigenous meaning ... with commensurably fewer indigenous valid constraints on the exploitative use of instrumental resources" (Butz, 1996: 49).

Indigenous peoples can of course, adapt to changed circumstances, by replacing or reinterpreting prior meanings, as Bebbington observed in Ecuador (1991: 17). Indeed, the Miskitus in Asang are successfully adopting new positions on resource use and land ownership in defence of their cultural interests. However, whilst these internal developments unfold, both in the case of the Shimshali of Pakistan, and the Miskitu in Asang, external social and economic norms are thrust upon local communities, which encouraging them to sacrifice ideological concerns and cultural integrity to pursue purely material options instead:

"... any of these changes may represent an indigenous and communicatively validated world-shift, but always with the threat of a corresponding loss of meaning (Habermas, 1984) which comes from subordinating the symbolic / instrumental to the merely instrumental" (Butz, 1996: 49-50).

In Asang, it is possible to see evidence of both successful and unsuccessful adaptations to new instrumental imperatives of external origin. Generally speaking, it would appear that although as a unit, the community of Asang has been able to construct new forms of meaning in order to defend their interests over land and forestry resources, which are presently threatened by outside parties and new instrumental imperatives, the same process has been far more difficult to replicate within the community itself. As examination of contemporary livelihood patterns, organisation, community values and beliefs in Asang in this chapter will demonstrate, whilst changed circumstances have encouraged a reorientation in indigenous environmental perspectives, involving greater appreciation of ecological scarcity and community concern to achieve control over access and use of the land and resources available, the wider political and economic context nevertheless continues to produce multiple threats to Asang's material and symbolical integrity, weakening the community basis from which community mobilisation and defence needs to be mounted.

Livelihoods in Asang

Today, the distinctions between the subsistence and commercial spheres of the indigenous livelihood system, described in Chapter 3, have become somewhat more blurred. Some livelihood activities are either no longer productive or available, or in the absence of alternatives, have had to adapt in order to cater to both objectives. Hunting is an example of a
traditional livelihood activity which is no longer viable. With the expansion of the indigenous population, the availability of wild game has been significantly reduced, meaning that hunting has become more of an occasional pursuit, rather than regular activity amongst Miskitu men. As a formerly active hunter told me, although they used to eat quite a lot of meat in the past, nowadays, the yields from hunting are low:

"I think all of the animals have been killed, now that there are more people, they eat a lot, and because of this the animals have gone much further away...."

Moreover, as many residents of Asang observed, since all the communities in the area have grown and are encroaching upon one another, you are likely to run into people from neighbouring villages if you do decide to go hunting; there is just less space, and less animals, these days. It would also appear that the amount of meat consumed from domestic animals might have fallen since the war, when livestock were slaughtered or lost.¹ Meanwhile, the already depressed pre-war economic conditions of the Atlantic Coast region were significantly aggravated by the 1980s conflicts and the unstable investment and institutional context of the present decade, in which economic regression, rather than recovery, has occurred. As a result, commercial opportunities such as employment or trade beyond the community have become extremely limited. Over time, therefore, as the viability of hunting and commercial strategies has become ever more restricted, indigenous livelihoods in Asang have become increasingly dependent upon agriculture, both for subsistence, and as a means of earning cash.

Another potential source of income for Asang nevertheless exists: the industrially-coveted lumber resources located in the vicinity of the village. These resources are not however, being presently commercialised by Asang, both because economic conditions remain unstable and since the land demarcation issue has yet to be resolved. However, Asang's perspectives on the commercial use of resources, along with their struggle to obtain political and economic control over the land on which they are situated, are extremely relevant to this inquiry. Our examination of the livelihood strategies pursued in Asang will therefore concentrate upon the two principal activities either pursued or considered by villagers today: agriculture, and exploitation of forest resources.

Agriculture: changing practices and values

Until the twentieth century, agriculture had strictly been practiced for auto-consumption, rather than trade (Helms, 1971: 123). Nevertheless, the banana trade of the 1920s changed this

¹ However, it is difficult to know just how many animals the community used to have in the past - although I was told they had about 1000, compared to 200 cattle today, Helms estimated a fairly low number of cattle in Asang at the end of the 1960s, only about 1-2 per family - more like 60-120 in total. Unless numbers of cattle grew dramatically between the late 1960s and 1981, I have to assume that the villagers were exaggerating somewhat.
trend; by the 1960s, rice and beans, introduced by the Moravians, were increasingly relied upon by Asang villagers, to fulfill both commercial and subsistence purposes (Helms, 1971: 122). The growth of the population, which has almost doubled in the space of 30 years, combined with the absence of viable livelihood alternatives, has transformed Miskitu men, reluctant farmers in the past, into full-time cultivators. Agriculture was previously considered an inferior subsistence activity, and was primarily performed by women (see Chapter 3). However, since agricultural products have assumed a cash value, cultivation in itself has become more symbolically important in community affairs than in the past. The contemporary concentration upon agriculture in indigenous society is the result of dual imperatives: the need to eat, and the need to earn. As a woman in her 50s told me:

"we use more land today because there aren't any companies, and there's no way to buy things, so we have to grow more .... before we didn't work as much because we had work - today it's the opposite"

According to the former judge of the community, in the past, men from Asang preferred to find work outside the village, than to plant:

"it seems they liked money better than work. And also, things were cheaper then, so the people wanted to earn more than plant .... since nobody bought [rice and beans], people didn't dedicate themselves to agriculture. Now that beans are really expensive, rice is expensive, things in general are more expensive, people have begun working in agriculture .... slowly they began to realise that they had to plant in order to survive"

Once the availability of work outside the community was considerably reduced, a reassessment, and reorientation, of Asang villagers' livelihood options occurred. Although men had previously neglected this particular activity, agricultural activities now came to occupy most of their productive energies. And as Asang villagers aimed to raise production levels in order to have enough both to eat and to trade, patterns of land use changed accordingly.

**Land-use patterns intensify**

Since Asang villagers have few alternative options for food and income, they are forced to clear more land than previously for agricultural purposes. One might assume that Asang's agricultural yields have grown in proportion to the increased amount of land they are cultivating. According to informants, however, this has not occurred. As one community leader told me, although families are now planting two or three hectares, as opposed to the one or two they used to in the past, the land they are using today is nevertheless much less suited for agriculture.

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2 Women were however by no means displaced from agriculture by men; they continues to play a significant role in agriculture, in addition to their household activities.

3 Although families plant on average 2-3 hectares, they can control anywhere between 5-20 hectares at a time (CIES, 1992).

4 In Chapter 4 we stated that one of the reasons for why agriculture was traditionally underemphasised area of indigenous livelihood strategies was threat the land in the region is not suited for cultivation. The
Since 1960, when the northern bank of the Wangki on which the Asang villagers traditionally cultivated was deemed Honduran soil by the International Court of the Hague, they have been forced to concentrate upon land to the south of the village, which they consider less fertile, or pay bribes to the Honduran soldiers for using the land on the other side of the river. Families are therefore engaged in a perpetual search for fertile land for cultivation, which takes them further and further from the village centre itself. Moreover, even if villagers do find fertile plots, since they still practice slash-and-burn cultivation, using neither chemical nor organic fertilizers in their work, they must clear new plots if not every, at least every other year (CIES, 1992). When populations and agricultural demands were small, human pressure upon the land was bearable; today, the human-ecological balance is difficult to maintain, as reflected by this informant's observation:

"now we plant much further away than before .... in the past, there were so few of us, we could plant nearer to Asang ...... now there are many more of us."

However, in the absence of alternative livelihood options, agriculture, and therefore the land, has been forced to try and cater to both the subsistence and commercial needs of Asang. Land, and in particular, fertile land, has relatively recently become considered as a scarce commodity in Asang, as pressure upon it to be productive increase. These demands are moreover further aggravated by the nature of the agricultural trading system in the sub-region itself, the subject of the next section.

**Agricultural trade before the 1980s**

Before the war, the rice and beans produced by Asang were bought directly from the village by floating commissaries operated by tradesmen who would sail up and down the river between Waspam and Karisal, selling or exchanging goods for rice and beans (see Fig. 5; Helms, 1971: 40-1). There were also a number of local Nicaraguan or Creole merchants with commissaries located in the principal villages which could also buy village produce; the villagers themselves might also take their produce to the principal commercial centres along the river to sell: San Carlos, Leimus, or Waspam itself (see Fig.5). Waspam in this period was the principal commercial centre in the region, more active, prosperous and focal during the period than Puerto Cabezas itself. Asang's economic orientation therefore looked eastward and down river. Albeit an isolated community, Asang was nevertheless integrated within the municipal economy.

The municipal economy was destroyed by the war. A mass exodus from Waspam took place; many people, including the Chinese and Creole merchants who had been the principal orchestrators of economic activity during the 1960s and 1970s, never returned. The same upper River Wangki area has however possibly the most fertile, alluvial lands in the RAAN. Even so, cultivable land remains limited, whilst villagers by far prefer the northern banks of the river now denied to them by the international court ruling.
conditions which had fostered individual entrepreneurship in the pre-war period — a lax institutional environment — discouraged a resumption of private economic activity in the 1990s. The war left unprecedented levels of mistrust and insecurity in its wake, which required governmental intervention in order to be overcome. However, to date, this has not happened. As one formerly prosperous local merchant told me:

"nobody wants to invest their money or set up a business or anything because we just don't feel safe" (San Carlos, pers.comm.; 1997)

Meanwhile, the structural readjustment economic policies being pursued by Nicaragua did more to inhibit than foster the development of a self-referential local market in the municipality of Waspam. The commissary barges disappeared. Although some of the merchants located along the River Wangki have reestablished stores in particular communities, if this occurs, it is on a much-reduced scale. For example, an Hispanic family from San Carlos, located only a few communities down river from Asang, used to own two barges which would regularly travel between San Carlos and Waspam. As the señora of this family told me:

"when we had barges before the war we would buy all the [villages’] produce, we’d leave San Carlos with passengers and produce on Mondays, we’d come back on Wednesdays with passengers and goods, dropping off provisions at each community en route .... it was very regular ... the other one would leave San Carlos on Friday and would come back on Sunday .... it wasn't like today, then you knew when you could travel. The fare cost 15 Cordobas, but in this time diesel was cheap ... not like today, when it's incredibly expensive, and the fare has become so much more" (San Carlos, pers.comm., 1997)

In the absence of regular channels of trade and communication between the upper River Wangki area and the municipal and regional centres of the RAAN, today, Asang’s isolation appears even starker than it did 30 years previously.

**Contemporary trading patterns**

After the war, once it had become so difficult for Asang villagers to transport and sell their produce down river, traders from Honduras were quick to step into the gap left by the Nicaraguans. The nearest, and most important commercial centre to Asang today is Awasbila, further upriver, which is accessible by road from the Honduran town of Puerto Lempira, and is therefore frequented by merchants from this country (see Fig.5). Although the Honduran merchants are effectively able to dictate their price to the Asang villagers, they nevertheless prefer to sell their beans for 50 Cordobas per quintal to the Hondurans, then spend the extra money and time to travel to Puerto Cabezas, where they might get 80 Cordobas per quintal. Asang agriculturists are not happy about this state of affairs; they are well aware that they are

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5 *Señora* is used to connote the female head of household, wife / mother, or older woman as opposed to *señorita*, younger, unmarried women.

6 Compared to almost 500 Cordobas for a one-way journey today.
underselling their products. However, since there is no political relationship between the Miskitu communities of this area and the Honduran merchants with whom they trade, the latter are under no obligation to make the terms of trade fairer to the producer. As one village leader told me:

"people are crying, they don't want to sell their beans to Honduras, but since no one's helping them, they have no choice"

One of the most frustrating aspects of this trade from Asang's perspective is that the Honduran merchants pay them in Lempira, the Honduran currency, rather than Nicaraguan Cordoba. As a result, the currency most used in Asang is Lempira. Lempira is considered to be an even weaker currency than the Cordoba, and no-one in the RAAN beyond the upper River Coco area will exchange Lempira for Cordoba, or accept Lempira as form of payment. This means that whatever money the Asang villagers do earn from their produce, they have no choice but to spend it on goods brought by the same Honduran merchants buying their produce. The Honduran merchants, restricted neither by Honduran nor Nicaraguan laws in their dealings with the Asang villagers, are able to set high prices for goods and low prices for produce. Asang villagers therefore must cultivate more and more land in order to attain the bare minimum of manufactured goods they require to live.

Perhaps they do have a choice. After all, it seems ludicrous that Asang villagers should choose to sell their rice and beans in order to buy goods such as flour, sugar, oil and other household goods of less or no nutritional value, a decision which invariably leaves them without food or money at a later stage in the year. The same problem was indeed observed by Mary Helms in Asang during the 1960s (Helms, 1971: 139); today, the situation, if anything, has become worse. It is therefore not only possible to blame the Honduran merchants and the Nicaraguan government for the problems Asang villagers are facing. The Miskitus' dependence upon manufactured goods for food and other amenities also determines their choice of livelihood strategies and patterns of resource use, and helps perpetuate their situation of captivity to the Honduran merchants who dominate the area.

Then again, perhaps it is asking too much of the Asang villagers, to expect them to forego the goods they desire to purchase, and expect them to stand up to the Honduran merchants, or live on rice and beans alone. Realistically, without the concerted intervention of the Nicaraguan government, the Hondurans' economic stranglehold over the village and the region will not be broken. However, since the return of the villagers to Asang following the war, the Nicaraguan government is most noted for its absence. During an group interview with eight men, one participant told me, to the agreement of the others:

"since we came back from Honduras, the people of Nicaragua have forgotten us. We have no option but to sell to Honduras, because it is very difficult to get out of here, there are no means of communication, and Waspam is very far away .... and when people get there, the
prices are so low that it really isn't worth going.... people say that we've been discarded, 
before the war things were normal, but now we've been totally forgotten"

Feelings of abandonment, frustration and despair prevail in Asang. Given the negative economic 
conditions in which they struggle to meet basic livelihood needs, it is hardly surprising that not 
only have internal social relations in Asang become strained, but that the community has 
developed a cynical, distrustful and detached attitude towards the regional and national political 
establishments in Nicaragua as a result. As an elderly man in Asang said to me,

"the Hondurans run the show here, what's the point of the Nicaraguan government? If we 
had a government in Nicaragua, the people wouldn't have to sell their crops to Honduras for 
money..... we have waited for people to come from Nicaragua to buy our goods but they 
never do, so what choice do we have .... and if some day the Hondurans decide not to come 
and buy crops and sell food we will be even poorer and more abandoned than we are now ...."

Commercial options: Forestry resources

The other main livelihood strategy available to villagers in Asang is to sell forestry 
resources from the vicinity of the community. The other principal commercially lucrative 
resource found near Asang, gold, is only sporadically mined. It is moreover sold on an 
individual basis, and therefore is not intended to benefit the community as a whole, nor does it 
require a collective community decision-making process, as is the case with lumber. In order to 
appreciate attitudes in Asang towards the commercial use of lumber, it is useful to provide some 
background to the village's experience of involvement with the forestry industry, and to consider 
how attitudes towards the business and resources themselves have changed over time.

Background to the lumber industry

Although men from Asang had been working in mahogany camps along the River 
Wangki and further south since the 1920s (Schramm, S.M.R. 1922-6), it was not until the 1950s 
during the heyday of the NIPCO lumber corporation (see Chapter 6) that mahogany operations 
began in the vicinity of Asang itself (Helms, 1971: 112, 114). NIPCO contractors hired men 
from Asang as labourers to cut the wood, paying something like 8 Cordobas, just over a Dollar, 
per day. The community neither asked, nor received, compensation for the wood extracted itself. 
According to informants, people were glad to have the opportunity of earning cash and enjoying 
access to cheap goods: as an elderly woman told me, while the lumber company was in Asang:

"people were happy, because they had work .... and everything was cheap then."

According to informants, although mahogany reserves still exist in the vicinity of Asang, the 
majority of accessible trees were felled during this period. The NIPCO contractors cut lumber 

"near and far....they cut all the nearby trees immediately...they cut down everything they 
could."
In the 1950s, Asang villagers did not oppose the activities of the lumber contractors, who were cutting down precious wood from land near to the village, nor did they demand a payment for the wood being extracted. Only those Asang villagers working for the contractors gained in any way from the lumber business. These facts suggest that in this period, Asang villagers either did not consider the land where the contractors worked to be theirs, nor they did not consider the resources being extracted from these areas to be property of the community. Community perspectives on land ownership and resource use have however changed quite extensively since this time.

**Changing attitudes to commercial resource use: contemporary representations of past perspectives**

Today Asang villagers are deeply concerned to gain legal titles for their land, an area which would reportedly now include the remaining forestry resources not claimed as exclusive community property in the past. As an Asang villager told me:

"now, the people are only concerned in uniting in order to fight for [land] demarcation and nothing more, because we live off of the land"

How do villagers themselves explain their new perspectives towards land and resources as community property and foreign companies? Appreciating how Asang villagers consider their environmental perspectives to have changed since this time helps us understand both how indigenous value resources today, and the types of concerns likely to determine their agendas as stakeholders.

Asang informants provide various types of responses when asked how their attitudes towards resources and companies had changed over the last few decades. The older generation do not differentiate greatly between the past and the present: they were happy to have the companies working in the community and region in the past, and wish that they would return, because they have so little money. One couple, when asked if they feared another company might come and cut down all their wood for nothing again, told me that at least the community would have money again, and anyway, if the company did want to cut down their trees, there was no point in resisting, because companies were more powerful then they were. Their main concern was to see a new source of income for the community, not to defend its resources; opposition which they argued, would be futile anyway. However, similar opinions were only expressed by a minority of Asang villagers interviewed. Informants in their 50s and below usually considered securing the community's legal rights over the land to be Asang's absolute priority. Although they argued that they had been materially better off in the past, they had nevertheless been unaware of their rights, and had subsequently allowed their environment, and therefore themselves, to be exploited by foreign interests:
"in this period, people weren't as knowledgeable as they are today. They didn't know politics, in this period people from outside considered our people to be very inferior, they'd come and tell us what to do. Not any more though, today we are much more aware of things, we know about politics, we know about the riches of our natural resources, which is why it's difficult for anyone to walk off with lumber without permission from the community leaders"

According to one elderly informant, Asang villagers did not demand any compensation from the companies during this period, because they

"didn't understand the lumber business or know that the wood was theirs, so they didn't get involved"

Nowadays, things are different, however. The majority of informants said they had been "robbed" by the companies in the past, that they had been "blind" then. Since this time, their consciousness had been raised, and they would never allow themselves to be hoodwinked again. There are still mahogany reserves in the interior, and people said they would make sure that when these are extracted, the profits will benefit Asang this time around.

Why did attitudes change?

Asang villagers today are clearly aware of the material value of forestry resources, and are adamant about the legitimacy of their claim over them and the land on which they are situated. Whereas in the 1950s, the village had been content to allow foreigners to extract lumber from the vicinity of Asang, by the 1990s, the community adamantly assert their rights over these resources and the land upon which they were situated. They moreover consider their past relationship with foreign companies and merchants to have been highly exploitative, and expressed determination not to let their resources be used for others' benefit again:

"people were sad when the companies left, but that's because they were fools back then .... old people would sell trees for a pound of tobacco, but not any more... If a company comes back and wants to cut trees from here, we'll have to sit down and talk, it's not like before, when they came and cut down what they wanted just like that, bam bam bam."

The war is considered by informants to have been a crucial factor in bringing about the radical change in community consciousness in Asang. As a pastor from Asang, currently residing in Puerto Cabezas explained to me:

"the war opened the political consciousness of our people, because the Miskitu people didn't know politics, but the revolution opened up new political spaces to them"

His opinions were echoed by one of the leaders of Asang interviewed:

"during the Sandinista government, the mentality of the people became somewhat more enlightened, like a giant waking up, people began to learn much more about politics,

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7 See Chapter 8 for more detail.
According to other people in Asang whom I interviewed, the war had not merely made them more aware of their rights; as soldiers during the war, they had gained the valour necessary to fight, and make their rights effective. The post-war economic depression, and popular disillusionment with the ability of old leaders, the national government and the autonomous regional system to deliver anticipated improvements in the RAAN have also undoubtedly caused attitudes to change. Since external assistance seems unforthcoming, and livelihood systems ever less resilient, Miskitus in Asang have been forced to develop defensive political and environmental attitudes, which are focused upon securing legal rights over community land and resources. The material survival of the community has become their preeminent concern.

**Land: coexistence of traditional and modern concepts of land property and rights**

The development of political consciousness and assertion of collective community rights provides us with an example of how Asang, when functioning as a unitary body, has not only been able to incorporate new strategies in changed circumstances in order to fulfill their livelihood objectives, but has also managed to attribute new cultural meaning to their efforts in the process. Land has assumed both a material and symbolical value in Asang today, as it provides the source of both economic power and development and cultural legitimacy and survival. At the same time, however, traditional attitudes towards land and resources have managed to persist within the community itself. Community land continues to be treated as a common resource, although individuals within the community will have a recognised claim over certain areas of land according to usufruct criteria. Usufruct rights are acquired by clearing an area of previously uncultivated land. In Miskitu, the cleared land held by an individual according to usufruct rights is known as *insla prata*. Sarah Howard, who conducted detailed research into Miskitu land use and holding practices, noted that *insla prata* is usually only cultivated for one harvest, after which time it is left fallow for between four and twenty years (Howard, 1993a: 200). By this manner, Miskitu agriculturalists are constantly extending the area of land they control according to their usufruct rights. Another aspect of community attitudes towards land worth noting is that it cannot be bought or sold within indigenous communities, and has not acquired a monetary value as so many subsistence products have over the years. Community land is therefore claimed on a collective basis, but is used, and its benefits are accrued, individually. In contrast, most other resources located on community land, such as
forests, are regarded as common property, and the income they generate is intended to benefit the community as a whole.  

The collective and usufruct attitudes towards land ownership found in indigenous communities shows that despite centuries of culture contact, distinctively Miskitu (and Mayangna) perspectives have nevertheless been able to persist. As Howard has argued:

"Although the indigenous way of life has been transformed as a result of interaction with outsiders and the imposition of alien culture and economic norms, there remains a distinctly indigenous concept of land rights. This moral economy is based on collectivity and use according to need rather than ownership" (Howard, 1993: 203)

Indeed, despite various sources of internal tension, there were no reports of conflict or competition over land within the community itself. However, whereas Asang villagers only used to hold one set of attitudes towards land (and resources), defined by usufruct rights and subsistence needs, changed circumstances have led to the Miskitus adopting Western legalistic perspectives towards land, in order to better negotiate their interests as a collective unit. Land now represents multiple new meanings in indigenous culture: it is perceived as a source of political and economic strength, land entitlement is a reinvindication of indigenous identity, land ownership is a prerequisite for cultural survival.

**Inter-community conflicts over land**

Asang is not the only community in the region concerned to protect their interests now, and in the future, by securing land titles to finite land and resources. The development of political consciousness over issues of territorial rights, local re-evaluation of natural resources as well as population increases have combined to encourage communities throughout the region to develop more extensive land claims, which rest upon indigenous land rights criteria (Howard, 1993a: 232). In the upper River Wangki region, the major objective of community land claims is to gain control over fertile agricultural land and notably, remaining mahogany reserves. As Howard has noted:

"The process of re-evaluation of resources is particularly notable in the case of forests ... consequently, demands for more land by indigenous communities and the extension of boundaries by village leaders have become closely associated with demands for control of larger areas of forests with commercial value." (Howard, 1993a: 232-3).

Asang's neighbours, like Asang, have become increasingly concerned to protect their present and future livelihood needs, and hence indigenous communities' projected boundaries have begun to seriously overlap. Community boundaries have never been fixed, but have expanded over time in response to growing subsistence needs (Howard, 1993a: 205-6). Previously, however, the

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8 Not all resources are treated as common property; in Asang, although forest resources were considered to be common property, gold (which can be found in this area) is mined and used by individuals alone.
gradual expansion of community boundaries did not necessarily lead to inter-community conflict, since populations were lower, whilst the major incentive was to gain control over subsistence rather than commercial resources. Today, however, needs and commercial incentives are much greater, and communities are now fighting over areas which previously were freely used by all, but are now being claimed by each. Inter-community land conflicts over land and resources have therefore become increasingly prevalent and intense throughout the region since the war. As Howard concluded shortly after the war:

"whereas at the time of the fieldwork there was very little conflict between the indigenous communities of the RAAN and the state or private companies, there was considerable rivalry within and between the indigenous communities themselves over land and resources" (Howard, 1993a: 216).

As the 1990s advanced, however, indigenous communities have come into conflict with the government as well as other communities, making land ownership the most contentious and outstanding issue in the RAAN today. In the persistent absence of a demarcation process, informants in Asang believed that conflicts between their community and other villages in the region over land were practically inevitable. As one villager told me:

"today we plant more. Our numbers are multiplying, so we must work more, and we use more land per family. Because of this, today we occupy more land annually, and as a result, we have problems over land with the government and neighbouring communities."

During my stay in the community, a village meeting was called to discuss the land problem, and in particular, tensions over land which were developing between the Five Communities - Asang, Krasa, Santa Isabel, Karizal and San Pedro⁹ - with the communities from above the rapids, headed by Raiti (see Figs 2 & 5). Given the difficulty of defining respective communities' territories, and in the interests of avoiding conflicts, many communities opt to combine their efforts with other communities, and aim for a joint, rather than individual, land title. Although an initiative in March 1996, spearheaded by The Nature Conservancy (TNC), an NGO active in the Bosawas Reservation lying south/south-west of these communities, had been made to encourage the Five Communities to pool resources with Raiti and the other communities from above the rapids, and claim an even larger area of land collectively, an agreement had not been reached. Since this time, it appeared that relations between the Five Communities and the rapids communities headed by Raiti had greatly deteriorated.

At the meeting in Asang, various stories circulated. The people from Raiti were apparently entering the Five Communities' lands. A woman from Karizal had reportedly seen people from Raiti using barbed wire to mark off a new community boundary for themselves

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⁹ A group of communities from this region, of which Asang is a member, who are choosing to pursue their land claims jointly rather than individually.
which infringed on the Five Communities' territory. They had even been seen cutting down wood from this area. The Raiti people, it was asserted, had threatened to kidnap people from the Five Communities if they attempted to take the barbed wire down. Incensed by these various reports, the previously orderly meeting erupted in chaos, the men began yelling that no-one ever paid any attention to Asang's rights, that their neighbours were showing them no respect, and that Asang was letting herself get trampled over by communities like Raiti, who were struggling for their land with the help of foreign organisations (TNC), while Asang was doing nothing, and had no one to help her. As one participant declared:

"We in Asang have let ourselves get left behind, while other communities are fighting for their rights and development .... now we have to change this situation, or else we won't even have any land left on which to plant rice .... only we can secure our rights, because no one else is going to help us"

Many speakers adopted quite inflammatory positions when attempting to incite the community to action. One man argued, to a chorus of approval:

"...if we don't fight for our wood, then it'll be taken away from us, and then what will we do? We need to get more serious, the men in Asang are too timid - we need to pick up our guns and show those people from Raiti who the men in Asang are"

After the meeting, I asked a village leader if he was surprised that people were talking about resolving their problems by military means, rather than through peaceful negotiations. He said he was not, as people were fed up with waiting in vain for the government to come and help them, while circumstances in, and relations between the various communities in the area steadily deteriorated. He told me that groups of men who had fought during the war had come to his house on various occasions telling him that they wanted to fight, and asking him to help them get organised (the village leader in question was also a commander during the war). As he observed,

"people are thinking about fighting with guns ..... I believe they are serious"

The former soldiers' belief that Asang's problems could be solved by resorting to arms was certainly not shared by all community members. Nevertheless, in the absence of governmental intervention or outside facilitation, the armed combat strategy remains a prominent option considered by Asang villagers now that conflicts over land are proliferating throughout this area. The regional and national governments' neglect of this region has done little to convince people in Asang that their concerns might be resolved by peaceful channels; their experience of an autonomous parliamentary democracy has been anything but inspiring, as extracts from interviews with both men and women demonstrate:

"Everyone survives on their own account here, because we don't receive support from anyone, no government lends its assistance, so everyone just looks for ways of surviving, to send their children to study if they can, though few are able to....."
"Today they say that indigenous peoples have rights, but I don't see any rights, only fairy stories"

"Autonomy hasn't helped .... we live here as we always have, fairly poor. And since Fagoth\textsuperscript{10} came into power, no-one's seen him here, he hasn't told us anything. Here we are, discarded, forgotten. This river has always been neglected .... since the end of the war, this part of the Atlantic Coast, from Leimus up to here, we haven't received any help whatsoever, until the NGOs came, they helped a little.\textsuperscript{11} But the government - nothing. Here the regional government or whatever they call it does nothing, there's no help, there's no work, they don't even come here to show their faces...."

Until action is taken by the Nicaraguan state or regional government to reverse popular sentiments of despair and neglect in communities such as Asang, inter-stakeholder respect, the basis for negotiation and progress on resource-management related issues, remains non-existent. Addressing Asang's economic problems, political isolation and demands for land entitlement would help build the grounds for consensual approaches, so that Asang villagers do not have to see themselves as abandoned and alone, with no support from anyone. As one women told me:

"no one helps us, we're on our own .... people here live by the grace of God."

Numerous factors over the last number of decades have emerged to encourage growing awareness amongst Asang villagers' of the existence and implications of ecological scarcity. In response to threats which new circumstances pose to their material and symbolical integrity as a community, a broad consensus exists in Asang that formal land rights need to be secured, in order to restrict outsiders' access to their land and resources. Informants in Asang did not, however, provide any ideas for how resources would be managed in the long-term once these rights were secured; what "in the community's interests" actually meant was left undefined. But perhaps Asang's more immediate problems are how to organise an effective, collective, community-resistance movement able to meet their given objectives in the face of prevailing economic and political conditions, which not only fail to support community empowerment, but can also undermine community integrity and co-operation. I will now turn to consider community cohesion and solidarity in Asang today, both in relation to contemporary environmental perspectives, and in order to assess the contemporary social context's ability to mount and sustain effective defence of their interests and resources.

\textsuperscript{10} Steadman Fagoth was the former Governor or Coordinator of the Regional Government, who was voted into office in May 1996. Fagoth's support was always strongest in the River Wangki, where he grew up (in the community of San Esquipulas, further down river from Asang). His appointment as Governor created high hopes for change in the Rio Wangki. When he also failed to deliver (or even to visit) the disappointment in the River Wangki district was very hard to bear.

\textsuperscript{11} The largest and most significant NGO operating in the district after the war was the EEC-funded Project Wangki. At the end of 1996, Steadman Fagoth put pressure on the PW to replace the local representative in their organisation (a young man from San Carlos) with his own cousin. Angered by his threats, the Europeans decided to close down all PW operations for at least the rest of 1997. Deprived of their primary source of emergency assistance, many people in the River Wangki district turned against their erstwhile leader. To date, the PW has not resumed operations.
Intra-community relations

The instrumental and symbolical significance of reciprocal systems

One of the most useful indicators of social cohesion is how practiced and respected intra-communal systems of reciprocity, such as food sharing, or *pana pana* are. Reciprocal systems in Miskitu society have historically performed dual functions. On the one hand, *pana pana* encourages communities to pool their labour resources, and work collectively to realise particular instrumental objectives. Reciprocity in *pana pana* thereby performs a practical role in safeguarding Asang's material reproduction. At the same time, *pana pana*, or food sharing (particularly meat) were symbolically significant acts in Miskitu culture, a physical reflection of the sentiments of mutual aid and community unity which underpinned community life. However, during the banana boom, as money became more and more prevalent in Miskitu communities, intra-community labour and food exchanges were also affected. Rather than exchanging labour, people began to hire help instead, thereby removing the obligation upon them to return labour in kind. Rather than exchanging meat, people began to sell it. Once cash had been introduced into traditional reciprocal systems the ethic of reciprocity itself began to be undermined. As Helms tells us:

"During the banana period, when cash was plentiful, people readily hired extra labor to help with banana work ... today ... while cooperative labor is still required ... people are not as anxious to be hired, since it is no longer possible to obtain cash by hiring out" (Helms, 1971: 130)

According to Helms, although people continued to exchange gifts of food with one another and the pastor in Asang in the late 1960s, they were increasingly less willing to commit themselves to the reciprocal work required by the *pana pana* system. In a cash-starved economy, assistance continued to be repaid by reciprocal labour, but now that people expected cash for their toils, they were no longer as willing to work for "free."

In Asang today, intracommunal reciprocity has been undermined even further by the pervasive influence of money. The term *pana pana* is applied equally to situations where labour is returned with labour, as it is to situations where labour is hired. The symbolical element of reciprocity in *pana pana* is being lost in what is increasingly becoming a purely commercial transaction: the veneer of reciprocity noted by Helms in the 1960s seems to have become even more tenuous today. The group of village leaders I interviewed initially presented a positive picture of internal unity and cohesion in Asang, telling me that the community continues to practice *pana pana*, and uphold traditional ethics of reciprocity and cooperation. However, by the end of the conversation they were telling me that since people can neither provide money nor meat for helpers, people are far more reluctant to lend their services. It became obvious that the *pana pana* system they were referring to was the commercial, rather than barter type. Most
other informants, however, made little attempt to glamorise pana pana. Women in particular, were very critical of how people had lost their community ethics, no longer gave gifts of food or labour to one another, and were essentially ruled by money. A selection of responses on the theme of reciprocity elicited from Asang informants is presented below:

"in the past, we used to practice pana pana, people cared for one another, you didn't have to buy meat .... now you've got to buy everything."

"in those times, we worked collectively in everything, but not any more .... now you have to pay people for help ... only a very few people will repay work with work .... since we don't have a company here any more, and we're only working in agriculture, we began paying each other this way."

"some people still repay work with work, but most people work for money, you have to pay, or else they won't help you."

"before, people worked harmoniously, they were united in work as in food. if you killed a cow, you'd give some to everyone ... today you have to pay for meat."

"people used to do favours for one another, but not any more, now they just ask for money."

"poverty meant that people had to work hard to pay for their things ... and in the end, everything became something to buy, rather than give."

These quotations suggest that villagers' contemporary need to earn a cash income has led them to demand monetary compensation within the context of relationships that were previously determined by community ethics of cooperation and reciprocity. This does not mean that all ideological sources of community reinforcement have been eroded; for example, Asang villagers continue to hold their land in common, and have not succumbed to individualistic or financial criteria for determining land use within the community itself. However, irrespective of the picture of community unity presented to the outside world, internal community solidarity has been strained over the last decades. The strong cultural ethic of community cooperation upon which local institutions to regulate resource use practices might be built has become less secure. Protecting and fostering indigenous cultural integrity should therefore be considered an integral goal of contemporary resource management initiatives in the RAAN.

Monetary value of "wark" and gender relations today

It is perhaps not surprising that all women informants, as opposed to most men, criticised the "immorality" of contemporary community relationships. Gender equality, noted by Exquemeling in the seventeenth century, is one of the aspects of the traditionally egalitarian indigenous society which has been undermined by the subordination of symbolical to instrumental considerations. Whereas previously men and women's work complemented one another in securing livelihood objectives, once salaried labour - predominantly the occupation of men - became so valued in Miskitu society, the status of women was itself undermined. Salaried labour had not existed in traditional indigenous society; the Miskitus' exposure to it led to a
whole new term and concept being introduced into their language and culture: *wark*, or work, and new criteria for determining the value of given activities. As we discussed in Chapter 3, indigenous women have historically played a vital role in sustaining Miskitu cultural identity and reproduction. Nevertheless, irrespective of how crucial women's work was in sustaining indigenous households and communities, their ability to earn money was greatly inferior to men's, and as such, their egalitarian footing within indigenous society was undermined (Cunningham, 1994: 35, 41). According to a woman in Asang:

"if women knew how to *wark* and earn money, sewing or something like that, maybe the men would respect them .... and since the men are the heads of families, because they earn money, they have the power to give rights to the women .... but since women don't have any way of getting money, men don't respect them"

Although agricultural tasks used to be mainly performed by women, once this activity became the primary means of both earning cash and feeding families, the men took over the lion's share of the work. As one woman told me,

"the men have more respect, because they work more in the fields, and earn more money"

On the one hand, women seemed as responsive as men were to the monetary imperatives presently dictating community orientations and relationships; although they objected to the poor treatment of women by men, they nevertheless seemed to accept that since the men were the primary earners in Asang, they deserved the most respect. However, women also showed much more dissatisfaction with how money-oriented Asang had become, and much more skepticism about the ability of companies to resolve their problems. One elderly woman said that in all her time in Asang, she had never seen people behave as they do now:

"...without respect or love .... people are only interested in money now ... before they had great respect for their elders and would look after them and visit them all the time ... everyone neglects the old people now"

Arguably, women's declining status in indigenous society is symptomatic of the general problems afflicting community cooperation and integrity in Asang today. As much more concern is being paid to material imperatives than traditional ideological values, such as equality and reciprocity, the sense of *community* is being eroded, and intracommunity tensions have inevitably emerged. Although there remain many aspects of life in Asang which seem to confirm the persistence of community solidarity and cooperation to the outside observer,12 informants' own responses nevertheless suggest that social trends are operating in the opposite direction. Their obvious concern that traditional values and form of social organisation at the community level were being eroded underlined the severity of this problem.

12 One Saturday during my stay, the villagers spent the day hauling sand from the beach up the steep banks to the community, which was needed to build the new church in Asang (the previous church was burnt down during the war).
Indigenous beliefs in the post-war context

One of the most powerful indicators of tensions within Miskitu society today is provided by the post-war indigenous belief system. As we discussed in the previous chapter, indigenous beliefs and fears in the spirit-owners of the natural world had abated and become modified through the Miskitus' exposure to Christianity. The pastoral, paternalistic figure of the Moravian missionaries had largely replaced the position previously occupied by the *sukia* in indigenous communities. *Sukias* were not completely eradicated, but their profile in indigenous society decreased in proportion to the growth of the Moravian Church during the twentieth century, whilst the figure of the *sukia* himself became transformed by contact with Christianity, into *spirit-uplika* or *curanderos*, who called upon God in their work. Traditional animistic beliefs persisted, but given the influence exercised by the Moravian Church in indigenous communities, encouraging "restraint and quiet dignity" (Helms, 1971: 189) amongst the Miskitu, they were necessarily subsumed beneath the Christian surface presented to each other and the outside world.

The tumultuous experiences of the 1980s upset this status quo, and encouraged radical new changes in the indigenous beliefs system. The Moravian pastors, who had historically encouraged their indigenous parishioners to adopt passive, non-interventionist attitudes during the various political turmoils of the twentieth century, were presenting a different argument by the early 1980s (see Chapter 7). Certainly not all, but nevertheless enough Moravian pastors sided with the Contras to have created the popular impression today that pastors encouraged people to do the same - and get themselves killed. Indeed, a number of these pastors went beyond providing spiritual guidance to the soldiers in the Honduran guerrilla camps; some became prominent leaders amongst the exiled forces, some even became active fighters themselves (Hawley, 1997: 128, 129). It is important to remember that pastors, as representatives of the Church, were considered the guardians of community morality within their respective parishes (Rossbach, 1986: 177). As Hawley has argued, the support provided by a number of pastors to the Miskitu troops in Honduras gave their cause a sense of morality and higher purpose able to sustain the combatants through periods of intense hardship and adversity (Hawley, 1997: 129). However, in the more cynical and depressed era of the late 1990s, when the negative repercussions of the war are painfully obvious, faith in the Moravian pastors, and the Church in general, has greatly diminished. In fact, as guardians of community spiritual and social values, the Moravian pastors who joined the conflict did not only break their vows to God, but are considered to have jeopardised the morality of the Miskitu people themselves. As one professional from Asang, currently residing in Puerto Cabezas told me:

"before, people believed blindly in the Church .... then the Church got involved in political affairs ... picked up guns, encouraging people to get involved in the war. Now people think
about this, and have begun to analyse how the Church influences them and undermines their culture .... they also blame them for getting involved in the fighting, the pastors helped Contras and Sandinistas alike, blessing soldiers, guns and everything before battle ... seeing all this, people can't give them the same respect that they gave them before, people changed because of the suffering ... these pastors are bad people, drunks, criminals - people who one day were with God and aren't the next day, are committing double the crime of ordinary people ... you can't compare the sin of someone who isn't part of the Church to that of someone intimately part of it - the latter is far worse ... the pastors only continue to command respect because they have the Bible on their side, their trickery lies in the Bible itself..." (P. Cabezas, 1997)

The war, combined with the significant financial demands placed by pastors upon their congregations, necessary to sustain parish churches, means that respect for religious establishment has noticeably diminished in Asang since Mary Helms visited the community. Many informants complained that all pastors were interested in nowadays was money, and the community had to break their backs in order to keep the "word of God" in Asang. As one informant told me,

"we're not Christians, we're fools [babosos]!"

The erosion of traditional channels of indigenous reciprocity is paralleled and precipitated by the diminished respect for Christian morality in indigenous society. As Helms noted in 1971, the general kinship ethic of generosity had been reinforced by Christian values of charity introduced by the pastors:

"these two systems of generosity are blended into a single behaviour pattern" (Helms, 1971: 107)

Changed circumstances and experiences have however encouraged the dual elements of this particular cultural characteristic to become noticeably less prevalent in Asang society today. Many informants bemoaned the negative effect which the war had had upon community solidarity, morality and ethics:

"..before the war, people were very Christian, much more so than today, they believed in God much more then than now. Now there's evil everywhere. Because of the war, people became more rebellious, now they like to kill. That never happened before. People loved and respected one another, now this is no longer true, people don't respect their elders, they don't help one another, if you can't work, you don't eat..."

Implications of the contemporary phenomenon of widespread "brujeria" (witchcraft)

It is perhaps no coincidence that as the power of Christianity has diminished in the indigenous belief system, pre-Christian beliefs enjoyed a resurgence. As a Miskitu intellectual told me, the exceptional circumstances of the war encouraged the indigenous peoples to explore and revive elements of the pre-Christian belief system:

"they had no alternative but to return to certain practices ... in the first months of the war they didn't have guns ... they need to locate a source of strength" (P. Cabezas, 1997)
However, traditional knowledges which had in past times, been guarded by a single, designated person in indigenous society, the *sukia*, to be used in specific circumstances for particular purposes, reportedly proliferated through the combatants based in Honduras in particular. As one informant, a pastor in the Seventh Day Evangelist church, who had spent the war in Honduras in the refugee and military camps told me:

".... all those who knew about black magic got together in Honduras, and spread their knowledge throughout the others .... and those who were contaminated there, came back here.... witchcraft is now like a piece of rice: there's a lot of it ... in the Bible itself, Jesus said that there would be witchcraft ... witchcraft is the spirit of the Devil which is reborn in those who don't love their neighbours .... to practice witchcraft is a sin, but to believe in it isn't, because the Bible says it exists, and I believe in the Bible." (Waspam, 1997)

Many informants in Asang, as elsewhere, told me that witchcraft had become a terrible problem since the war.

How should we interpret the belief that witchcraft is a widespread problem afflicting indigenous communities today? The fact that indigenous beliefs in the 1990s are predicated upon fear of each others' spiritual power, rather than fear of the power of the spirits of the natural world, is an extremely telling reflection of the social tensions besetting contemporary indigenous culture. As an elderly man explained to me, after spending years fighting and living in the mountainous and jungle interiors:

"people aren't afraid of the mountains now - any more than they are afraid of the laws of God. Their hearts have become hard"

Rather than being united in fear of the outside world, the main manifestation of supernatural fears amongst Miskitus in Asang and beyond are internal, directed towards one another. An informant in Asang told me that whereas in the past, one could argue openly with the next person, you no longer can today, for fear that this person or a friend or relation of theirs might cast a curse upon you.

"people will even openly tell you that they can put a curse on you, so you had better leave them alone"

One elderly couple told me that the husband had lost his sight in 1988 because certain people, who had returned from Honduras, were envious of them. I already discussed village envy in the previous chapter, arguing that material accumulation rested uneasily with the traditional community ethic of equality. Manifestations of envy, in the form of black magic and sorcery, are equally indicative of pervasive social tensions affecting indigenous culture in general. According to a pastor in Waspam:
"there's widespread mistrust prevalent amongst the Miskitu people, which means that I'm afraid to eat or drink from anyone, because someone could have put a potion in that which I consumed ... for example they put a spell on the Director of the radio here in Waspam ... I don't know why, if for envy or something else ... people are very envious, if you have a good business they're going to do set a spell on it to make it fail, or they'll make you lose your job .... envy is everywhere today - this is part of Jesus' prophesy, that people will lose their love for one another, that they will only think bad things.... Jesus said that science will develop, that men will be able to do many things, more than he could ever do, and because of this, the corruption will grow so large that fathers will send their children to their deaths, brothers will send brothers, and mothers, their grandchildren ... this is all part of the Bible, this is the prophesy of God which is being fulfilled here..." (Waspam, 1997)

The fatalistic attitude of this informant was replicated, though not in so many words, by numerous other informants in Asang and beyond. It would be wrong to suggest that indigenous society has become in all respects, resigned and divided. Although Asang is experiencing many difficulties in sustaining cultural cohesion, and defining meaningful indigenous traditions within the community itself, they have been more successful in adopting new perspectives and approaches towards land and resources designed to secure collective community interests in contemporary circumstances. At the same time, within the community itself, distinctly Miskitu approaches to land use, held in common, with individual rights restricted to usufruct only, persist. It is perhaps no coincidence that during my stay in Asang, I heard no mention of conflicts between community members over land use itself. Nevertheless, given the individualistic attitudes which available livelihood options appear to foster, combined with the ever-increasing infiltration of money into community concerns and transactions, and indications that community co-operation and trust has markedly diminished over the years, suggests that prevailing trends are undermining, rather than reinforcing, social integrity in Asang.

Conclusions

In what ways has Miskitu culture been modified over time, and how have these changes affected their environmental perspectives at the community level? As discussed in Chapter 3, until at least the second half of the nineteenth, the Miskitus employed a diverse array of subsistence strategies in order to secure livelihoods. Although they were accustomed to trade local resources for European manufactured goods, their survival did not depend upon them, since tools, rather than food, were the principal items coveted. Since hunting and seasonal activities featured prominently in indigenous livelihood strategies, the Miskitus were a fairly nomadic tribe, whose use of land was extensive and low-impact, rather than concentrated and intensive. In contrast, by the late twentieth centuries, Miskitu communities have become territorially-fixed, whilst their livelihood strategies now revolve around agriculture, and therefore require more focused patterns of land use - particularly since long-term economic depression has left few alternative ways to earn cash and buy the manufactured goods (including food) which Miskitus today depend upon. Contemporary economic and political conditions however make it extremely difficult for Miskitu communities to market their produce, since neither encouraging
internally-coherent markets in the region, nor protecting local indigenous interests, represent policy priorities for the national government. In addition, whereas in the 1950s, community boundaries and access rules were flexible, this is no longer the case today, when competition over available land and resources has increased, and both are now perceived as scarce. The main concern of indigenous communities, neglected by the government and harassed by the traders, has therefore become to impose strict access rules over land and resources they consider theirs, by obtaining formal land titles. Land demarcation and indigenous survival have become closely associated in contemporary indigenous consciousness. Community land is both materially important as a source of economic power and development, and ideologically significant, as a symbol of cultural viability, tradition and legitimacy.

In many respects, contemporary indigenous environmental perspectives represent positive and necessary accommodations in Miskitu attitudes to external realities of encroachment and competition. Non-indigenous values of land ownership have been assumed, which are likely to serve their community interests in the long-term. However, these new cultural orientations, made necessary by contemporary contexts and material imperatives, have nevertheless disrupted value systems and relations between and within indigenous communities themselves. On the one hand, the desperate conditions which have made the land demarcation question so urgent in the RAAN today has fostered competition and discord between the communities over territories which they are each trying to assert prior claims. In the absence of acceptable criteria to define community land boundaries, and indeed, a land demarcation process of any kind, these inter-community conflicts could proliferate, unless communities decide to acknowledge historical realities and pool their claims for indivisible territories instead.

Meanwhile, within communities such as Asang, the nature and penetration of external material incentives has had noticeable affects on community values and social organisation, which appear less egalitarian, less co-operatively oriented, in the present day than they were in the past. Although Asang villagers are still united when dealing with issues as a community, internal matters are far more difficult to resolve. One of the communities' principal assets for successful locally based management - their collective communal identity, which has historically allowed them to pursue and defend common livelihood interests, and pool human and material resources - seems currently at risk. For the moment, the concept of community still remains a powerful motivator for indigenous peoples, and a meaningful part of their existence, as indicated by the Asang villagers' determination to defend their land interests collectively. Nevertheless, if present conditions persist, it is difficult to predict whether co-operation or conflict will define community relations in the years to come. Maybe once Asang secures her land rights, and common enemies - other communities, the government - are removed, new tensions could develop within the community itself. To date, their primary focus is on obtaining land rights, not
on determining how these will be managed once these rights are secured. As the example of Awas Tingni in Chapter 8 will demonstrate, resolving these issues can be as complicated for a community as securing a land title from the Nicaraguan state. Moreover, irrespective of the community's apparent determination to reverse political and economic marginalisation by securing land rights and economic development, the survival imperative might mean their rights might come only after all available land and resources have been consumed. As one, admittedly pessimistic community leader in Asang told me:

"the people want to develop, but they're not thinking about the future, about their children, their grandchildren, if a company comes I know they're going to clean out all the forest we've got left, they can come and take everything away"

Long-term resource management initiatives depend upon a consensual and collective involvement of local communities. Research in Asang however indicates that the community base, although adapting to contemporary economic and political circumstances to remain viable, is simultaneously being undermined by them. In order to appreciate how these external factors operate to define and indeed, confine the parameters of community action and outlook, attention must necessarily be given to the national and international economic, political and institutional systems from which they have evolved. In the next chapter, these issues be explored through an historical examination of the forestry industry in Nicaragua.
Chapter 6 The Regional Forestry Industry 1880s - 1960s: Historical Foundations of Resource Mismanagement

Introduction

This chapter presents an historical examination of the macro-level economic climate and international forestry industries from which contemporary management policies and community perspectives in the region have emerged. By this process, the politico-economic conditions from which the reorientations in indigenous livelihoods, material aspirations and perspectives described in previous chapters will be appreciated. This chapter also intends to contextualise and inform the analysis of contemporary examples of forestry management in the RAAN which will be considered in Chapter 8. In Chapter 2, I argued that when viewed from an historical perspective, the overall weakness of regional institutions, given both the parallel weakness of national government, and its policies and traditions of rule from the centre and neglect of the localities, made the failures of regional autonomy and local political disaffection, not particularly surprising developments. With such a poor institutional climate, and in the absence of trust between government and society the difficulty of constructing collective, multi-layered approaches to management seems clear. By the same token, contemporary patterns of unsustainable forestry exploitation in the RAAN, both formal and informal, cannot be fully appreciated without also considering the history of the forestry industry, the national economic policies which fostered it, and the social, political and management repercussions for the region itself. Following a brief characterisation of the history of regional resource extraction, I will examine the three main forestry companies which operated in the RAAN between 1880 and 1960, and the Nicaraguan political contexts which facilitated them. In the final section of the chapter, I will consider the forestry industry from the local perspective, identifying the various conditions and incentives which at the time, encouraged indigenous communities to readily accept the presence of these companies in the region.

Natural resource extraction in the RAAN

Natural resources have been exported from the Atlantic Coast region since the first stages of contact in the sixteenth century, a trend which became entrenched by the late colonial period. However, the rate, scale and nature of extraction had exponentially increased by the late nineteenth century, in face of new demands for resources created by booming industrialisation in the United States. Sources of raw materials to maintain the industrial machine were being sought for worldwide, and the Atlantic Coast was no exception (Sollis, 1989: 485). The Atlantic region held the richest reserves of natural resources in the country, and consequently became extremely important to the both the Mosquito Reservation government, and Nicaragua following 1894, as a source of foreign investment.
Although the scale of regional commercial activity increased, it nevertheless remained sporadic, dependent upon external economic demands and conditions, rather than developing an internal rationale of its own. Meanwhile, even though the region was becoming an economically significant source of revenue, the Coast remained politically isolated and marginal in national terms; as indeed, it has to this day. The historical experience of seeing regional interests subordinated to national concerns has proved influential in shaping political attitudes, identity and economic concerns of costeño society.

**US Economic activity on the Atlantic Coast after 1894**

During the nineteenth century, the US began to supplant the British as the principal economic, and therefore also political, influence on the Coast. By the time Nicaragua incorporated the Atlantic Coast, US citizens were controlling 90% of all productive and commercial activity in the region (Sollis, 1989: 488). Economic focus into the twentieth century was primarily upon the lumber, banana and mining industries. The region represented many attractive features for investment by US businessmen: easy shipping route to New Orleans, the abundance of natural resources, the compliance of the Nicaraguan government, and the availability of a cheap, cooperative and often English-speaking local workforce. As one investor described the region in a letter to a friend, back in the United States:

“The bottoms are rich in timber and the uplands abound with gold ... native help is plentiful and can be hired for a song and a sixpence, and the mahogany can be floated all the way to the coast.” (Robert N. Keely, 1894, cited in Bergman)

**Institutional incentives for exploitation**

Since the nineteenth century, Nicaraguan institutions have largely operated in favour of the lumber industry and foreign investors. The political constitution of Nicaragua, although amended between 1848 and 1938, nevertheless persistently gave foreigners all the civil rights and liberties enjoyed by Nicaraguans themselves, according to the limits of the law (Solorzamo, 1989: 56). When the resources are exhausted, the periphery will be ignored until resources recuperate, or alternative resources become lucrative. The marginal area is therefore often subject to extreme economic volatility or boom / bust cycles, that defy the emergence of stable local economies. The isolation, and lack of power experienced at the periphery, can make it very difficult for these areas' inhabitants to resist. This is partly because the global economic system which is peripheralising or incorporating the native people's land and people, also transforms and commodifies relations between people and their environment in this process. Such regions are neither excluded from, nor incorporated into, the global economic system; they continually remain on its periphery (Fenelon, 1997: 264). Moreover, as national economic policies become directed by external, rather than internal agendas, even if the nation chooses to protect the interests of the peripheral area, the combination of pro-investment legal frameworks and weak institutional contexts can make it extremely difficult for them to do so.

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1 The expropriation of marginal areas' land and resources by the national state, operating purely with national interests in mind, has also been referred to as *internal colonialism* (Osherenko & Young, 1989). Valuable raw materials are physically located in peripheral areas, occupied by small, likely marginal, populations. The natural riches are extracted from the area, to benefit the (often foreign) corporations and secondly, the governments and consumers located in the metropolitan centres (Osherenko & Young, 1989: 56). When the resources are exhausted, the periphery will be ignored until resources recuperate, or alternative resources become lucrative. The marginal area is therefore often subject to extreme economic volatility or boom / bust cycles, that defy the emergence of stable local economies. The isolation, and lack of power experienced at the periphery, can make it very difficult for these areas' inhabitants to resist. This is partly because the global economic system which is peripheralising or incorporating the native people's land and people, also transforms and commodifies relations between people and their environment in this process. Such regions are neither excluded from, nor incorporated into, the global economic system; they continually remain on its periphery (Fenelon, 1997: 264). Moreover, as national economic policies become directed by external, rather than internal agendas, even if the nation chooses to protect the interests of the peripheral area, the combination of pro-investment legal frameworks and weak institutional contexts can make it extremely difficult for them to do so.
In terms of the lumber industry, this meant there were no restrictions upon who applied for lumber concessions, nor limits to the amounts of land they could request. Between 1893 and 1906, approximately 858,000 hectares, 60% of which were located on the Atlantic Coast, were granted as concessions, at an average of between 50 and 80 centavos per hectare (Solorzamo, 1991: 8). As a result, American companies like George D. Emery were able to gain concessionary rights to over 40% of the entire Atlantic Coast territory.

Foreigners did not only enjoy the same rights as Nicaraguan citizens; theirs were arguably even more comprehensive. The Emery company was made exempt from all maritime and port taxes, and were even allowed to import all their foreign manufactured necessities tax-free. In general terms, even if export taxes were imposed, the authorities were incapable of rigorously collecting them. (Solorzamo, 1991: 14). Indeed, they often did not even bother: for example in 1913 the Nicaraguan government declared tax-free exploitation of Atlantic Coast forests to be permissible for a period of two years (Gaceta Oficial, 26-6-1913 cited in Solorzamo 1991: 13). Regulations controlling both the manner and the terms of lumber extraction in this period were effectively non-existent. According to Solorzamo, Nicaragua administrations have been historically inefficient, unable to control foreign companies or protect national resources and citizens. They have either favoured a particular group with ties to the government, or been non-existent, either so as not to jeopardise the interests of foreign investors and those few Nicaraguans benefiting from their presence, or simply because the government did not have the capacity to formulate or enforce the necessary regulations (Solorzamo, 1991: 24).

The Big Three Lumber Companies:

John D. Emery Company

The Emery Company set an appropriate precedent for future lumber extraction in the region. The Boston lumber company, which established operations in the region in 1884, was the first to systematically target the precious hardwoods of the region, obtaining a lumber concession from the Mosquito Reservation government in 1885. In 1893, the Emery Company was exporting four steamboats laden with wood per month, including mahogany, cedar and pine, from the River Wawa. By 1894, they had extended operations beyond the limits of the Reserve, creating conflict with the Nicaraguan government, and providing them with a further incentive to launch a military operation to incorporate the region into national territory.

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2 100 Centavos were worth a Cordoba; 7 Cordobas were worth approximately one US dollar.
3 The role played by the Emery company in undermining costeños' territorial claims presents a striking parallel with the NIPCO company’s contributing towards Nicaragua - and most importantly, the Miskitus’ - loss of the northern bank of the Rio Coco to Honduras in 1960. The long disputed Nicaragua-Honduras border question only became an issue for international arbitration once the NIPCO company started cutting mahogany north of the Rio Coco, in land over which Honduras had a legitimate claim. The International Court of the Hague settled in Honduras' favour, making the natural boundary of the Rio
Due to the support given by the US to the Nicaraguan government's military takeover of the Coast, relations with American companies in the region after Incorporation were immediately on extremely cordial terms. In 1894, the Zelaya government allowed the Emery company to merge their 1885 concession with another which had originally been granted to a Canadian company, thereby granting them control of an area which represented over a quarter of all national territory. The Company also benefited from the favourable tax conditions, or lack of them, described in the previous section. For eight consecutive years, the Emery company exported to the United States an average of a thousand planks of mahogany per month (Rossbach, 1985; Jenkins, 1986: 199).

As long as the United States and Nicaragua were on good terms, the only concern for the Emery Company seemed to be the natural limits of the resource itself. However, in the early twentieth century relations between the two countries did become strained, as Zelaya asserted his country's independence through economic policies, such as contracting large loans from British financial houses, which were not to the United State's liking (Sollis, 1989: 487). Even less acceptable to the US was Nicaragua's decision in January 1907 to annul the Emery concession, on the grounds that the company had failed to perform any reforestation in the areas cut, and had abused their privilege of duty-free imports, by reselling goods brought into the country ostensibly for company use alone.

Given the Nicaraguan government's previous lack of interference in the lumber company's operations, the Emery Company was outraged, and put a claim for unfair loss of revenue before the US. State Department. As soon as the new Taft administration entered office in March of 1909, they began to apply pressure on the Nicaragua government to resolve the Emery claim. In the face of American diplomatic insistence (and the 400 US. Marines who had landed in Bluefields, following a conservative uprising against Zelaya, in order to protect 'American lives and property'4), the Nicaraguan government capitulated (Sollis, 1989: 487). The countries reached agreement in September 1909: Nicaragua would pay the firm $600,000 to settle its claim and buy out its assets. Additional benefits to the Emery company were valued at $200,000, a total sum considerably more than what the damages they had originally asked for. Nicaragua regarded the settlement as extortionate, but in the face of US pressure, national interests were sacrificed. The Emery company withdrew from the Coast not only with a hefty

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4 According to Sollis, "The US Secretary of State Knox, who ordered the intervention, was legal counsel to the US-owned Rosario and Light Mines Company which contributed financially to the exercise and was a major investor in Nicaragua" (Sollis, 1989: 487, footnote).
settlement and past profits, but moreover, along with all infrastructure they had established in the region, equipment which they had originally promised to leave behind (Rossbach, 1985).

In the case of the Emery company, Nicaraguan politicians, laws and institutions had shown themselves either unwilling or unable to protect national and regional interests against international capital's agenda. The lack of control over lumber exports means that to this day, it is unclear how much lumber the Emery Company was actually able to extract during their years on the Coast. This same dilemma has persisted throughout the history of regional forestry industry, given Nicaragua's weak position in the international economic system, and the difficulty of conceptualising alternate means of development in this context. Ultimately, the consequences are primarily borne by the people and the environment of the Atlantic Coast, who also receive the smallest portion of the profits accrued from regional lumber extraction.

*Bragman's Bluff Lumber Company*

By the 1920s, in common with other US industries, the American construction business was rapidly expanding. Nicaragua's pine reserves therefore became a new focus for intensive investment. Large-scale exploitation of the Atlantic Coast's tropical pine forests began in 1921 with the Bragman's Bluff Lumber Company, a subsidiary of Standard Fruit, which based their operations in the small coastal village of Bilwi, or Puerto Cabezas. BBLC had a concession of 50,000 acres for long-term pine export. The company invested $5 million into the project, building a wharf, 100 miles of railway with various bridges, a large sawmill, an electric plant, an ice factory and a company zone for the foreign workers (Foladeri, 1981). By 1926, Bragman's Bluff was employing 3,000 salaried workers, making it the largest and most significant company in Central American and the Caribbean (Solorzamo, 1991). At the height of production, BBLC was producing 55,000 feet, or 18 kilometres, of wood planks per day (Vilas, 1989: 46).

However, the historically unstable political situation in Nicaragua meant that this economic boom, like others, would be shortlived. After a Liberal revolution, the US Marines occupied Puerto Cabezas, bringing the conflict between General Sandino and the Americans over to the Atlantic Coast. As a big American multinational corporation, BBLC became a target for the revolutionaries under Augusto Cesar Sandino, who caused substantial damage to regional company infrastructures, particularly in the mining district. Although the business community might have weathered the crisis, it coincided with the Great Depression, which led to a general collapse in business confidence. By the 1930s, both BBLC, and Standard Fruit, which had been purchasing between $30,000 and $40,000 of bananas per month from the Rio Coco withdrew (Sollis, 1989: 488).
How did BBLC run its operations on the Atlantic Coast? What kind of employers were they? One the one hand, BBLC seemed to have introduced more regular forms of employment than practiced by companies in the past. As Grossman observed in 1923,

"...this company has done away with the advance paying, debt contracting methods herefore in vogue, which held many of the indians in a state of peonage, sometimes for years. The new company hires its labourers at a fixed price per day, paying them regularly in cash at the end of every 2 weeks. The people are beginning to recognise the great advantage of this system, and it is hoped that this new system will have a salutary effect upon economic conditions all along the coast." (Grossman, 1923: 77-78)

The Moravian Superintendent was undoubtedly in favour of this new initiative, which made it less easy for companies to exploit the indigenous workers. Nevertheless, the normalisation of modern work practices was not necessarily a beneficial change for the indigenous population, nor one which they were particularly in need of. As Thomas Belt tells us, the previous system of advance payment by merchants held many loopholes, which were often manipulated by the indigenous workers to their advantage:

"Parties of men are....fitted out with canoes and provisions and proceed up the rivers, far into the uninhabited forests of the Atlantic slope. They remain for several months away, and are expected to bring the rubber they obtain to the merchants who have fitted them out, but very many prove faithless, and carry their produce to other towns, where they have no difficulty in finding purchasers" (Belt, 1875; 32-3, cited in Offen, 1994; 4)

Formalising labour practices in the region therefore had both positive and negative consequences for indigenous workers; although the work environment became somewhat more reliable, yet the Miskitus' ability to control the commercial process had been greatly reduced.

A similarly equivocal change was the BBLC's decision to introduce commissaries for their workers. Workers could choose to receive their wages in goods purchased from these commissaries, instead of receiving them in cash. Access to these goods presented a strong incentive for indigenous workers to sign up as company labourers. According to some authors, the credit system was designed not only to return most of the workers' wages to the company at a profit, but also to make workers indebted to the company - the same system which Grossman thought he had seen the end of, only in a different, more subtle, guise (Yih, 1987; Solorzamo, 1991). However, according to an informant I spoke to who had actually worked for the company, it was rare for workers to become indebted to the company stores, and that they welcomed the reliable access to goods it afforded them with. Company commissaries did however mean that manufactured goods were becoming ever-prevalent features of Atlantic Coast society.

There were however, parts of the company that not even the employees had access to. For one thing, the costly wharf they had erected was strictly for company use alone; indigenous
fishing boats still had to sink anchor offshore, and row onto the beach. The company compound in which the American employees lived was off bounds to the indigenous peoples and Creoles; a physical separation which underlined the class and status differences between white foreigners and the local ethnicities. The idea of a Japanese company behaving the same way in the United States appears inconceivable; in the Atlantic Coast, however, company policy and wishes prevailed. The BBLC's local authority was indeed, simply excessive. It ran not only the economic, but the political affairs of the region as well, even paying both the police and the public government officials' salaries in the region (Solorzamo, 1991). Moreover, BBLC kept no inventory or account books to enable authorities to keep track of their operations. Extracts from a 1930s document written by costeños\(^5\) presents a depressingly familiar picture of governmental institutions unable or unwilling to regulate companies' uses of the local environment, for anyone with experience of the contemporary regional lumber industry:

"Large foreign concerns operating here have disregarded the laws of our country in many respects. This was particularly noticeable in the mahogany industry in this Department. Forest inspectors were careless and were usually bribed to be quiet while they neglected their duties. The mahogany industry for the future will suffer greatly because in many instances, young trees were not planted. The forest inspectors were principally Nicaraguans of the Western part of our country" (Hodgon's Memorial, 1932: 21)

As Vilas observed,

"the government had no capacity to supervise extractive activities and exports; according to the report of a special government commissioner, the companies bribed the inspectors" (Vilas, 1989: 46)

The company could therefore do as it pleased; the Nicaraguan government made no attempt to restrict its activities.

Once the BBLC had decided to close down operations, they packed up all their installations and left; like Emery previously, they ignored their prior agreement with the government to leave all company infrastructure in the region after their departure.\(^6\) Once again, a foreign company had been able to dictate the production process, and exploit coastal resources unregulated by national institutions. However, from the company perspective, local political and institutional instability left BBLC with little incentive to act otherwise. As the investment context in Nicaragua has been consistently unstable since that time, the experience of the BBLC, and indeed the Emery company previously, is frequently replicated. Although the lax regulatory environment facilitates quick profits for resource extractive companies, institutional uncertainty

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\(^5\) Hodgson's Memorial was written in Bluefields. Hodgson himself was a Creole; many of the other collaborators in this document were probably also Creole, so it cannot be represented as evidence of perspectives within the indigenous communities themselves.

\(^6\) They even went so far as to dismantle the iron bridge they had erected over the Rio Wawa, piece by piece. The large concrete blocks on which it was built can still be seen today, physical landmarks serving as a reminder of previous company activities in the region.
in Nicaragua continues to discourage investors from making long-term financial commitments in the country.

**NIPCO**

In 1945 a new American-financed lumber corporation, NIPCO, or the Nicaraguan Long Leaf Pine Lumber Company, set up camp in Puerto Cabezas. Between 1945 and 1964, NIPCO reportedly exported 602.2 million feet of various types of wood, principally pine, mahogany and cedar, from the country (although given the poverty of company records, greater amounts of unaccounted wood were probably extracted) (Foladeri, 1981; Jenkins, 1986: 201). NIPCO's enormous productivity made her responsible for over 50% of all Nicaraguan lumber exports during this period (Jenkins, 1986: 200). The region, which had been suffering an economic depression since the Sandino revolutions and Great Crash had caused companies to withdraw in the 1930s, experienced a sudden revival. A booming economy had temporarily returned to the region.

NIPCO's permission to exploit forests on the Atlantic Coast came directly from Managua. Although NIPCO sometimes needed to seek indigenous communities' permission to fell lumber, given that certain villages had received titles to small portions of regional land earlier that century, they generally were able to proceed on the assumption that the region was national territory, administered by the government in Managua. According to Sam Robinson, the head of NIPCO during the company's peak years between 1950 and 1954, the company encountered little opposition from the indigenous population, whose subsistence activities were not particularly affected by their activities, and who generally welcomed the opportunity to earn money and other benefits from the company. Indeed, NIPCO, like the BBLC before it, became almost solely responsible for the economy, infrastructure and livelihoods on the Coast. For example, out of the 3,500 inhabitants in Puerto Cabezas alone, 800 were reportedly hired by NIPCO (Sam Robinson, 1997; pers. comm.). Albeit for their own purposes, they also improved local infrastructure. In order to transport wood from the interior to Puerto Cabezas, NIPCO built all-weather roads, including, the main thoroughfare from Waspam to Puerto Cabezas which is today the lifeline for the communities of the Rio Coco area. Road maintenance in those days was possibly even more thorough than in present times: NIPCO had four motor patrols, each with big tractors weighing 4-5 tonnes, some dump trucks, and a couple of road crews, to ensure that road maintenance was continuous. NIPCO also continued with BBLC's strategy of installing a company commissary in Puerto Cabezas accessible to all, which were not only cheaper but more reliable than the other stores in the area, as a ship carrying staples and canned goods would sail in regularly every six weeks from New Orleans (Sam Robinson, 1997; pers. comm.). These same ships, according to

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7 By the terms of the Harrison-Altamirano Treaty - see Chapter 8.
American reporter Lorenz Adam, who visited Puerto Cabezas during the NIPCO years would return to New Orleans "loaded with many 1000s of feet of pine, mahogany, or cedar lumber for export" (Adam, 1950s). The Atlantic Coast lumber industry was thriving in the 1950s, whilst regional forest reserves were being rapidly depleted.

What was the Nicaraguan government doing to control this booming industry? From all accounts, very little. According to Sam Robinson himself,

"the government didn't intervene much, there was a labour inspector to deal with any complaints against the company, but he was a pretty fair fellow. We also had a good company lawyer out there, and the National Guard, led by a good comandante, to keep the peace" (Sam Robinson, 1997; pers. comm).

Government officials seemed equally as sympathetic towards NIPCO in environmental management questions as in labour disputes. The Somoza administration "required no investments in restocking of reforestation, in environmental protection" (Sollis, 1989: 491). As Robinson himself acknowledged, their attempts at reforestation were fairly limited; whilst a former NIPCO worker in fact told me that they made no attempts to reforest whatsoever. Moreover, no effort was made to use NIPCO's presence to the region's long-term advantage, for example to use income generated by the company to stimulate local industry, with the post-NIPCO future in mind. In fact, according to the wife of one of the few Nicaraguan entrepreneurs working in the lumber industry during this period, it was far more difficult for Nicaraguans to get permission to cut lumber than it was for the foreigners. In the end, an estimated 240,000 hectares of forest were stripped bare, to little lasting regional benefit.

After experiencing fifteen years of intense deforestation, it was not surprising that by the 1960s, with all the most easily accessible wood already extracted, the industry should have suffered a decline once natural limits were reached. In 1956 NIPCO tried to solve the problem of declining lumber resources by crossing the Rio Coco at Leimus in 1956, to cut lumber in the disputed territory to the north. However, the main outcome of NIPCO's decision was to incite war between Honduras and Nicaragua, which was only settled once the International Court of the Hague ruled that the Rio Coco should henceforth be the border between Honduras and Nicaragua in 1960 (Wenger, 1975). With all easily accessible sources of lumber already plundered, NIPCO closed operations in 1963, and the Atlantic Coast economy, still dominated by foreign investment and export, having experienced no integral regional development during the NIPCO period, collapsed once again.

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8 Commanding officer.
Eighty years of sporadically systematic deforestation had inevitably left their mark on the regional environment. As Reverend Warren Wenger remarked in 1975,

"...in the rolling savannah only sparse strands of smaller pine trees grow since the US-owned NIPCO has cut down and milled at its sawmill at Puerto Cabezas all the larger trees in North-Eastern Nicaragua by 1963 .... most of the cedar, mahogany... and other good lumber trees have also been cut down, so lumber men must now travel far inland into the rain forest to search for such trees." (Wenger, 1975; 8,9)

Not only had thousands of forested acres been stripped bare, but soil had been impoverished and waters contaminated in the region. Meanwhile, the newly unemployed either returned to their communities, or sought work in other, smaller industries, which subsequently emerged on the Coast. Soon after their departure, the various constructions they had erected around the region, such as bridges, workshops, houses and so forth, which were no longer being maintained, collapsed (Jenkins, 1986; 203). NIPCO as with all lumber companies previously, had not only brought little lasting material gain to the region's citizens; it had left their livelihood basis, the environment, severely weakened.

The political and institutional contexts of environmental destruction

Although it is easy to blame the resource extractive companies for the legacy of environmental damage left by this period, NIPCO's goals had nevertheless always been clear: they had come to the Atlantic Coast to make a profit from extracting forestry resources. The company was not responsible for making the laws regulating resource management practices, nor were they in charge of monitoring themselves, to ensure they were respecting them. The task of determining and enforcing the institutional framework for forestry management lay with the Nicaraguan government, which should have been taking national, regional and environmental concerns into account. Moreover, regional society might have been expected to keep a check on government performance through popular pressure, if their livelihoods, heritage and future were being exploited by foreign parties, to no benefit for themselves. Without question, the dominant global economic system created the macro conditions of insatiable industrialisation which brought the resource extractive industries to the Atlantic shores of Nicaragua. However, the micro conditions of the Nicaraguan political system and coastal society which proved so accommodating to the foreign companies provided the requisite foundations for short-term environmental exploitation in the region.

The Somoza Dynasty: 'A Developmentalist Approach to the Atlantic Coast' ⁹

World War II revived the depressed American economies, encouraging the government to develop pro-active policies which included the Atlantic Coast within the general strategy for national revival. The largely passive and patrimonial state of the 1930s and 1940s, gave way to

⁹ Term used by Vilas, 1989: 60
a new, pro-active governmental philosophy of modernisation and development. Primarily because of its natural resources, the Atlantic Coast formed an integral part of their strategy to achieve modernisation, by increasing national levels of production. As Vilas argued, the Somoza dictatorship:

"had as its goal the capitalist development of productive forces on the Coast, and their integration into a more dynamic overall economic plan" (Vilas, 1989: 60).

The Somozas had close ties with the United States, who were subsidising and encouraging the Nicaraguan government's modernisation process through development programmes such as USAID. Political policy was also very much influenced by the American-controlled World Bank's promotion of export agriculture in the 1950s. Having concluded that Nicaragua should concentrate upon her agrarian economy for the foreseeable future, rather than pursue industrialisation, they advised the government to adopt policies designed to promote foreign investment, including tax exemptions, giving the same rights for foreign as domestic capital, and guaranteeing the total convertibility of profits (Vilas, 1989: 62). Given that US capital was indeed pouring into the Nicaraguan economy whilst US governmental organisations were working on national political institutions, it is perhaps not surprising that American and Somoza political and economic strategies became mutually supportive.

The policies designed to promote foreign investment in agriculture in the Pacific, were transplanted to the Atlantic Coast to stimulate the natural resource economy. As Vilas argued, the Nicaraguan government conceptualised the Atlantic Coast in economic terms; their goal being to "transform the land into capital and the population into a labour force" (Vilas, 1989: 63). According to the "trickle-down" principle of developmentalist theory, this approach would not only bring benefits to foreign capital and national revenue, but to the regional population as well. Although with hindsight this philosophy appears either naive or exploitative, its promoters, although probably most interested with their own agendas, might have genuinely believed their developmentalist discourse; many still do today. Nonetheless, the net result of this policy, and willing subordination of national interests to American agendas, were regional resource extractive industries whose practices undermined the long-term social and ecological interests on the Atlantic Coast.

Local responses to the company period

How did the indigenous people respond to the company period? Today, many Miskitus will say that they were blind in the past, that they didn't understand that the companies were wreaking havoc on the environment, and violating their land rights. To an extent, this argument not only absolves them of responsibility for past destruction of their forests, it also allows them to present contemporary land demands as historically consistent concerns. Ultimately the
unhelpful contemporary romantic media images of indigenous peoples living in tropical forests, abstracted from worldly concerns is reinforced, bringing us no closer to appreciating how the lessons of history inform cultural consciousness in the present.

So why did the indigenous peoples largely not resist the large-scale exploitation of their natural resources in the twentieth century? Why did they accept imposed economic patterns and parameters set by body politics external to their own culture? Various examples can be given to explain this phenomenon, some of which have already been touched on in previous chapters: the Miskitus had no prior experience of environmental degradation to draw from, and they were concerned to obtain cash in order to acquire the manufactured goods they now depended upon, whilst their livelihoods and land requirements did not yet appear threatened by company activities. Moreover, the Moravian Church played a part in fostering indigenous acceptance of large-scale resource extractive enterprises during this period, as we shall now discuss.

Commercialisation and the Moravian Church: Influence and Priorities

The active acceptance by Moravian pastors - the moral authorities in indigenous communities - of the foreign companies operating in the region set a clear example to their congregations which was no doubt extremely influential in encouraging them to become further involved in commercial activities. Although the Moravian Church experienced problems protecting the interests and maintaining the moral integrity of their indigenous congregations because of the companies' presence, they nevertheless generally welcomed foreign industries. The development of the Mission was assisted by the companies, both directly, in the form of free services and grants, and indirectly, by providing their flock with employment, and therefore congregation cash to provide for the various parish churches (Adams, 1987; 52). As an elderly informant in Puerto Cabezas told me, the Moravian Church and BBLC-Standard Fruit:

"got on pretty well...the company did everything, they really helped the people and the church."

The Mission received numerous favours from the companies, such as free passage and free transport for goods to and from the States, free materials for Church construction, and assistance in putting their buildings up. According to Sam Robinson of NIPCO, the Church was "always looking for handouts." He said NIPCO's contributions to the Church were wide-ranging, from community activities to paying the salaries of missionaries themselves. From the arrival of the Bragman's Bluff Lumber Company in 1921 the missionaries were already consciously targeting the new source of revenue and assistance. Moreover, as people came looking for employment with the company, population concentrations presented the missionaries with fertile ground for evangelical work:
“... fortunately [depression] was greatly relieved by the establishment of a new lumber and banana comp at Bragman’s Bluff ... this new company has been a great blessing by bringing employment and money to the labouring classes... from present appearances, Bragman’s Bluff will become the commercial centre of our atlantic coast, and we are preparing,... to make it the centre of our work. Already members from all our various stations are working there...” (Grossman, 1923; 77-78)

Missionary reports show that the pastors recognised that regional economic prosperity was integral to the Church’s development. As extracts from Reverend Schramm’s reports from Sangsangta, Rio Coco, attest, the missionaries were actively encouraging their congregations to contribute materially to the Church, and realised that the peoples’ generosity varied according to the state of the economy:

“... Sunday collections could not be raised because there is no money in the Wanks [River Wangki]. Only Christmas collections were raised. Also, the congregation cash was not paid, but when a letter from the parsenwihta 10 was read and a few encouraging words, which contained some spices, were told them, then they promised to pay. And indeed we have collected some 70 dollars or more of congregation money in our congregations” (Schramm, 1922)

In his 1970s thesis, Reverend Wenger clearly recognised the connection between booming business and Church prosperity during the 1950s:

“... there was good business throughout the whole coast in lumbering, gold mining and selling bananas. The time of great prosperity from 1952 to 1955 coincided with a large increase of giving [to the Church] of about 25,000 Cordobas11 ” (Wenger, 1970)

Once economic conditions improved, life got somewhat easier for missionary Schramm and the Church on the river:

“at least the people have some money, and they were able to pay their congregation fees .... we hope, it will keep up” (Schramm, 1926)

The Moravians also appreciated the fact that the earning power which companies brought to their congregations facilitated the development of more appropriate Christian lifestyles in the communities (see Chapter 4). As Rev. Karl Muller observed:

"even if all of our people can easily procure the sufficient for their families' survival, given that the tropical land and climate produces fruits and vegetables without any great effort on the part of the natives, it has been difficult for them to obtain cash. Moreover, as the Christian community progresses, it becomes evident that the clothes worn in past times need to be replaced with contemporary fashions. One quickly learns that a real Christian family cannot live in open shelters as in the past" (Muller, 1928)

10 Parsenwihta means literally, judge parson or headparson. In this case, they are probably referring to the superintendent of the Moravian Church.

11 At that time, about 7 Nicaraguan Cordoba equaled an American Dollar, so the increase was of about $3,570 US.
The Reverend carried on to list all the material items required by a Christian family: houses, furniture, tools etc. However, all these possessions could only be obtained, he argued, with money, and hence, salaried work. Work was not just esteemed by the Moravians for the money and possessions it could bring, however. The missionaries hoped that through the experience of wage labour, the indigenous peoples might develop a more responsible and dedicated attitude towards work as was becoming to a diligent Christian. As Foladeri observed,

"on an ideological level, [the Church] encouraged salaried work to become culturally legitimate" (Foladeri, 1981).

The Moravians' objectives of inculcating their own attitudes and ethics towards work amongst the Miskitus indeed seem to have been quite successful. As Adams has observed, the Moravians:

"changed the Miskitus' way of life and fostered in the a strong sense of work and wage earning which did not reflect indian traditions and which favoured big business work patterns"(Adams, 1987: 58).

The lumber industry nevertheless did cause the Moravians some problems within the communities themselves. Although the companies helped the parishes develop financially, they also served to test the moral fibre of congregations. The attraction of foreign traders and money could undermine Church authority, and draw the men away from the fold:

"for many weeks, and even for months, many men, especially in Asang and in the nearby villages, were away at work in the mahogany camps. Since the Chinese man, Charley, has opened a centre in Asang for his camp, many men were rather going to the camps than to the church, as is often the case with the indians.... Carlos Hunter...is the director of the work at Asang, and.. of course the people are always around him, as the bees around the flowers ... I have the impression that the people are getting cold and careless...most all the men are at the mahogany camps. I found the evangelist's house in a poor condition.. the verandah was leaking and the rain pouring through. Also the church was in a dilapidated condition. We need not look far for the reason of this condition. Wherever the indians are mingled up with the traders, then they neglect the Lord's work. I am sure, the Chinese and Carlos Hunter living such a heathenish life, have had a bad influence upon the Christians in Asang. Also some of the [church] helpers at Asang are more interested in the work of the camps than in the Lord's work." (Schramm, 1926; 2)

Once the work slacked off, however,

"the men of Asang and the surrounding other places are again at home, and they attend services regularly" (Schramm, 1926; 2)

At the regional level however, despite some differences, the relationship between the Moravian Church and the American companies remained extremely cordial. According to Adams, the Moravians were even able to improve the industrial system, and to stamp out some of the greater injustices suffered by the indigenous peoples:
“in the case of the Bragman's Bluff Lumber Company, it seems the Moravians were even able to influence some reform in labour practices, for the company did away with their unstable .. credit system in favour of cash wages.” (Adams, 1987 55)

With the best of intentions, the missionaries encouraged the indigenous people to deal with the outside world, by understanding the way it functioned. For example, concerned that the indigenous peoples were being exploited by merchants in barter exchanges, they encouraged their parishioners to adopt the monetary system by using cash transactions in their missionary stores (Rossbach, 1986: 107). The Moravian Church saw the development of the regional economy, and integration of their parishioners into this productive process, as an integral aspect of their wider spiritual mission on the Coast. And although equilibrium between their material and spiritual pursuits was sometimes threatened by the traders, over all, the Moravian Church ultimately welcomed their presence in the region:

“... we are thankful to be able to say that many of the foreigners who have come to these shores to work for the new company are supporting us in our efforts to help our people and many, by accepting the good and refusing the evil, set a good example to our indians” (Grossman, 1923;80)

Indeed, each time that the inevitable happened, and the companies began to close down, the Moravians would therefore be left distraught:

“High floods, drought and the closing of the mahogany works have made it very hard for our people to earn a bare living. We too have felt it. The collections and the payment of the “congregation cash” have fallen off everywhere. The only enterprises on the coast have been the banana companies at Bluefields and Bragman’s Bluff. But even these companies, especially Bragman's Bluff Company, have laid off many labourers. The cost of living has become still more expensive... (Grossman, 1928: 80)

Overall, the missionaries helped bring the external world of work into the indigenous communities. As they were also leaders, and spiritual guides or protectors of the indigenous people, their opinions held great weight, and no doubt contributed toward their congregations' acceptance of the foreign companies' presence amongst them.

_The growth of material concerns in indigenous culture_

Indeed, prior to the 1960s, there were minimal signs of protest from coastal society against the economic status quo of the American companies. One of the principal reasons for this has usually been considered to be the attraction of manufactured goods which the booming economy brought to the Coast, and which work with the companies enabled the indigenous peoples to buy (Hale, 1992, 12). As one elderly informant in Asang told me, when I asked if people had welcomed the companies or not, he replied:

"Of course we wanted the companies, because we were poor, and needed the money...People were poor, they were dressed in tunu [bark], some did not even have guns.... people bought
plates, food clothes and tools with the money... the companies brought different things from abroad so therefore people loved them."

The Moravian pastors could already be found complaining by the 1920s that the younger generation was become overly influenced by imported values and commodities:

"it must be stated that the mode of living has become more extravagant especially among the younger generation. They go too far in imitating foreigners in everything - food, style, pleasures which sap their vitality as much as their purse, causing not a few to become careless and indifferent." (Grossman, 1928; 80-81)

Edward Conzemius, an ethnologist who conducted research amongst the Miskitus and Mayangnas in the 1930s, noted that:

"Nowadays, the Indian's wants from the outside world are many .... foreign-made articles ...are now considered indispensable to the bulk of the Indians... in order to obtain these commodities the Indians will work for a short time as day laborers, or sell some forest or agricultural products. Very little value is placed upon labour performed at home ..[they have a] childish preference for anything foreign" (Conzemius, 1932, 40-1, 105).

During the NIPCO period, the American reporter Lorenz Adam, referred to earlier, noted that

"most of the people are largely dependent on the lumber company and their constant fear is that the company will some day cease operations and they won't have any other way to make a living" (Adam, 1950s).

It seems apparent that part of the reason for indigenous society's acceptance of large-scale resource extraction was that this commerce enabled them to obtain a whole variety of items, such as machetes, axes, knives, fish hooks, cloth, ammunition, thread, needles, clay pipes and tobacco considered to be cultural necessities (Conzemius, 1932: 41). Moreover, the indigenous people did not necessarily see the economic system, and their relationship with it, in terms of exploitation. As Helms has argued,

"it is .. possible that what Western observers see as exploitation is considered desirable from the point of view of the native population" (Helms, 1971: 32)

The indigenous peoples wanted manufactured goods; the enclave economy met their desires. Only when the economy proved no longer able to meet indigenous livelihood requirements would the system itself come under widespread popular scrutiny, as we will argue in the next chapter.

Company compatibility with indigenous land use requirements

Hale also attributed indigenous quiescence to the fact that companies primarily worked "in lands which the Miskitu did not use, and which they did not consider as territory which they had the right or the need to control" (Hale, 1992: 12, my translation). Indeed, according to a Creole informant who worked for both BBLC and NIPCO,
"the Indians didn’t even have an idea that the wood belonged to them...today the communities say the wood is theirs, but they didn't say anything like that back then."

As we showed in the previous chapter, the mahogany reserves targeted by NIPCO contractors in Asang lay at some distance from the village and their plantations, and therefore extraction did not interfere with their daily routine. Moreover, mahogany was only used occasionally in the village, for example in the construction of boats. Meanwhile, the pine savannahs principally targeted by NIPCO were not areas which the indigenous peoples had traditionally used, as the soil was too poor for agriculture (Howard, 1993b:11). In fact, it was an indigenous custom to set fire to enormous tracts of the savannahs, in order to drive out game, to graze animals on new pasture, or to attract the same wild animals to the new shoots which would spring up in the wake of the blaze. Lumber activities in general did not interfere with traditional indigenous use of land, given contemporary population levels, livelihood needs and conceptualisation of rights.

**Indigenous priorities and environmental degradation**

Were the indigenous people not concerned about the environmental destruction incurred by the companies? The advantages of education, hindsight and experience tell us that lumber companies inevitably cause environmental degradation to some degree or other. However, the indigenous people of Northeastern Nicaragua had never personally witnessed lasting and irreversible environmental degradation, nor had they any historical or cultural reasons to believe that human actions could alter the natural forces around them. Moreover the unromantic, purposeful and rapacious example presented by American business encouraged them to adopt a more businesslike approach to the expropriation of resources:

"the company kept control of the Indians, they made them understand, to be honest, and if you go to work, work, because they were not used to work."

Field research appears to confirm that the indigenous peoples in this period were not yet associating environmental degradation with human activity. According to one Miskitu from Asang, now a reformist pastor in the Moravian Church:

"people were so irresponsible, they didn't mind at all that loads of mahogany was being extracted, and that the logs they could not transport were being left to rot in the path...the people didn't protest in the slightest..... they didn't understand the damage which they were making, because the people didn't know much about the impact which cutting down so many trees caused"

Moreover, their livelihood perspective continued to be geared towards immediate goals, mitigating against the development of long-term future planning. According to a non-indigenous NIPCO employee who lived in the region during the 1950s:
"the indians were living from day to day.. they didn't think what it was going to be like ten years down the road"

The former judge in Asang told me that people used to kill as many wild boar, and cut down as much mahogany as possible:

"...if they could finish them off, they would...people weren't sad when they were gone through, they were happy, as they only thought of money then, not the future."

When I asked an informant in Waspam whether people had been concerned about the environmental impact of the concerted deforestation occurring on the Rio Coco, the nature of his reply indicated the concerns of the times:

"not really; NIPCO helped the people a lot.... the company gave them work."

Conclusions

Indigenous environmental perspectives cannot be understood merely by focusing upon indigenous settlements in isolation. Consideration must also be given to the national and international contexts, and the political, economic and institutional climates, which set the conditions and terms of resource management at the microlevel. As Thorpe argues:

"... it is essential that we trace the way policy changes at the macro-level are feeding through to affect production, consumption and investment decisions at the level of the household" (Thorpe, 1996).

Policies, like places, have histories, and the longer their histories are, the more entrenched are the institutional, economic, political and social patterns which they foster likely to be. Contemporary developmentalist, neo-liberal economic trends in Nicaragua have clear roots in nineteenth century industrialisation. They can arguably also be related to the mercantilist preoccupations with the export economy held by the ruling elites during both the colonial era and early independence (Burns, 1991: 58). The national government's preoccupation to modernise and development according to global economic norms and criteria have throughout the twentieth century, proved instrumental in persuading Nicaragua to create favourable political conditions for foreign investment. However, persistent institutional uncertainty has meant that companies are only willing to commit for the short-term. In the Atlantic Coast, these macrostructural circumstances created an unregulated institutional climate of resource mismanagement in the region, which would allow successive resource extractive companies to make quick profits from large-scale pillaging of the environment. These policies would set economic trends in the region which would persist into the 1990s, as will be demonstrated in Chapter 8.

Irrespective of the increased commercial demand for resources, as populations grew, so too did the rate of expropriation required to maintain the indigenous subsistence system. The
consequences of environmental degradation would be most noticeable after the fact; during the height of company activity the indigenous people, without experience or knowledge of environmental degradation, with a perspective on the natural world that depicted it as powerful, volatile and changeable, it is not surprising that they could not foresee the consequences of their actions. And regardless of whether environmental degradation was apparent to the local population or not, the need to survive has logically remained their first priority. Since the only industries in the region promoted by the Nicaragua state were (and would continue to be) geared towards straightforward resource extraction, the region was kept marginalised on the periphery of the world economy, with no effort made to foster an independently viable local market. The Miskitus' commercial options were therefore inevitably restricted to environmentally destructive industries. Given that such companies have dominated the regional economic scene for so long, it is not surprising that when indigenous communities today decide to liquidise their forestry assets, they will invariably think in terms of straightforward extraction, both because of historical experience, and given the lack of commercial alternatives available to them. The deleterious effects of development-oriented policies are not just borne by local people; their lessons and paradigms can also be grafted upon local perspectives.

In the 1970s, the developmentalist direction being taken by both the regional economy and local perspectives alike seemed to hold little promise for the future. The prognosis of Bernard Nietschmann, who conducted his research in the RAAN during this period, was that:

"Economic forces instigated from outside systems have set in motion internal oscillating waves within Miskito society and their ecosystem which are tending toward ecological simplification and social atomization. The rules of Miskito society contain little anticipatory power to cope with extraneous economic challenges, nor are feedback mechanisms very efficient in light of increasing monetary dependence to affect restabilization of a threatened system." (Nietschmann, 1973: 243).

However, despite the gloomy picture painted by Nietschmann that the Miskitus' "maladaptive trends" would likely lead to further cultural subordination or erosion and ecological destruction, the 1970s in fact saw the emergence of indigenous organisations designed to defend threatened livelihoods and communities, whose origins could moreover be traced to much earlier periods in Miskitu history. The development of indigenous political consciousness, and the strategies the

12 I have not been able in this thesis to address the history of the rubber industry in the region, which historically represented a significant forest resource which did not require the tree to be felled in order to acquire. The principle types of forest gums to be found in the region are Chicle and Tunu. Until the 1979 revolution, there was a considerable market for both these wild latexes, which were sold by individual harvesters to the Wrigley processing plant based in Waspam. However, the American company shut-down following the Sandinista revolution, and since with the arrival of synthetic replacements for rubber, the global market for this product has declined, the regional market for non-timber forest products today is virtually non-existent (Offen, 1998). Since rubber trees were tapped on an individual basis (and since the rubber industry no longer exists) they do not feature in our analysis of community forestry resources.
Miskitos have used to try and achieve land and resource rights for their communities sheds light on both their contemporary environmental perspectives, and characteristics as stakeholders. These issues will therefore be discussed in Chapter 7.
Table 1. Historical Chronology of Major Political Events in the Atlantic Region, 1600s-1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>circa 1600</td>
<td><em>Oldman</em> crowned King of Mosquetos (M.W., 1699: 288)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1740</td>
<td>First British-appointed &quot;Superintendent of the Mosquito Shore&quot; sent to region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1787</td>
<td>British acknowledge Atlantic Coast as sphere of Spanish influence according to the Treaty of Paris (1783) and the Convention of London (1786) &amp; withdraw from Coast.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1816</td>
<td>Coronation of Miskitu King George Frederick I in Belize signals reassertion of British influence in Atlantic Coast following weakening of Spain after the Napoleonic Wars. The British Protectorate over the Coast lasts until 1860.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1821</td>
<td>Central America declares its independence from Spain and forms a Federal Republic, including Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Costa Rica.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1838</td>
<td>Nicaragua declares its independence from the Federal Republic of Central America.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>Treaty of Managua; The Mosquito Reserve is created, Nicaragua gains access to Atlantic Ocean both north and south of the Reserve.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>Incorporation of Mosquito Reserve into Nicaragua, Miskitu King exiled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906-7</td>
<td>Samuel Pitts affair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906-14</td>
<td>Harrison-Altamirano Treaty for indigenous land approved, but only partially implemented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920s-30s</td>
<td>General Sandino active in Atlantic region, U.S. companies withdraw, economic depression.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940-50s</td>
<td>Somoza dictatorship instills political stability, economic revival, boosted by W.W.II.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960s</td>
<td>Increased intervention of central government as regional economy declines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Formation of ALPROMISU and nationalisation of Moravian Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Sandinista Revolution overthrows Somoza dictatorship; MISURASATA created.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>MISURASATA land claim precipitates outbreak of conflict between Miskitu and FSLN; &quot;Red Christmas&quot; leads to evacuation of communities from River Wangki.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Autonomy Statute approved following lengthy process of negotiations and reconciliation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>First RAAN (and RAAS) regional elections; YATAMA control both Cel. and Govt. Sandinistas defeated by Chamorro-led UNO coalition in simultaneous national elections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>2nd regional elections; Sandinistas control Regional Council &amp; Presidency; Liberals &amp; YATAMA, control Regional Government and post of Coordinator, or Governor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Victory of Arnoldo Aleman and the Liberal Party (PLC) in October national elections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>3rd regional elections: Liberals take control of Cel, Sandinistas &amp; YATAMA reps, are not present when new (Liberal) Reg. Govt. Coordinator is elected. YATAMA factions resume muted military offensive against the Central &amp; Regional Govts. in May, protesting lack of action re: indigenous land demarcation and regional autonomy.</td>
</tr>
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Chapter 7 Indigenous Identities, Leadership and Political Agendas

Introduction

Indigenous identities are not only reflections of culture, but can be used as political strategies by indigenous leaders engaged in representing and furthering local interests. Since this thesis is operating within the framework of co-management theory, with the goal of providing information regarding the potential behaviour and considerations which inform Miskitu actions as stakeholders in resource management contexts, it is important to understand how perspectives held at the locality become presented at the negotiation table and to the outside world. The indigenous leaders and organisations entrusted with the responsibility of furthering their peoples' political agendas are invariably forced to operate in spheres dominated by non-indigenous values and customs. In order to achieve legitimacy, and be effective in these contexts, they must necessarily cater their demands and self-representation according to the norms and expectations of their external audience; without losing grassroots legitimacy whilst doing so. The need to reconcile these dual imperatives raises numerous questions not only for indigenous organisations and leadership; it also highlights the tensions which participation in, and accommodation to external political systems, can create within indigenous societies themselves. Indigenous culture and environmental perspectives can indeed become modified through the process of defending local culture and environmental concerns. The themes of indigenous identity, leadership and political agendas therefore become integral to an analysis of indigenous culture and environmental perspectives.

Indigenous Identities: Deconstruction and Reinvention

According to Octavio Paz, the Mexican Nobel Prize winner (1974), the essential quality of modernism is change, and its dynamo is a critical deconstruction of the immediate past that requires the reinvention of identity (quoted in Kleymeyer, 1992: 27). Paz's observations, although particularly applicable to modern times, are not necessarily restricted to them: cultural identities are revised continuously throughout history. Although in comparison to industrialised societies of the modern age, the cultures and identities of indigenous peoples can seem far more traditional or preserved, as this thesis has so far demonstrated, they are nevertheless also continuously modified over time. This process occurs in response to both endogenous cultural and historical considerations, and the exogenous influences wrought by external political, social and economic systems. The reinvention of identity serves both to reaffirm the group's cultural viability in its own eyes, and in those of the outside world.

The two functions of identity - to provide both internal and external cultural legitimacy - are not, however, always complementary. The characteristics of identity and culture considered
legitimate within the group itself are not necessarily shared by peoples beyond it. One could argue that as long as the cultural group remained united in believing in itself, the opinions of outsiders would be irrelevant. However, indigenous peoples - particularly in the modern age but essentially throughout the experience of contact - are rarely able to disregard the perspectives of external parties. In modern nation-states, wealth tends to bestow political power and vice versa; indigenous peoples, who frequently suffer from marginalisation underdevelopment, poverty and exploitation, but do not possess either wealth or political power, can have a very hard time getting their concerns recognised by the nation-states in which they are located. Since indigenous concerns so often involve land claims, their political agendas are perceived by many states as constituting a direct threat to national sovereignty. Confronted by both state intransigence, and their lack of wealth and political clout, indigenous peoples are often forced to adopt non-native forms of leadership, discourse and representation, in order to achieve recognition as legitimate stakeholders in land and resource management issues (Baviskar, 1998: IACP). As Fisher has observed:

"Explanations proposing "culture" as a basis for [indigenous] resistance are limited if not placed within a broader political framework" (Fisher, 1996: 220)

In order to understand indigenous peoples' concerns as stakeholders in the management process, it is therefore necessary to consider the development and nature of their identity, leadership, political consciousness and organisation, and how these cultural considerations shape their environmental agendas.

**Indigenous identities as political weapons**

Since the areas inhabited by indigenous peoples are so often remote, it is no coincidence that they also tend to hold the richest reserves of natural resources. In developing countries in particular, these areas are perceived as valuable means of income generation, whilst to environmentalists, they become the object of conservationist concern. For indigenous peoples who depend upon the land for sustenance and cultural survival, and who frequently find themselves in competition with nation-states for its control, environmentalism represents one of the various opportunities available to them to put their problems before the global community. Linking their identities to the environmentalist agenda presents considerable political advantages, since it enables indigenous peoples to tap into a groundswell of popular support and sympathy in the northern hemisphere. Many indigenous people have actively worked to exploit this advantage, by consciously lacing indigenous statements with environmentalist discourses.

However, the need to assume non-traditional identities, such as environmentalism, in order to serve ulterior political objectives not only confines, but according to circumstances, can even undermine indigenous movements themselves. Ultimately, indigenous peoples
environmental perspectives and agendas are far more complex than environmentalists. Discrepancies between the external and internal identities of indigenous peoples as innate conservationists can weaken the political strength of their position. As Fisher argues:

"to conclude that [indigenous peoples'] strong defence of this resource base derives from their relation with that base denies agency to [indigenous] society ... such a picture could limit [their] efforts to win concessions or use their territory in any manner they choose by defining authentic indigenous activity in terms of 'traditional' social roles." (Fisher, 1994: 229).

Environmentalism represents simply one of the ways in which indigenous identities can be co-opted, and their agendas and leaders constrained, by the need to cater indigenous demands to non-indigenous political circles.

**Cultural rights, customary tenure and international organisations**

The use of indigenous identities as political strategies, however, does not necessarily require radical cultural accommodation. The identity of indigenous peoples as historically marginalised and exploited peoples, who have nevertheless retained traditional attachments to place and culture, is a reality for many traditional societies which has, independent of ecological considerations, become increasingly potent political weapons in recent years. According to Ruttan,

"...that local peoples have prior and customary rights remains the strongest moral argument for legally recognizing traditional tenure systems." (Ruttan, 1998: 62)

From the second half of this century onwards, international organisations began to pay concerted attention to the persistent violations of indigenous peoples human rights. Indigenous rights to traditional lands, to use their natural resources, and to cultural integrity, are defended by numerous international organisations and documents, such as the ILO Convention No.169, the UN, the OAS and so on. Today, as the international community attempts to make amends for past atrocities committed against native peoples, indigenous identity itself provides moral and legal justification for cultural and tenure rights. As a seasoned practitioner of indigenous international law has observed,

"Through the United Nations and other international institutions, the world community has become increasingly concerned with promoting and protecting the rights of indigenous peoples" (Anaya & Crider, 1996: 347-8)

It is not surprising that the contemporary international moral, legal and political climate should encourage indigenous peoples to fashion their discourses and strategies with an external audience in mind. However, despite the encouraging international legal and moral climate, new standards are difficult to enforce, and nation-states can easily continue to disregard indigenous rights. Nevertheless, driven by the *expectation* of international assistance, indigenous
organisations can over-commit in this direction, and fail to coordinate and stimulate consciousness and action at the grassroots, amongst their own people. When this occurs, the authority of indigenous leaders can be questioned, and the legitimacy of their movement imperilled. Moreover, although international organisations and even states can move to promote community rights, they nevertheless expect indigenous groups to move through the appropriate legal and political channels in order to achieve them. One could argue that the discourse of cultural and systemic heterogeneity which appears to be represented by contemporary decrees on indigenous rights is just that - discourse - since in practice, native peoples must still, albeit perhaps understandably, conform with the homogeneous values and norms of globalised society. The strain of conformity is most obviously borne by indigenous leadership. Their problems should however be conceptualised as a reflection of internal cultural tensions, rather than independent of the societies from which they originate.

**Indigenous leadership**

The globalisation of communication, and the increasing political and moral space externally available to indigenous peoples, has unavoidably required them to assume new forms of leadership to project their political demands. Indigenous peoples today are more likely to be represented by relatively younger, educated individuals familiar with modern values and customs, who possess the types of skills such as bilingualism and literacy necessary to operate in external political and economic circles (Baland & Platteau, 1996: 341-2). As language, formal education and political negotiation skills are often not possessed by the elder, traditional authority figures, they cannot usually function as effective leaders in state arenas, at least not without the assistance of younger advisors. Working in tandem, the older and younger generations can potentially cater to both the local and external expectations of indigenous leadership. Indeed, whilst traditional leaders can encourage community based action and management of common property resources because of the trust and prestige they inspire, the younger generation of leaders are often more skillful at developing communication and cooperation between communities and stakeholders (Baland & Platteau, 1996: 339; 341). Whatever their generation, the legitimacy of indigenous leaders rests upon their ability to appear competent, to inspire trust, and to be seen to be motivated by communal, rather than personal interests (Wade, 1988: 491; cited in Baland & Platteau). The quality of leadership determines not only the coherency of the indigenous agenda; it also affects their chances of success.

The legitimacy of indigenous leaders, and their ability to represent their people and make decisions on their behalf, knowing that these will be respected, also depends on their degree of success. For example, in the case of the Cree of Quebec, Filkret Berkes has argued that recognising Cree leaders' political concerns and agendas, and acting upon their requests for Cree rights and self-government, not only strengthens their own legitimacy, but reflects positively
upon Cree society itself (and thereby strengthening the values and practices of Cree land skills and ethics considered so complementary to co-management efforts). However, if Cree leadership is ignored by the provincial or federal governments, Cree culture is equally slighted and undermined (Berkes et. al., 1991: 15). And when negotiation with government authorities appears fruitless, sections of indigenous society might feel inclined to pursue extralegal courses of action which the discredited leaders are powerless to control. The interdependency of indigenous leadership, indigenous society and successful indigenous participation in negotiation and co-management initiatives becomes clear.

Conversely, governments can also become too accommodating to indigenous leaders, thereby destroying their local legitimacy and authority. Since the relationship between indigenous peoples and governments is so often characterised by at least some degree of separation, if indigenous leaders are perceived to have crossed this barrier, and allowed themselves to become co-opted by governments, then their local legitimacy is likely to suffer. This is particularly true when significant problems of trust and communication exist between indigenous peoples and governments. Moreover, the very experience of operating in political and governmental circles can result in indigenous leaders, the same as with non-indigenous politicians, losing the trust of the people by apparently or actually pursuing individual rather than collective interests. Although distance between political representatives and their constituents is largely accepted, and even considered normal in industrialised societies, the same arrangement can however be unacceptable to indigenous peoples whose often close interpersonal, kinship ties and traditions lead them to expect much greater levels of proximity with leadership. Indigenous communities can experience alienation from their leaders if the strategies and discourse they employ appear excessively oriented towards an external audience, and are "far removed from the specific cultural meanings of functioning native communities" (Brown, 1993: 319).

Even if indigenous leaders' concerns do remained focused upon the community, they might nevertheless tend to work unilaterally, without providing communities with the level of consultation traditionally expected of indigenous representatives. Indigenous peoples are likely to lose faith in their leaders if campaigns force not only psychological, but also physical distances to be placed between leaders and the communities; particularly if they do not see tangible benefits ensuing from them. After the promising early victories of the Kayapo-spearheaded campaign opposing large-scale development in the Amazon, momentum slowed considerably. Payakan, one of the principal Kayapo' leaders, expressed his frustration that endless trips and meetings with people all around the world were not bringing any significant changes to his people. Desperate circumstances meant that the Kayapo' at home were increasingly advocating deals with mining and lumber companies, having lost their confidence in the power of global sympathy to give them some pragmatic, as opposed to ideological,
assistance. In the end, Body Shop International stepped in with a contract to buy brazil nuts from
the Kayapo', thus postponing difficult decisions at that time. Nevertheless, not all indigenous
peoples enjoy the same international contacts and image of the Kayapo', and are not likely to find
such predicaments as easy to resolve. As Brown has argued, new criteria for political legitimacy
are still ultimately determined by indigenous peoples at the locality, according to their particular
values and objectives (Brown, 1993: 321). If immersion in the external world of politics and
government leads indigenous leaders to forget the source of their power, then it is possible that
their decisions will not be considered legitimate or upheld at the locality.

Indigenous identity and the case study context

According to Brown, the new politics of indigenous expression and identity described
here are strongest among Andean and Central American Indians, who have suffered the
disorienting impact of European settlement for half a millennium (Brown 1993: 319). This is
certainly true of the Miskitu, whose forms of identity, leadership, political consciousness and
organisation have been heavily affected by exogenous influences. This chapter considers both
the historical formulation and contemporary nature of Miskitu identities, leadership and political
agendas, beginning with the Miskitu King.

The Miskitu King: New departures in indigenous leadership and identity

The Miskitu King provides us with an early example of how indigenous leadership and
identity were modified by exposure to, and involvement with, external political-economic
systems. The Miskitu King was a post-contact phenomenon, which many researchers believe
was installed by the English as a convenient figurehead on the Coast, to provide legitimacy to
England's position and interests in this region to the outside world, but without real authority
within his own culture. Since there was no precedence of centralised political organisation in
traditional society, this seemed a reasonable assumption to make (Helms, 1971: 20). However,
the King arguably performed a vital, if sometimes unappreciated, role for the Miskitus as
interlocutor between indigenous society and the outside world. The legacy of the Miskitu King
for subsequent indigenous leadership and identity in the region will be briefly examined.

Implications of the Miskitu King for indigenous leadership

As Helms herself acknowledges, "the concept of king ... was useful to the Miskito in
foreign affairs" (Helms, 1971). The Miskitu King represents in many ways, an important
example of the reaffirmation, and yet modification, of Miskitu identity, organisation and
orientations in response to the experience of culture contact. By imitating British forms of
power, and calling their new leader a "King", the Miskitus were arguably attempting to flatter the
British, and thereby increase their leverage within this cross-cultural relationship. The Kings,
who probably emerged from powerful headmen with access to important resources (both goods
and slaves) for barter with the Europeans (Novacek, 1988: 22), become lynchpins between colonial and indigenous economies. Their primary function was to operate as a middleman between kin-based community systems and values, and the different cultural and economic spheres the Miskitu were being exposed to (Rossbach, 1986).

"A middleman is a political figure who, because of his footholds in two different cultures, provides practical material advantages to his constituents...the middleman's legitimacy by definition is not ideological but practical" (Dennis and Olien, 1984: 727).

Although the Miskitu King perhaps initially emerged from the indigenous inhabitants' purely practical need to regulate their external relationships, over time, he nevertheless does appear to have become a genuine figure of authority within indigenous society itself (Dennis and Olien, 1984). Many of the Miskitu Kings were taken to Jamaica, Belize and even Europe to receive some formal education, and to learn to speak English. Their new skills helped them garner local respect and support, as noted by Holm:

"it is hard to overemphasize the sociolinguistic significance of the tradition of Miskitu leaders being well versed in the language and ways of the English. These men enjoyed considerable prestige among their tribesmen" (Holm, 1978: 328).

The King's particular ability to relate to foreign cultures and customs therefore made them both useful and respected by the Miskitus. The ability to appropriate non-Miskitu skills and move comfortably in external spheres, would subsequently be required by all indigenous leaders from the Atlantic Coast.

**Cultural changes catalysed by the King**

Although the institution of the King gave indigenous society a certain degree of control over their relationship with European outsiders, this new form of leadership nevertheless placed considerable strain upon the egalitarian indigenous social system (Novacek, 1988: 22-3). The establishment of the King institutionalised the temporary, war-time authority of prominent headmen, and created an unprecedented hierarchical structure of permanent authority within indigenous society (Hale, 1987a: 36). Moreover, although the King's leadership was partly based upon experience and knowledge, wealth and power also became elements of his authority; and consequently, of the indigenous value system as well. Since the King's main function was to regulate and foster trade between the Miskitus and Europeans, he and his followers became the primary recipients of its benefits. Among the items of trade most coveted by the Miskitus were guns. Armed with these weapons, the Miskitus became able to dominate the other tribes of the Atlantic Coast (whom as argued in Chapter 3, they now regarded as inferior to themselves). The other indigenous tribes were forced further inland, sold as slaves to the Europeans or made to pay tribute to the Miskitu King. Bell tells us of an interior tribe, the Twakas, who

"go to the coast almost once a year to pay their tribute to the King" (Bell, 1899: 127);
The Miskitu King can therefore be considered to have existed at the centre of the major political and economic events of the contact prior to the nineteenth century: European trade, regional slavery, and Miskitu territorial hegemony.

The values and changes associated with the Miskitu King therefore signalled many new departures for the Miskitus during this period. Although they continued to live in isolated communities, they nevertheless now considered themselves to be part of global society, and superior to the other indigenous peoples of the region. Prior Miskitu and regional indigenous egalitarianism had become disrupted. Permanent leaders, able to bring concrete, material benefits to their people, and to master and manipulate the norms and practices of European culture, had become necessary and accepted. Meanwhile wealth and power, alongside experience and tradition, had become new attributes of Miskitu authority.

However, Miskitu acceptance of their King was not unqualified. Although the figure of the Miskitu King would subsequently be used by indigenous movements in the twentieth century to galvanise popular memories and support, once the actual Kings began to fall short of local expectations of leadership, popular commitment to them largely disappeared. The circumstances which led to the demise of the Miskitu King directly relate to the constraints under which contemporary indigenous leaders operate, and will therefore be briefly considered.

The demise of the Miskitu King

In the nineteenth century, the centre of British colonial interests moved from Cape Gracias a Dios, an area of concentrated indigenous settlement where contact between Europeans and indigenous peoples had initially occurred, south towards Bluefields (see Figs. 2 & 6). By this time, Bluefields occupied an important strategic geopolitical position, located as it was near to the proposed transoceanic canal through the Rio San Juan. Moreover, a number of British subjects, primarily Creoles from Belize and Jamaica, were starting to export mahogany from the Coast, concentrating upon the Bluefields area (Hale, 1987a: 40). Political as well as economic incentives were therefore shifting British orientations southwards. The Miskitu King was by now so closely associated with the British authorities that he also moved here, to live with the British Consul.

However, Bluefields had no Indian residents, being primarily inhabited by Creoles and foreign merchants. The King, according to the consul:

"moves amongst strangers, who treat him without respect and with no kindness whatsoever" (F.O. 420/8, quoted in Vargas, 1996: 98).
In Bluefields, the Miskitu King began to seriously lose touch, not only with his local power base but indeed, with Miskitu culture itself. By 1891, the new King, Robert Henry Clarence, was a man raised purely in the south, who had no knowledge of life in the indigenous communities, and could not even speak the Miskitu language. Moreover, following the banning of the slave trade at the beginning of the nineteenth century, a major source of the King's material power was also removed, thereby

"reducing the amount of goods they could obtain from the Europeans for use in building support factions" (Novacek, 1988: 22).

With physical and cultural distance compounded by a the King's inability to share wealth, and bring benefits to the communities, they no longer felt any need to support him. The institution of the Miskitu King must therefore be conceptualised according to two distinct phases: pre-nineteenth, and post-nineteenth century periods. In the first stage, a legitimate, if not absolute, indigenous leader emerged as a response to the new subsistence opportunities. In the second, the King, having effectively abandoned and betrayed his cultural origins, no longer commanded his peoples' respect. In the nineteenth century, the Kings'

"real power did, in fact, decline ... from this point on they remained in place essentially as figureheads for the British" (Novacek, 1988: 23).

**Historical roots of the indigenous relationship with government and the nation-state**

In the nineteenth century, the Atlantic Coast had its first experience of centralised government, first with the British Protectorate from the 1820s to 1860, and subsequently, with the Mosquito Reserve, from 1860 to 1894. Both governments were dominated by British and trading interests, which were implemented by their new regional allies, the English-speaking Creoles of Bluefields. As regional economic and political stakes increased, the Miskitus found themselves sidelined by regional governments which although ostensibly operated in their name, in reality did little for them. The Miskitus' first real experience of centralised authority was therefore not particularly positive. As De Kalb, a North American who visited the Coast in 1892 noted:

"the machinations of government strike the indians as something mysterious which they do not understand (and which they hate, because they feel its iron weight when they disobey its regulations). Rather than seek constitutional means of controlling the government, the indian invents ways of disobeying or destroying it ...the government .... works arrogantly against the interests of the Miskitus ... The struggle sometimes creates great tension" (De Kalb. 1893: 275)

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1 From 1860, according to the Treaty of Managua, the extreme parts of the coast - including the River Wangki and the River San Juan, became officially part of Nicaraguan territory. The majority of the Coast remained under British control, a region which became known as the Mosquito Reserve.
Although the Miskitus would subsequently reinterpret their historical experience and popular memory of a Miskitu kingdom and nation-state in the twentieth century, their disaffection with government per se would however only be consolidated by events over the next hundred years.

Then again, although the regional governance systems did little for the Miskitus, and by their very existence, appeared to threaten traditional community autonomy, in practice, the government in Bluefields was never really able to exert its authority in the localities. Indeed, one of the major legacies of this period for Miskitu identity was that they learnt how to retain a marked degree of local independence within the confines of a nation-state (Rossbach, 1985: 2). Contact with the state was primarily channeled through the village headmen; it was not a relationship shared by everyone. Indigenous cultural reproduction and community autonomy was able to co-exist with the state, although its existence was generally resented. The Miskitu character therefore:

"retained its fundamental detachment from state during the period of the Reserve" (Oertzen, 1986: 118)

Indigenous community detachment from government would however be much more difficult to maintain within the context of the Nicaraguan nation-state, as events at the turn of the century would demonstrate.

**Incorporation of the Atlantic Coast, 1894**

In 1894, the Atlantic Coast region was incorporated by Nicaragua, and renamed the Department of Zelaya. The British were forced out and the Miskitu King sent into exile. Indigenous opposition to this military takeover at the time was negligible. Their disaffection with the Miskitu King and the Reserve government meant that they were more than prepared to try out the Nicaraguan alternative. On the face of it, the Nicaraguans were presenting the Miskitus with an attractive offer, which brought them significant material benefits. On the 20th of November 1894, 80 indigenous representatives signed an agreement with Nicaragua's General Cabezas, acknowledging that the Atlantic Coast was now Nicaraguan soil. In return they were granted exemption from military service and taxes, autonomy for the indigenous communities, and promises to provide them with schools and churches, and to pay their leaders regular salaries (Rossbach, 1985: 4; Hale, 1990: 3-4). However, after incorporation, the Nicaraguan government failed to honour these promises. The Miskitus therefore became quickly disillusioned with the Nicaraguan state, particularly since it began to actively threaten local autonomy. With the intent of establishing firm control in the Coast, Nicaragua set up military posts in various indigenous communities. Interventions in community affairs increased, export taxes became imposed, and in May 1899, all special privileges were revoked. Having suffered a downturn in their status during the nineteenth century, the Miskitus had probably initially felt vindicated by the terms of
their convention with Nicaragua; once their high hopes had been disappointed, their dissatisfaction became all the more acute. (Rossbach, 1985: 2)

**Indigenous resistance and the Samuel Pitts affair 1906-7**

The legacy of indigenous resistance at this time, as well as the lessons of its failure, continue to be felt by indigenous organisations and leaders today. The first most notable aspect of indigenous resistance was the form it took, and the audience it chose to project its political agenda to. Rather than mounting a regionwide indigenous political movement, dissatisfied Miskitus disparately projected their grievances to an external audience, directing numerous petitions to their "protector state" England in which her assistance was requested (Rossbach, 1985: 32). Perhaps this is understandable: indigenous society had no experience of political regionwide organisation. However, the tendency of regional indigenous movements to put more effort into seeking strength and legitimacy from external rather than local sources, arguably continues to be a major source of weakness today, since this focus makes it difficult for grassroots resistance organisation to develop. Moreover, the success of an externally-projected strategy depends on whether supporting it serves external powers' ulterior political concerns or not. In this case, their appeal fell on deaf ears, since the United States had forced Britain to withdraw from the region, leaving her with no reason to defend or protect the Miskitus any more.

Having failed to get help from their erstwhile allies, indigenous objectors then tried to inspire their own people instead. The characteristics and failure of the main indigenous uprising of this period are indicative of the problems faced by indigenous leaders and organisations in developing appeals which not only resonate with the Miskitus' own sense of identity, history, and culture, but can retain legitimacy in the eyes of the outside world as well. The movement was led by Samuel Pitts, a Miskitu from the north, whose tactic was to style himself as the new Miskitu King, thereby evoking the image of the Miskitus' past regional ethnic supremacy, and independence from both Spain and Nicaragua (Rossbach, 1985: 14-5). Although his movement never gained the full support of all communities, and was prematurely quashed by the Nicaraguan army (who mortally wounded Pitts in his home town of Yulu in November of 1907) Pitts nevertheless showed subsequent Miskitu leaders how effective the reinvention and use of historical cultural symbols could be in motivating indigenous organisation. The Miskitu King, whose exile had provoked little concern among the Miskitus a decade previously, had suddenly become a cultural icon used to galvanise local imagination and support, symbolical of the Miskitus' historical relationship with great world powers, and indeed, the Miskitu nation-state as well. The Pitts affair also however exposed the problems of political movements based upon such Miskitu-specific symbols and appeals. Pitts' rhetoric not only alienated the Creoles, Mestizos and Mayangnas in the region. It also meant that the Miskitus' potential external allies, the English and Americans, could never take the leader nor the movement seriously, since they,
unlike the Miskitus, considered the Miskitu King to have been a British invention and a British puppet, and therefore an utterly inauthentic local authority figure. The example of the failed resistance movement led by Samuel Pitts suggested that although charismatic leaders might temporarily be able to stimulate Miskitu organisation in defence of their culturally-specific rights, the use of culturally-specific symbols and discourse, although inspirational to the Miskitus themselves, were not likely to lead to effective political action in external circles.

Consolidation of indigenous antipathy towards the nation-state

The Miskitus' early negative experiences with the Nicaraguan nation-state only served to deepen their feelings of alienation from government which had emerged during the nineteenth century. That they became far more acute under the Nicaraguan government was partly due to the historical enmity between Miskitus and Spaniards. Although they were now dealing with Nicaraguan nationals, rather than Spanish colonialists, the Miskitus failed to make any distinction between the two. Miskitu resentment that Nicaragua had failed to honour their promises of 1894 was therefore vastly exacerbated by historical hatred of the Spaniards and alienation from the state. Over time, even though the Miskitus had not resisted incorporation by Nicaragua, it would subsequently come to be viewed in popular memory as an illegal usurpation of the sovereign "Mosquito Kingdom". This perspective has in certain quarters of indigenous society, persisted strongly to the present day. Nicaragua can still be demonised for having forcibly incorporated the Atlantic Coast and failed to fulfill promises made. As an elderly informant in Puerto Cabezas explained to me:

"England had agreed to leave if Nicaragua would promise to teach and look after the Atlantic people. But then someone walked over from the Pacific and realised that it was all the same land, that there was no ocean in between, and they said all of it is ours - why should we bother to teach these people? Instead of that they took everything they could, because they found that this side is the richer part of Nicaragua... more trees grow on this side and there are more fish in the sea. So they decided not to bother with their promises. But there were coastal people who knew what Great Britain had demanded....."

2 Historical treaties indeed pay credence to the Miskitus' argument. Although Nicaraguan sovereignty over the Atlantic Coast was recognised by the 1860 Treaty of Managua, signed between Nicaragua and Great Britain, it nevertheless also created a Mosquito Reserve (which however excluded the greatest concentration of indigenous settlements to the north) in which the Miskitus could enjoy self-government. It moreover stipulated that although the Mosquito Reserve could eventually become incorporated by Nicaragua, this would only occur if agreed to by the Reserve inhabitants. The treaty also obliged Nicaragua to make annual payment to the Mosquito Chief or King. When Nicaragua failed to fulfill to recognise the Chief or provide him with annuity payments, the matter was referred to Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria for arbitration. His decision in 1881 "restored almost complete autonomy to the Mosquito authorities .. by strictly limiting Nicaragua's sovereignty rights... Not only did it call for continuation of the annuity but also for settlement of all the unpaid installments of previous years, with interest. More significantly, it provided that the government of Nicaragua not be entitled to grant concession for the acquisition of natural products within the reservation; that this right be reserved to the Mosquito authorities alone..." (Dozier, 1985: 119-120). In the 1980s, the prominent Miskitu war leader, Steadman Fagoth, used these long-forgotten treaties in order to strengthen Miskitu conviction in the historical legitimacy of their cause, arguing that the 1860 Treaty of Managua recognised the "indigenous peoples' right to govern themselves according to their own customs, as confirmed by the Emperor of Austria's arbitration." (Fagoth, 1985).
Today, indigenous rights to land, social services and development are not merely justified on the grounds that the claimants are indigenous, or conservationists; long-forgotten treaties between Nicaragua and Great Britain are cited to show the global and historical dimensions of their legitimacy. The strong conviction found amongst indigenous peoples of the Coast that Nicaragua has tricked, exploited, disrespected, and ultimately, stolen their land from them, helps explain why it has been so difficult to build trust between indigenous peoples and the state today, from which constructive dialogue and sustainable co-management efforts might develop.

**Indigenous concerns for land and the Harrison-Altamirano Treaty**

Incorporation and the intrusive policies of the state, which included the bestowal of extensive land grants to both supporters and companies (part of President Zelaya's plan to develop the region's economic potential) meant that for the first time, indigenous communities became concerned about acquiring legal rights to land (Hale, 1992: 7; Vargas, 1996: 140). A partial accommodation to external systems and law and property, alien to the traditional indigenous system of usufruct and common resources, had occurred. Community concerns were somewhat alleviated by the Harrison-Altamirano Treaty of 1906. The Harrison-Altamirano Treaty represented Britain's attempt to bring closure to her long history of association with the Atlantic Coast and the Miskitus. At the instigation of the British, the treaty recognised Nicaragua's sovereignty on the Coast, but also provided for the entitlement of indigenous community lands. Given Nicaragua's reluctance to realise indigenous land rights in the region, the process did not begin until 1914, when the Foreign Office sent over their representative, H.O. Chalkley to stimulate the efforts of the Land Titles Commission (Hale, 1994: 48). By 1916, the commission had surveyed and granted titles to around 30 indigenous communities on a collective basis.

Although the Miskitu attributed great symbolical importance to these land titles, interpreting them as "evidence of current rights as well as historic ties with Britain" (Hale, 1994: 51), in practical terms, they had gained little. Titles were only negotiated for communities lying within the territory of the former Mosquito Reserve; the majority to the north received no recognition of their land rights until the 1960s. Moreover, the limited amount of land allocated to communities failed to recognise the extensive territorial needs of slash-and-burn agriculture, and made no provisions for either population growth or indigenous control over extractive resources for their own commercial use. At this time, it seems likely that the communities receiving the titles might have taken them more as confirmation of their persistent role and significance in regional politics, than as literal representations of their land rights (Howard, 1993a: 205). Even if they did recognise that the titles gave them absolute rights over the community lands designated them, they would not necessarily believe that they were unable to hunt, cultivate or travel through the lands beyond their assigned village boundaries as they
always had. Ultimately, the indigenous land rights issue, initially broached in this period, would remain an unresolved issue for many generations to come.

**Indigenous political consciousness and organisation in the 1960s and 1970s**

This section examines the conditions and nature of indigenous political consciousness and resistance in Northeastern Nicaragua leading up to the eruption of war on the Coast in 1981. Although indigenous resistance to foreign impositions had occurred previously in various forms, resistance had never been systematic, organised or political as it began to be in the decades preceding the war. An examination of this period is crucial to understanding the nature and origins of indigenous agendas, goals and strategies designed to defend their livelihoods against the encroachment of the state in the 1990s. During this period, the indigenous people of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua, to a greater degree than ever before, became aware of the link between their cultural survival and the control of natural resources, when their freedom to make free use of them became severely threatened. Their current environmental perspectives and stakeholder objectives are intrinsically related to the development of their political consciousness during this period.

**Regional Characteristics in the 1960s-70s**

A number of factors encouraged the development of indigenous political consciousness and organisation in the pre-war period. Most notably, was the withdrawal of the principal companies operating in the region, the ensuing economic depression and the assertive, interventionist approach pursued by the national government to stimulate renewed growth. Meanwhile, rapidly expanding populations, increased pressure upon the land and resources, new subsistence approaches and livelihood expectations were collectively placing strains on both the material and symbolical spheres of Miskitu existence, and the local environment itself. Although people did not starve during the depression, nevertheless, standards of living had become culturally dissatisfying for the Miskitu. The ethic of poverty observed by Helms in Asang (see Chapter 6) was not confined to this village alone. Diets throughout the region had become impoverished (Cattle, 1977: 39). Both game for the inland communities, and turtle for the coastal villages, were getting scarcer, partly because of increased subsistence needs, and in the case of the turtle, also due to the intrusion of commercial demands and incentives. Prestige food items, with less nutritional value than the traditional diet of wild meat or fish and tubers, were being coveted at the expense of the indigenous diet and environment. The indigenous peoples had begun to use subsistence resources and the subsistence base itself, the land, to buy not just supplementary manufactured goods, but food itself. The commercialisation of subsistence had created a crisis of faith within Miskitu society:

".. today, the Miskitu complain, 'everything money business' ... money represents a conflict for the Miskitu, money is to accumulate, differentiate, yet all Miskitu tradition emphasizes
giving and equality of material means. Meat is to give, money is to get. There is no easy resolution of this conflict of values." (Weiss, 1975: 19)

Both the instrumental and symbolical dimensions of indigenous existence were therefore being impoverished, local trends which were greatly exacerbated by the political climate, in which historical Miskitu animosity towards the state was being inflamed.

**Relations with the State 1960s-70s**

What political objectives did the Nicaraguan government have at this time for the Atlantic region, and how did they influence the development of indigenous consciousness and resistance? In the pre-war period, the Somoza regime continued to view the Atlantic Coast in much the same way as it had during the company era: as a source of exploitable wealth, in the form of natural resources (see Chapter 7). Somoza's primary policy for the region was to stimulate its productive capacity both in the interests of national development, and to strengthen his own personal position. However, in order to meet the standards of international financial and development bodies during a period of economic depression, a more hands-on approach to government was needed. Indigenous communities in the Atlantic Coast during the 1960s and 1970s therefore experienced unprecedented levels of government intrusion into their daily lives, which increasingly threatened indigenous autonomy, and fueled their historical resentment of the Nicaraguan state.

*Culturally Incompatible Development: the PFNE*

In 1953, on the recommendation of the World Bank, the Institute for National Development or INFONAC, was created, (Vilas, 1989: 63). One of its principal initiatives was the PFNE, or the Northeastern Forest Project, which aimed to resolve the problem of deforestation in the Atlantic Coast. The objective was to replenish a commercially lucrative, but ravaged, natural resource for future production. The primary goals of the PFNE were to reforest the pine savannahs between the Rivers Wangki and Wawa devastated by NIPCO, and to both fight and prevent forest fires from damaging natural regrowth. The project, a collaboration with the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), began with 24,710 acres in 1959, and had expanded to 321,230 acres by 1964.3

At first glance, the project seemed well-conceived. Regional pine reserves had been devastated by NIPCO; their restoration would benefit, and should have been welcomed, by the local population. Instead, they largely opposed it. The PFNE project directly threatened local autonomy by unilaterally incorporating extensive tracts of land used by the communities into its

3 According to Jenkins Molieri, the FAO persuaded Somoza to take on the project, which he did so not out of concern for the devastated pine savannahs, but because he welcomed the opportunity of attracting foreign prestige and investment.
sphere of operation, thereby threatening the basis of indigenous villages' livelihoods. Moreover, INFONAC forbid the indigenous peoples from cutting lumber, even putting some indigenous peoples in jail for this crime at a time when the communities, in need of alternative sources of income, and were becoming more and more interested in selling their lumber resources (Jenkins, 1986: 292). The Miskitus believed that INFONAC was not only infringing their land and threatening local autonomy; given their rational and historical mistrust of the state, they also saw the project as a governmental attempt to wrest control of regional resources from the people for their own benefit:

"The Miskitu believed that INFONAC was appropriating Miskitu lands and selling timber resources which rightfully belonged to the Miskitu." (Dennis, 1981: 285)

Villagers apparently even burnt down pine savannahs in protest, to prevent INFONAC from illegally exporting what they considered to be their lumber. Moreover, as firefighters hired by PFNE, Miskitus could get paid to fight the fires they themselves had instigated (Dennis, 1981: 285; Jenkins, 1986). Ultimately, the indigenous population was given little incentive to cooperate and support the PFNE's goals, or to understand why their traditional practice of burning the savannah to promote regrowth and attract game, in changed environmental circumstances and with greater populations, might be a self-destructive pursuit.

The PFNE example illustrates how different cultural perspectives and objectives can lead to opposing views on environmental management. The project was designed and implemented solely by the foreign technocrats, without any indigenous input. The only real role for indigenous peoples in the project was as hired labourers. Little attempt was made to demonstrate to the indigenous peoples that reforestation might be in their long-term interests. Given that the central objective of reforestation was to restore a lumber industry which had brought little regional benefit in the first place, the indigenous peoples were perhaps right to be suspicious of it. Perhaps more significantly, this experience was extremely influential in confirming historical indigenous prejudices towards the state, and in consolidating communities' determination to gain control over land and natural resources as a means of defence. Other circumstances beyond the PFNE project were fostering a siege mentality in indigenous communities. The state was also promoting colonisation of the Atlantic region, in order to relieve the population pressure in the Pacific caused by their agroexport policy, which had left so many peasants without land. Indeed, given the severe land shortages in the west, the Mestizos needed little encouragement. Immigration to the region boomed, at high ecological cost, and with no great improvement in the living and working conditions of the Pacific farmers (Hale, 1989: 75).

From 1963 to 1971, farm units on the Coast increased by 54% to 12,914, the area of land under cultivation by 172% to 774,500 acres, while the number of cattle needing grazing pasture rose by 166% to a total of 117,000 (Rep. of Nicaragua, Sec of Agriculture, cited in Vilas, 1989: 169.
More than ever before, indigenous communities were coming into direct conflict with the mestizo population (Hale, 1994: 119). The eastern regions, although still at a distance from the expanding agricultural frontier, were no doubt aware of the phenomenon, and given the decline in total agricultural production suffered in this area during the 1960s, they would likely have been put on their guard. Indigenous resistance in this period therefore developed as a defensive response to external encroachment upon the foundation of indigenous livelihoods: their land.

Whereas in the period of the Harrison-Altamirano Treaty, land titles were perceived in more symbolical than literal terms, circumstances in the 1960s and 1970s were encouraging perspectives to change. Although villagers continued to use community land according to usufruct principles (see Chapter 6), they were nevertheless increasingly aware of the need to acquire legal ownership of their land, which reflected both their actual and potential needs (Jenkins, 1986: 294; Howard, 1993b: 11).

**ALPROMISU**

ALPROMISU was the first organised indigenous political movement in the region. ALPROMISU, or the Alliance for Progress of the Miskitu and Sumu Indians, was founded in Bilwaskarma, Rio Coco, with the support of the religious establishment in 1974, whose logistical and moral support represented a crucial factor in the development of an organised and regionwide indigenous political organisation. Although the exploitation of indigenous producers by Chinese and mestizo merchants in Waspam represented the initial inspiration for the association, at the first meeting in Bilwas, indigenous representatives from all over the Atlantic Coast realised that poverty and injustice was a regionwide, collective indigenous experience. In a variety of ways, the outside world, and in particular the Nicaraguan government, was seen as interfering with indigenous peoples' livelihoods, and their free access to and use of land. Through ALPROMISU, in collaboration with the Moravian Church, the indigenous peoples were being informed of their rights as indigenous peoples (Hawley, 1997: 121). As one informant told me,

"people woke up, and suddenly realised that the whole region was becoming a reserve ... that the Miskitu were marginalised, second-class citizens... and so they created ALPROMISU."

**Limits on indigenous resistance: lessons of ALPROMISU**

ALPROMISU aroused much optimism and expectation of change within the communities of the region. However, the organisation's main strength, its community support, was all too easily undermined by the government, personal interests, and the political inexperience of the ALPROMISU leaders themselves. ALPROMISU never developed a clear agenda or political position vis-a-vis the national government, from which to present and defend radical demands based upon ethnicity. Instead, the organisation gradually became co-opted by
the government. ALPROMISU accepted the Somoza regime's offer of a greater role in local government, granting them the post of major in Waspam, and a seat on the National Assembly. The founding member of ALPROMISU told me that accepting this offer was their first fundamental mistake, since it robbed ALPROMISU leaders of their independence and integrity, to little significant benefit. They committed their second when, in attempting to resolve the concerns of some 15 communities from the River Wangki whose land was most directly threatened by the PFNE project, political inexperience led them to accept the government's own projections of community land, rather than presenting their own proposals. The land titles would subsequently be seen as inadequate, and the communities felt betrayed by their ALPROMISU representatives:

"We still weren't clear about what dimensions of territory were being referred to....we believed that the title was important, not the quantity.... and as they know everything, they worked up a deal quickly, leaving only small pieces of land for each community" (pers. comm, 1997)

Although ALPROMISU continued to participate in international activities and conferences as representatives of the Nicaraguan indigenous peoples, by the outbreak of the revolution in 1979, their influence within the region had been considerably diluted (Vilas, 1989: 91).

Lessons learnt from ALPROMISU

ALPROMISU's failure was the result of a combination of factors. The organisation had lacked a clear political agenda. Its leaders were politically inexperienced, and failed to capitalise on the initial groundswell of support its creation initially generated. ALPROMISU had tried to manipulate contemporary external political contexts and opportunities to their own advantage, but being unskilled at this game, they both failed to secure significant concessions from the national political system, whilst losing their popular legitimacy and power base by making too many accommodations to non-indigenous agents. The same leaders were ultimately considered to have betrayed the communities: the government had given them positions in both the municipal and national governments, but they had failed to translate their political power into effective benefits for the people. The land titles they had obtained for the 15 communities on the River Wangki were considered a sell-out. Their overall motivations were therefore assumed to be personal, rather than collective. Indeed, a group of young Miskitus studying at the National University in Managua heavily criticised ALPROMISU for its subservient attitude to the national government4 (Vilas, 1989: 90). Meanwhile the Mayangnas, though nominally included in ALPROMISU, saw it primarily as a vehicle for the Miskitus, and formed their own organisation,

4 Steadman Fagoth, who had been one of this group of students, wrote in his 1985 book that they had criticised ALPROMISU "because it seemed that it was confusing the direction and objectives of the indigenous movement with those of [national] political parties" (Fagoth, 1985: 126). Ironically enough, in the 1990s, Fagoth has appeared guilty of the same crime, since he shows more concern for Liberal Party directives than the needs of the Atlantic Coast itself.
SUKAWALA, instead. The experience of ALPROMISU therefore highlighted indigenous organisations' need for skilled leadership, coherency, independence, and an effective political agenda able to inspire sustained local support, and relentless pressure upon the Nicaraguan government, if indigenous rights were to be achieved. However, as a founder of ALPROMISU told me:

"... the indigenous people hadn't developed a clear ideological position at this time, from which to formulate properly political organisations."

ALPROMISU was ultimately widely considered to have been co-opted by the national government, and its popular support base evaporated. Whilst ALPROMISU remained an important stage in the development of indigenous political consciousness, the crisis of the indigenous communities in the 1970s was moreover probably not extreme enough to encourage more radical positions of organised indigenous resistance. The 1979 revolution would however create a political context in which more ethnic solidarity and more radical indigenous positions could develop (Hale, 1987b)

Sandinista Revolution 1979

After more than a decade spent struggling against the Somoza dictatorship, the FSLN, or Sandinista National Liberation Front, finally overthrew the spent regime on July 19th, 1979. The Pacific Coast had experienced decades of repression by the Somoza regimes, and the FSLN revolution received widespread popular support in this particular period. People on the Atlantic Coast however, although clearly dissatisfied with the status quo and national government, played no role in the popular revolution, partly because the FSLN had never developed activities in the region, and partly because the communities had not reached the breaking point which occurred in the Pacific. Their involvement in the revolution would therefore develop after the Sandinistas had overthrown the Somoza government, and were engaged in the process of implementing policies intended to consolidate the victories of the revolution.

The Sandinistas and the Atlantic Coast

Although the Coast did not directly experience the Sandinista revolution, its aftermath had a catalytic effect upon indigenous mobilisation, organisation and ethnic political identity.

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5 SUKAWALA was formed in Bonanza, in 1974, after the Sumus (or Mayangnas) felt their special interests were not represented by ALPROMISU. SUKAWALA showed that although the indigenous peoples of the region were experiencing similar cultural crises in this period, persistent historical differences still made collaboration between Miskitu and Sumu / Mayangna difficult. One of SUKAWALA demands was for a solution to the continuing problem of stream contamination from chemical waste emitted by mining companies working in the interior (Vilas, 1989: 91). The Sumu / Mayangnas had perhaps more obvious reasons to link their social problems with ecological destruction, as many of their people were dying from contamination; they would certainly prove more adept at using the indigenous environmentalist image to their advantage than the Miskitu in the years to come.
The Revolution provided the indigenous peoples with the political space and opportunities to openly mobilise themselves regionwide. As a prominent Miskitu leader observed,

"... the fervor of the revolutionary triumph, filled people's spirits and hearts, creating an atmosphere of new things to come, new conditions in which we all could express ourselves, we all could participate. Previously, the atmosphere was dormant" (Brooklyn Rivera to P. Bourgois, 1984, cited in Hale, 1994: 132)

When the Sandinistas spoke of rights for the people, the Miskitus' ethnically specific concerns for their own rights were stimulated. As two teachers in Asang told me, the revolution politicised the people:

"... the Sandinistas spoke more about rights than us indigenous people.. we hadn't heard people talk like that before.... the people were blind before the war...
"we began struggling for our rights before the war but Somoza always kept us marginalised, nobody could speak about rights, but the revolution gave anyone the right to speak to anyone else about rights" (pers.comm., Asang, 1997)

The Sandinista revolution therefore inadvertently encouraged a more radical departure for the indigenous political mobilisation. At the fifth annual congress of ALPROMISU, in October 1979, a group of radical Miskitu university students, who had long criticised the organisation for not promoting an ethnic agenda under Somoza, argued for a new direction, and created MISURASATA in its place. Although the Sandinistas in theory believed grassroots mobilisation and participation were essential to a successful revolutionary process, they feared that indigenous ethnic militancy might undermine their socialist revolution (Hale, 1994: 133). The creation of MISURASATA therefore made the Sandinistas decidedly uneasy, and the Coast came to be seen as the weak link in the national campaign, soon after the revolution:

"We know that the spearhead of the counter-revolution could happen here....we know that the work is going to be arduous because there are problems there of ethnicity and autonomy.." (Carlos Nuñez, in Ohland and Schneider, 1983: 37, my italics)

MISURASATA

The Sandinistas in fact had good reason to suspect that MISURASATA would develop a contrary, rather than complementary position from the revolution. MISURASATA's message blended elements of indigenous tradition with new discourses of power to mobilise the people behind an ethnic platform, with land rights holding centre stage. As an extract from MISURASATA's 1982 General Guidelines demonstrates, the leaders borrowed conceptual themes from various quarters, nation-states, indigeneity, religion and Marxism in order to reaffirm their indigenous identity and provide legitimacy to their claims:

6 This group included Steadman Fagoth, Brooklyn Rivera, Hazel Lau and Armstrong Wiggins, among others.
7 MISURASATA - Miskitu Sumu Rama Asla Takanka, or 'Association of Miskitu, Sumu and Rama Indians' (Asla takanka means literally, working together).
"We declare that as national indigenous peoples, we follow a system of land use based on social principles, and not on individual ones, in perfect accordance with Biblical teachings both of the Old and New Testaments, relating to the ownership and the use of land. In this way, the possibility of some dominating others through individual exploitation of the means of production is completely eliminated" (Ohland and Schneider, 1983: 52, my italics)

Their discourse, although in some respects a mixture of an array of apparently distinct ideologies, nevertheless appealed to their listeners on many levels: as indigenous peoples, as Christians, as descendants of the Mosquito nation and as members of the historically exploited proletariat class.8 The frustrations experienced by indigenous peoples over previous decades had therefore found an outlet in the revolutionary climate and the radical indigenous platform being promoted by MISURASATA.

Conflicts over land: MISURASATA and the Sandinistas

The main conflict between the Sandinistas and MISURASATA would develop over the issue of land. After the revolution, the Sandinistas had made all land and natural resources national property, and had soon set about the task of national economic revival (Vilas, 1989: 106, 109). Nevertheless, in order to accommodate indigenous concerns, the government reached an agreement with MISURASATA in mid-1980 to provide indigenous villages with 80% of all income generated by lumber felling on their communal lands, though not on national lands (Ohland and Schneider, 1983: 95-8). As many communities did not possess titles for their communal lands, the FSLN promised to resolve the land issue on the Coast, issuing titles "where warranted", once MISURASATA had presented them with a map of the territory involved. By the time the document was ready, relations between the Sandinistas and MISURASATA leaders had already severely deteriorated. Just prior to the beginning of land negotiations, in February 1981, the leaders of MISURASATA were arrested by the security forces under suspicion that they were hatching a separatist plot. Although all the leaders bar Steadman Fagoth were soon released, the situation had become tense.9 A few months later, the FSLN were presented with the map of indigenous land claims, consisting of a contiguous area which encompassed 40% of national territory (see Fig. 6; Vilas, 1989: 125). To the Miskitus, this represented a reinvindication of the historical rights to land of the "Mosquito Kingdom". The radical land position which Fagoth represented appealed to indigenous historical pride and contemporary fears in a period of popular crisis, providing a source of strength and cultural self-assertion. Fagoth transformed the popular sentimental memory of the Mosquito Kingdom and nation into an actual political demand. As Hale has argued,

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8 In a 1980 interview, when asked about the class characteristics of the indigenous movement, Steadman Fagoth replied: "the indigenous movement is a proletarian and semi-proletarian movement" (Ohland and Schneider, 1983: 76).

9 It is not possible to present a full investigation here of the context and circumstances which led to the breakdown between the FSLN and MISURASATA. For fuller details, consult Vilas, 1989; Hale, 1994.
"when Steadman Fagoth made the radical leap from individual community land rights to territorial rights for Indian peoples, the more militant position resonated with existing elements in Miskitu collective memories" (Hale, 1994: 160).

The opening line of MISURASATA's land claims document showed how bold the indigenous ethnic platform had become by 1981. Their radical political agenda, to the FSLN, amounted to a virtual declaration of independence by the Coast which made negotiation with MISURASATA virtually impossible:

"The territorial rights of indigenous nations over the territory of their communities have more importance than the territorial rights of states." (MISURASATA, July, 1981, in Ohland & Schneider, 1983: 163)

The FSLN took the map as final proof that MISURASATA was in fact a counterrevolutionary organisation, whose existence could no longer be tolerated (Ohland and Schneider, 1983: 99-105). Although MISURASATA had widespread support amongst the indigenous peoples of the Coast, the Sandinistas outlawed the organisation; a strategy unlikely to garner support for their revolution in the Atlantic region. In 1981 Steadman Fagoth was released from prison on the condition that he go abroad to study, and allowed a brief visit back to the Rio Coco to say his farewells. Instead, he escaped over to Honduras, followed by several thousand Miskitus, and the indigenous counter-revolutionary struggle began (Vilas, 1989: 144). The Miskitus no longer just felt alienated from the state; they had now taken up arms against it.

A conflict of interests

Following Fagoth's departure, it became increasingly difficult for other indigenous leaders to collaborate with the Sandinistas and retain local legitimacy. Miskitu leaders such as Brooklyn Rivera, Wycliffe Diego and Norman Campbell soon followed Fagoth's example and went abroad, caught as they were between the openly hostile Sandinista government, and popular suspicion that by staying, they must be collaborating with the FSLN. Fagoth was meanwhile urging the Miskitu to join him in armed rebellion against the government, using a triumphalist interpretation of Miskitu history to inspire the indigenous communities. An extract from Fagoth's 1985 book indicates the likely content of his argument, which played on Miskitus' historical fear of the "Spanish", their concern to maintain local autonomy, and their collective memory of the Miskitu 'nation-state':

"historically, the Atlantic Coast has never been victim of colonial domination or submission ... despite all the various attempts by the Spanish to control the natives of the region they never managed to, since the indigenous populations of this littoral, led by the Miskitus [always resisted] the colonial invaders of the period, in defence of their territory, their liberty and their political autonomy .... Given their spirit and tradition of autonomy and self-government....the 200 year-long relationship with the British government never undermined their self-belief, ..traditions, ..territorial domination [and] own forms of government .... [Their] legal and judicial position, [meant] countries like the United States, Honduras and even Nicaragua logically recognised our nation as autonomous..." (Fagoth, 1985: 94, 98)
Fagoth found himself in the exceptional position of being able to fully exploit powerful historical and cultural symbols, and advocate a radical political agenda of independence for the Coast to animate an ethnically-exclusive Miskitu following, while simultaneously receiving unlimited financial and military support from the United States, whose own unresolved domestic indigenous issues would normally have made such an alliance impossible.\footnote{In the 1990s, such an unusual combination of discourses and strategies would no longer be possible for indigenous leaders, as will shortly be discussed.}

All the historical resentments harboured by Miskitus towards the Nicaraguan state and the "Spanish" therefore came to a head during this period, and dialogue between the two sides, given the positions they were adopted, became impossible. By the 1980s, indigenous territorial rights appeared to represent a direct challenge to state sovereignty, while state sovereignty, was seen as a direct challenge to indigenous territorial rights and cultural survival. The lines of conflict had clearly been drawn. The added factor of the Reagan administration's pathologically anti-Sandinista foreign policy and military interventionism meant that war became an almost inevitable outcome.

**The impact of war upon indigenous perspectives**

The 1980s war left a deep imprint upon the indigenous peoples of the Atlantic Coast. The human suffering and devastation incurred was intense. All the villages along the Rio Coco were forced to relocate, either by the Miskitu insurgents to Honduras, or by the Sandinistas to new settlements towards the south, in order to deprive their enemies of a potential supply line. Puerto Cabezas began to overflow with people fleeing the countryside, as communities found themselves caught in the crossfire. Schools and health post were closed, the economy collapsed, and unemployment soared (Freeland, 1988: 56). Everyone had had a family member fighting in the bush, and everyone suffered personal losses.

It is not my interest to discuss the progress of the war, nor the process of reconciliation. Ultimately, pressure from the communities, exhausted by war, upon their relatives in the bush was extremely influential in persuading indigenous fighters to enter negotiations with the Sandinistas. The FSLN were themselves making a conscious effort to appreciate the indigenous perspective, their historical grievances, and their concerns for local autonomy. Moreover, although the majority of Miskitus sided with the Contras, a significant minority remained sympathetic to Sandinista ideals, and were able to perform an important intermediary role between Miskitu society and the government. Obviously, if both sides had continued to perceive one another's land rights in the stark terms presented above, negotiation would have proved impossible, but since continued war damaged both sides, mutual accommodation and
compromise become possible. In November 1984, the FSLN government took the brave move to respect costeños' "historic rights to autonomy", within the sovereign nation of Nicaragua (Hale, 1994: 174). Although leaders such as Fagoth and Rivera remained suspicious of Sandinista intentions, their own authority was being undermined as fighters and civilians alike tired of the conflict with which these leaders were so intimately associated. Meanwhile, the government did its best to promote grassroots support for autonomy. Recognising that state interference in indigenous affairs was one of the greatest local grievances, the Sandinistas pulled off a significant public relations coup by scaling down its presence in the region. Through the tireless efforts of many Miskitu community leaders who were committed to peace, and determined to see the FSLN's promises of regional autonomy produce lasting and concrete changes for the region, the proposed Autonomy Statute was eventually agreed upon in Puerto Cabezas, in April 1987. Although the fighting and turmoil persisted, with many communities unable to fully reestablish themselves until the turn of the decade, the formal war was coming to an end. A new era of regional autonomy was beginning, which appeared to augur great changes for indigenous rights and indigenous-state relations.

The 1990s

The Miskitus emerged from the war expecting great changes. The militant ethnic agenda had been sacrificed for a multi-ethnic regional autonomous system. The new institutional arrangement needed to resolve those indigenous grievances which had largely instigated the 1980s conflicts - land rights and local autonomy - to capture their support and imagination, and prevent a return to militant indigenous perspectives. This has unfortunately not been achieved. The difficulties experienced by the Atlantic Coast in making progressive legislation and regional autonomy effective in practice have already been discussed in Chapter 3. Whilst both the Chamorro and Aleman governments have sought to reimpose the control over the Atlantic region enjoyed by the Somoza government in the pre-war, pre-autonomy era, costeños have found it hard to formulate a new political identity and agenda for themselves and the future development of their region. Consequently, Miskitus continue to be animated by ethnically-specific appeals and perspectives. However, they have largely lost faith in the war leaders, whilst Church leaders are no longer able to legitimately figure as both spiritual and political figures in indigenous society. So although the war led to great improvements in the legal rights of indigenous peoples', there is no longer an obvious indigenous movement or legitimate indigenous leaders able to tap into popular disaffection and mobilise grassroots resistance, to ensure that their theoretical rights are practically implemented.

The determination to secure indigenous rights, even in the absence of clear leadership, nevertheless remains strong in the communities. At a meeting of various representatives from the River Wangki which I attended in Waspam, one of the participants explained how popular
political consciousness had in fact been strengthened by the disappointments they had suffered at the hands of their leaders and the regional government:

"in 1990 we lost our opportunity to make our rights effective, and we remained very disoriented and unsure until 1993, when we began to open our eyes. Today, in 1996 we have became determined to show the world that our rights are not dead .... our appreciation of our rights is more developed now...... If the government doesn't want to give us our rights, then we'll fight for them.... Nicaragua isn't governing herself, she's controlled by other countries, so our strategy should be to appeal to them..." (Waspam, 1996)

According to a community mayor from the upper River Wangki whom I interviewed in San Carlos:

"the Miskitu woke up when the guerrilla struggle was launched. And later, seeing how government candidates come and go, but don't do anything, they're waking up more and more. And when Fagoth comes out saying "I'm going to make a change, I am going to fulfill such an such a promise", but six months pass11 and he hasn't done a thing, the people finally decided to take no more.... we've been patient long enough, now we're getting organised, we already have our local and regional commanders, and the troops are strengthening..." (San Carlos, 1997).

Throughout the indigenous communities I visited, Miskitu and Mayangna, people expressed similar determination to fight for their rights, which on the one hand, is a positive reflection of their new political consciousness. However, popular disillusionment with the political system is so extreme, and people feel so desperate and abandoned by their leaders, the regional and national government, and the international community alike that the possibility that communities might choose illegal, and even military strategies to resolve their grievances, can never completely be discounted.12 Indeed, their perspective is arguably in keeping with the overall political culture of Nicaragua, where grievances against the government frequently lead to extralegal action. In order to keep indigenous resistance within legal boundaries and encourage

11 When Fagoth was elected Coordinator of the Regional Government in May 1996, he promised to radicalise the institution and make dramatic changes in the RAAN within 6 months, or he would quit his post. This promise was not fulfilled; by the end of 1996, the government had done practically nothing, whilst Fagoth kept his office until the regional elections of March 1998.
12 As evidence of the continued viability of armed conflict as a Miskitu resistance strategy, as I was completing this chapter, I learnt that a group of Miskitús from the coastal community of Sandy Bay, north of Puerto Cabezas, dressed in army fatigues and brandishing AK-47 rifles and M-79 grenades, had attacked three vessels of the Gold King fishing company, from whom they had stolen 70,000 pounds of lobster, tanks of gasoline, diesel and oxygen, diving equipment, and various food supplies. Apparently, the local fishermen, angry that the government has so far failed to make non-local vessels fish in waters further than 6 miles from the shore (as they are supposed to) decided to take matters into their own hands. As a member of Regional Council reported: "The communities feel threatened and invalidated and are not going to allow the fishery resource to be exploited in this way any more. As long as the rights of indigenous communities are not respected, indigenous peoples will take justice into their own hands, because they have no hope that the government will do so for them" (La Tribuna, 31/7/98). The Sandy Bay fisherman reportedly operated with the assistance of those YATAMA - an indigenous organisation which was formed during the war, primarily by the resistance fighters - representatives who in June 1998, took up their arms in protest at the Nicaraguan government's continued refusal to respect their constitutional rights, and who have since been controlling the bridge at Sisin, and therefore all traffic which leaves Puerto Cabezas for Waspam. The situation in the RAAN is therefore at present, extremely tense and volatile.
collective efforts to resolve outstanding community grievances in the RAAN, an indigenous organisation able to bridge the gulf between the communities and external political circles needs to emerge. The remainder of this chapter will consider the potential, and the problems, experienced by a new indigenous group, the Elders' Council, in attempting to fulfill the present vacuum of indigenous leadership in the Atlantic Coast region.

The Elders' Council

Although the internal leadership of indigenous communities has traditionally been headed by a group of experienced, authoritative and esteemed elders, prior to the 1980s, there was no precedent of a formal regional elders' council in Miskitu society. The present Elders' Council originated during the war, from the need of younger leaders such as Steadman Fagoth to make Miskitu resistance appear as morally legitimate as possible. In his 1985 book, Fagoth explains how the executive wing of the elders emerged, once the injustices being committed against the indigenous population had led the younger generation to:

"... present to the elders their determination to engage in a political and military struggle against the Sandinista oppressor. As a result, the moral, social and cultural protectors of the indigenous peoples, the elders had to create a political commission in order to represent their people at that particular political moment in time, from which emerged an executive board encharged with ..., authorizing the youth to defend themselves and their people ... the Elders' Council at this time therefore had to break from its traditional role of only directing the people in moral, cultural and community principles ... circumstances also led this same Elders' Council to delegate responsibilities to a commission formed by their children ... in this manner, MISURA is child of this Council ... the manager and principal indigenous authority" (Fagoth, 1985: 139-141)

The creation of a regional, pro-active and politicised Elders' Council, whose members were elected by Miskitus in Fagoth's camp exiled in Honduras, was therefore an act of political expediency and the result of exceptional circumstances. After the war, however, in the new climate of regional autonomy and party affiliation, the Elders' Council was no longer useful to those who created it, and was therefore cast adrift. For a number of years, the Elders' Council had effectively ceased to exist, with only the President and Treasurer still bothering to attend their damp, unfurnished office in Puerto Cabezas. As a Miskitu cultural expert told me:

"in every community, elders are respected, it's natural, but they've never been organised ... in Honduras, for whatever reason, Fagoth created the Elders' Council and used it a lot during the war ... but after the war, poor things, they weren't worth anything any more, they had only been used, and afterwards, nobody paid them any attention any more..."

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13 The Elders' Council is most commonly known as the Consejo de Ancianos in the RAAN, or the Almuk nani, which means elders in Miskitu.
14 When war broke out, MISURASATA became MISURA: Organisation of Miskitus, Sumus and Rama Indians, without the Sandinistas.
However, in July 1996, a trio of younger Miskitus who had been educated in the Pacific, offered to serve as legal, economic and cultural advisors to the Council. A reincarnation and reinvention of the Elders' Council occurred, and under the joint leadership of the older and younger generation of Miskitus, the organisation began to assume a rationale and identity of its own.

Although the scope and activities of the Elders' Council are still fairly limited, they nevertheless have been able, in a relatively short time, to become recognised as a new force in the regional political scene, and have been received by the national government, regional council and international agencies alike. However, although the majority of indigenous people in the RAAN are aware of the Elders' Council's existence, widespread grassroots support for this organisation has yet to develop. Then again, it is clear that the organisation of the Elders' Council does resonate within contemporary Miskitu culture - perhaps because the authority of elders, unlike that of the younger generation of leaders or the Church, was not tarnished by the war. The Elders' Council is therefore trying to use this advantage to project an image and discourse able to strengthen their legitimacy and support within the indigenous communities, whilst at the same time, attempting to garner credibility and political space in national and international circles. The dual imperative of indigenous leadership is a difficult challenge which the Elders' Council is currently attempting to resolve.

The Elders' Council's Political Agenda

The Elders' Council's political demands are primarily centred upon the need to secure land rights for the indigenous communities, and greater control over the expropriation of natural resources from the region. In February 1998, the Elders' Council convened a general meeting of indigenous communities, at which they declared that:

".. indiscriminate concessions which have been given over our resources are leading to their overexploitation, principally because there is no control by the State, because it fails to comply or enforce compliance of its own norms of operation, thereby giving room for .. corruption..... as representatives and leaders of our communities, we need to assume control of our natural resources in order to preserve them, and use them for our own needs, thereby preserving both our existence and culture..."

The need to secure rights over land and resources is presented as both material and ideological: the survival of indigenous culture and identity represents an integral part of the Elders' Council's political objectives. As their cultural advisor told me:

"we indians have an inner richness which we don't know how to use .... the Church, the State have told us we are poor, so that we continue to be passive and tell ourselves "I don't have the strength to get out of this situation I am in" or "I don't have the intelligence to think or do what they do", and our cultural identity becomes ever more impoverished...."

The demands of the Elders' Council are in this respect fairly representative of an indigenous political agenda in the late twentieth century: land entitlement and autonomy for indigenous
communities, participation in the formulation of resource management policies, sustainable use of resources, and cultural survival.

However, the Elders' Council demands also respond to the more radical stream of Miskitu political consciousness, and the historical symbols which animate these perspectives. In November 1996, the Elders' Council held a press conference at their offices in Puerto Cabezas, at which they explained the various problems besetting the region and indigenous communities at this time, problems which their organisation was intending to address. As their legal advisor told the assembled local radio reporters:

"in the last few years, the process of disintegration and dismantling of communal land property has continued .... many concessions of exploration and exploitation which threaten natural resources have been given, in clear violation of the Nicaraguan Constitution\textsuperscript{15} .... the autonomous government has allowed these concessions to go ahead in clear violation of the rights of the indigenous communities .... the indigenous communities have found no recourse to their problems to these constant and systematic violations within Nicaragua itself."

The implication of this statement was that the indigenous peoples would have to obtain their rights \textit{beyond} the jurisdiction of the Nicaraguan state. This impression was reinforced by the Elders' Council's Declaration, read out after the advisor's speech:

"...there is an urgent need to overcome a problem which is presently of global proportions: the crisis of Centralised States and Nations. This occurs once Nations become instruments of the State, and not States at the service of Nations; this is the case with the Chechen Nation with respect to the Russian State; in the demands of the Bosnian, Herzegovina and Sarajevo Nations; of the indigenous peoples of Chiapas before the Mexican state; to mention just a few of the nations which are trying to determine their own future, creating their own models in order to enable them to govern their own affairs and social systems.... the historical antecedent of this conflict [here], for the Community Nation of the Moskitia, is the military integration to the Nicaraguan State, which robbed us of the right to determine our own futures...."\textsuperscript{16}

The right to self-determination in the Declaration referred not only to indigenous communities, but to an indigenous "Nation." The "Community Nation of the Moskitia" notion resonates strongly in collective memories, as those familiar with Miskitu history might expect. The flag and the idea of a "Community Nation of the Moskitia" represented an important symbolical reaffirmation for many Miskitus, particularly those who had fought during the war, of their self-worth, historical rights and cultural self-identity in a period otherwise marked by despair, depression, and political marginalisation. Indeed, the rapid growth in the profile of the Elders' Council over the last couple of years has much to do with the dramatic way in which they

\textsuperscript{15} See next chapter for discussion on the principle concession the speaker was referring to, granted to the Korean lumber company SOLCARSA.

\textsuperscript{16} All the capitals used are those which appear in the text itself.
signaled their arrival on the regional political scene in October 1996: by erecting an flag which was ostensibly of the old Mosquito Kingdom in the principal central square of Puerto Cabezas.

Arguably, the Elders' Council also hoped to project their appeal to the international community, by comparing their plight to those of other ethnic groups fighting for self-determination within nation states. However, although Fagoth was able to employ the concept of territorial rights and secure international support during the war, only the ulterior political concerns of the United States at the time made this possible. In normal circumstances, the concept of an independent indigenous "Nation" is more likely to alienate than attract international sympathy, given the potential repercussions for national integrity and sovereignty worldwide. Indeed, the Elders' Council flag was taken down by Arnoldo Aleman on his very first visit to the Coast as President in May 1997. By restricting themselves to criticising state violations of indigenous land rights and self-determination, and pushing for the demarcation of indigenous land and the fulfillment of regional and indigenous rights to local autonomy and self-determination within the Nicaraguan state, the demands of the Elders' Council are more likely to be considered legitimate externally. Moreover, many Miskitus themselves, as well as most Mayangnas, are not inspired by the idea of an independent "Community Nation of the Moskitia", either because they consider it both politically illogical and unfeasible notion, or because it appears part of a Miskitu ethnocentric vision and identity which repels other ethnic groups of the region. Moreover, although the Miskitus can be animated by territorial representations of indigenous land rights, the primary concern of the majority is to secure legal titles for their respective communities (Howard, 1993a: 208). Few would want to risk the latter, by pursuing the former instead; recent memories of the war tends to deter many from radical action. Then again, as long as the hopes of the Miskitus continue to be disregarded by the national authorities, support for the militant ethnic agenda, whose advocates represent a prominent sector of the Elders' Council grassroots support, could grow, and continue to infiltrate the Elders' Council's political discourse and agendas - alienating the international community, but uniting a desperate indigenous population.

The Elders' Council therefore appears to express two contrasting visions of the indigenous future which are reflected by their political objectives. On the one hand, they wish to operate within the contemporary political systems of the Nicaraguan state and regional autonomy, to achieve coveted rights over land and resources, and to protect cultural identity. On the other hand, they argue or imply that indigenous rights are not attainable within these institutional frameworks, and that independence is their ultimate objective. Although their main efforts are spent trying to work within the legal framework, they are acutely aware of the peoples' disaffection with the political system - a politico, or politician is both untrustworthy and self-
interested - and therefore cannot completely discard non-political militant ethnic strategies and agendas.

*Institutional constraints on indigenous political expression: The Land Demarcation Commission*

Indeed, governmental figures and institutions in Nicaragua do little to encourage indigenous peoples to fully relinquish the militant ethnic agenda, and to view politics as a legitimate and effective sphere in which to resolve their various grievances. For example, in 1996 Nicaragua was preparing a proposal to receive substantial financial backing (an estimated US $10 million over 5 years) from the Global Environmental Facility (administered by the World Bank) to set up an ecological reserve in the RAAN, known as the Biological Corridor. The ultimate goal of the GEF-World Bank project is to develop a series of linked national Biological Corridors stretching throughout Central America. One of the GEF-World Bank's conditions for approval of the Nicaraguan proposal was that the government resolve indigenous community claims to land in this area. As a result, in August 1996, the Nicaraguan government created the National Commission for Demarcation of the Indigenous Community Lands in the Atlantic Coast (henceforth referred to as the Commission; Gaceta Oficial 6-9-96, Decreto No.16-96). In September 1996, the Nicaraguan Biological Corridor proposal was approved. However, the composition of the Commission led to widespread indigenous opposition, since it included 7 representatives of the Central Government, 4 representatives of the RAAN and RAAS Regional Councils and Governments, and only 2 representatives of the indigenous communities, one Miskitu, one Mayangna, one from the RAAS and one from the RAAN, selected somewhat randomly by governmental authorities. The Elders' Council voiced the opinion of many indigenous peoples when they condemned this Commission for pretending to decide their future territories. According to the Elders' Council, the Commission was a case of 11 versus 2, since despite the protestations of the governmental members, particularly those from the RAAN itself, that they were the elected and therefore legitimate representatives of the communities, their authority is nevertheless heavily disputed in the region. The Commission, and the political establishment which it represented, was therefore widely rejected in the RAAN:

"... the eight (sic.) representatives from the Nicaraguan state and the four representatives of the Regional Governments have in common the fact that neither have jurisdiction over property whatsoever... These members presume that they can resolve the future of our lands and existence as a people. The two indigenous representatives would be encharged of determining a land demarcation process which affects 60% of the lands which Nicaragua has

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17 According to one of the mayors from the upper River Wangki whom I interviewed in San Carlos, given the corruption of past leaders, the people would be better off voting in a stupid person at the next regional elections, since clever people are better at absconding with funds and "confusing people with their mathematical sums." However everyone would be able to work out what a stupid leader was doing, and when he tried to embezzle their money, they would be able to stop him. On a more serious note, he said that he hoped that the next Governor would not be a member of any political party, but a neutral, honest and responsible person.
always presumed the rule over; these indigenous representatives would effectively be completely defenceless before the twelve (sic) representatives of the State" (Elders' Council, Documento Numero Dos, Nov. 1996).

Indigenous opposition seems to have prevented the World Bank from providing the Commission with the funds necessary to carry out the land demarcation process; to date, the Commission has done little, if anything, to resolve this issue. The example of the Commission is however illustrative of the variety of the problems which inhibit inter-stakeholder co-operation, and shape the nature of indigenous politics and leadership in the region. Indigenous communities remain extremely suspicious of governmental initiatives, both because of historical experiences, and since state policies are indeed frequently formulated without local consultation, and not in their interests. As a result, although the Elders' Council might want to appear legitimate and be accepted by national, but particularly international political circles, the political environment in Nicaragua makes it difficult for them to consistently pursue this course of action. Government intransigence can leave indigenous peoples of the Coast with little option but to adopt radical ethnic agendas, in order to defend their rights, as occurred with the Elders' Council in the case of the Commission. The Elders' Council's has yet to decide whether their political objectives and strategies should be formulated within national institutions and political systems or not. Perhaps given the diverse elements of their political strategies, indigenous identity is manipulated by the Elders' Council in a variety of different ways.

**Indigenous identity in the Elders' Council's discourse**

The discourse of the Elders' Council, and their representation of indigenous identity, represents a blend of various elements of Miskitu history, culture and identity which are used to reinforce indigenous self-belief and provide legitimacy to their political objectives, as well as maximising the appeal of the Elders' Council to pose as leaders of the indigenous resistance movement. The legitimacy of indigenous land claims is defended on the grounds of historical tenure, and is couched in a language which not only taps into global sympathies for indigenous peoples, but which permeates the Miskitus' own sense of rights and identity:

"...indigenous territory is the inheritance of the peoples who live on it, and is hence a right which cannot be relinquished, which represents a guarantee for the preservation of our cultures and identities..." (IX General Assembly of Indigenous Peoples, February 1998)

In the same document, the Elders' also appeal to the Miskitus' interpretation of their own past, when they were a sovereign nation, allies to the great international powers of the day, and recognised in international treaties:

"...international treaties have been made with respect to this territory which therefore strengthen the rights of timeless possession, according to our system of communal living in coexistence with other cultures."
The incorporation of the Atlantic Coast by the Nicaraguan state, although accepted as a fact of life by so many costeños in the 1990s, is however often forcefully presented as illegal by the Elders. From this perspective they argue that none of the land in the region can be considered national territory:

"Nicaragua took over the Coast illegally and with force... this doesn't give the Nicaraguan state the right to possess land which is rightfully indigenous .... occupation doesn't convey the right of possession, nor does the 1894 Decree of Incorporation which was illegally coerced from a minority of our leaders..." (Advisor to the Elders' Council, Press Conference 1996)

The Elders' Council also argues that since they existed as a nation prior to the formation of the Nicaragua itself, indigenous claims over the territory take precedent over the national government:

"... in 1821, Nicaragua was no more than a small province of the Spanish Crown and did not exist as a State, whilst the territory of the Moskitia was both defined, and more extensive than many of the other provinces of Central America, and was recognised as a Nation by Britain and other powers." (Declaration of the Elders' Council, November 1996)

The righteousness of indigenous claims is further reinforced by the representation of indigenous peoples of the region by the Elders' Council as natural conservationists. In order to convey this impression, however, the Council deploys a discourse which is unlikely to be heard within indigenous communities themselves:

"There is an urgent need for leaders and spiritual mentors at the local level to encourage prayers and meditation amongst our people in order to inspire and strengthen us in the defence and protection of our natural resources, to recognise that each plot of our land is sacred, each sparkling cluster of pine, mahogany and cedar trees; each grain of sand on our beaches, each drop of dew in our forests are sacred to the memory and the past of our peoples, because the resin which circulates in the vein of the trees carries with it the memory of the peoples of the Mosquitia, and we must wait until we have clearly defined how to use and exploit our resources for the benefit of our nation and humanity." (Declaration , November 1996) 18

18 Although one would be hard pressed to find a Miskitu describing their relationship with the environment in such terms, the representation of indigenous peoples as conservationists, similarly with the argument that indigenous peoples' claims are legitimate because of their identity as indigenous peoples, is being absorbed by regional indigenous society itself. The argument that indigenous peoples' deserve new consideration today because they have been discriminated against for centuries is a laudable recent addition to the global moral consensus, but one which was not deployed by either indigenous peoples or the global community until perspectives towards indigenous peoples changed over the course of the twentieth century. It is now, however, firmly entrenched in indigenous political consciousness. The same has occurred with the argument that indigenous peoples are natural conservationists. Today, the indigenous peoples of the RAAN look around themselves and see that they have abundant resources at their disposal, while elsewhere they have been exhausted. They can therefore assume the belief that they must be (even if unconsciously) conservationists. This change in indigenous perspectives and identities might originally have been politically motivated, but it has since arguably served to raise ecological awareness amongst the indigenous peoples of the RAAN. Deploying the indigenous identity as conservationists for political ends could even end up having the welcome effect of fostering consciously environmentalist attitudes amongst the Miskitus.
Another discourse which has been assumed by the Elders' Council was perhaps ironically, introduced to the Miskitus by the party whose government so many indigenous peoples rose up against: the Sandinistas. The Sandinistas' argued that Nicaragua had historically been exploited by foreign countries, particularly Great Britain and the United States; countries which the Miskitus had historically considered to be their particular allies. However, by the 1990s, although the memory of their close relationship with Britain can still serve as a source of pride to the Miskitus, it has nevertheless largely been consigned to history, whilst the war left many feeling disillusioned and bitter towards the Americans. The argument that contemporary indigenous poverty and marginalisation is due to a history of economic, ecological and social exploitation is not only accurate; it also places responsibility for contemporary problems upon non-local shoulders:

"Between 1945-1964, in clear violation of the rights of our Communities over their natural resources, in the area of Bilwi alone, 602.2 million feet of non precious, and 43.4 million feet of pine, mahogany and cedar, were extracted.... from the economic and social point of view, the exploitation of natural resources has never improved the standards of living in our communities..." (Declaration, November 1996)

Finally, the Elders' Council understandably cite the rights afforded them by the Nicaraguan Constitution particularly those encapsulated in Articles 5 and 180. The terms of these Articles grant indigenous peoples the right to their own identity, culture, forms of social organisation and local self-determination, as well as the right to maintain communal forms of property, and to use their land and resources for their own benefit. Ultimately, the Nicaraguan Constitution alone provides justification for the indigenous demands presented by the Elders' Council.

**Political strategies of the Elders' Council**

However, since the successive Nicaraguan governments have so far failed to honour the terms of their own Constitution, the Elders' Council has been forced to employ a wide range of both political discourses and political strategies in order to further the indigenous agenda. Their political strategies fall into two categories: those directed externally, and those directed internally. The difficulty of balancing their political strategies between these dual imperatives is perhaps the biggest challenge faced by the Elders' Council.

From the Samuel Pitts affair through to the 1980s war, the Miskitus have tended to appeal to their external protectors of the time, Britain, and later, the United States. In the 1990s, this historical trend has been reinforced by new levels of global concern to protect indigenous rights

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19 One of the problems of representing themselves as exploited indigenous peoples is that this perspective does not help combat the history of paternalism which continues to inhibit local peoples from exercising local agency. I do not wish to contest the accuracy of this picture (although it is true that the indigenous peoples were not coerced, but collaborated with resource extractive companies) but to suggest that it does not necessarily encourage development of responsibility at the localities.
and cultures. As a result, in contemporary times, the Miskitus choose to project their political concerns and agendas to the international community itself, conscious of their ability to embarrass and pressurise Nicaragua at these levels into conceding their demands. A great deal of the Elders' Council efforts are indeed focused in this direction. For example, following Aleman's removal of the flag the Elders' had erected in Puerto, they wrote a letter to the national government delegate in the RAAN, in which they demanded that the flag be reinstated:

"..otherwise we will immediately commence action, according to our International Rights and the norms of peaceful conviviality promoted by the United Nations between peoples and nations. To these ends, we will call on the Organisation of American States (OAS), the United Nations (UN) the United Nation's Security Council, the International Court of Justice and other similar organisations."

The Elders' Council indeed frequently send letters to the UN, to the OAS, to the World Bank, to President Clinton, and even the Pope, to inform them of their actions and problems with the Nicaraguan government. At the end of their 1996 Declaration, they indeed noted:

"...the urgent need to ask for technical advice and assistance from international organisations, such as the United Nations, the International Court of Justice, the International Commission of Human Rights, the Global Council of Indigenous Peoples and so forth so that they can provide us with the skills and legal resources to fulfill our objectives" (Declaration, 1996).

However, their efforts to harness international support have so far been limited to meetings with representatives from the World Bank and a few small grants. As a Miskitu professional in the region observed, the Miskitus no longer have the international profile which they enjoyed during the 1980s, which has since moved on to indigenous tribes of the Amazon or in Chiapas. The Miskitus themselves however have a hard time recognising that their international profile has diminished in the 1990s, and continue to invest their energies in these pursuits. Moreover, in order to present themselves and their legitimacy in a way which caters to (at least what they believe) external parties' expectations of authentic and traditional indigenous leadership, the Elders' Council's tend to inflate their own history and importance. The Elders' Council has surprisingly claimed that their organisation "dates back to pre-Columbian times." In a proclamation emitted by the Elders' Council in November 1997, it was stated that:

"This body [the Elders' Council], has emerged from the heart of the People, according to their millenarian, perpetual, and complete will, is destined to represent them before the authorities of the Republic of Nicaragua and the World."

However the Elders' Council, as we have shown, was only created during the war, whilst there are no accurate figures to reveal the exact extent of its support, and even presuming that these numbers have steadily risen over the last two years, they should not be presenting themselves as the legitimate representatives of all the indigenous peoples of the Coast. Although I noted a significant level of interest in the Elders' Council during visits to the outlying communities, many people nevertheless told me that although they would be prepared to consider them as their new
leaders, they had absolutely no idea what they were actually doing in Puerto Cabezas. Indeed, at the meeting of River Wangki representatives which I attended in Waspam, a number of representatives complained that the Elders' Council had become a Puerto operation, and had no interest in informing and incorporating representatives from the Wangki communities.20

According to a resident of Waspam:

"... when foreigners come, they say: "we are an organised people, Rivera21 is our supreme elder" and the people from outside believe this to be true, but it isn't ... the Elders' Council could do a lot of things, but I don't believe it has the expertise to do so .... [their advisors] have never been in power ... they're just using the Elders' to get some money.... they never come here to organise the people, to tell them what they are doing. They just stay put in Puerto Cabezas..."

There is a distinct possibility that the great effort the Elders' Council is putting into garnering legitimacy and support in international political quarters, could be occurring at the cost of developing their grassroots support. It is clear that their battle for legitimacy in the region has not yet been won. And although indigenous peoples in the region largely believe that the international community should be made aware of their problems, there was nevertheless visible frustration that the Elders' Council was paying so little attention to the communities. As one of the organisation's own supporters told me:

"...there has been a lack of coordination, because of this, the communities are always complaining, because they don't know what's going on ... the Elders' Council should send people into the communities and give talks about the flag, about their history, about land, so as to raise the consciousness of the people .... but because they haven't been coordinated, because they have so little money, the communities are still kept in the dark..."

My informant's explanation identified one of the major quandaries faced by indigenous leadership in the RAAN. To develop their grassroots support, in an area where transport is difficult and expensive, and without the support of the Church, the Elders' Council needs financial support. They are therefore directing their energies into obtaining financial support from international quarters. However, by so doing, they are endangering their grassroots support. There is no easy way to perform the sensitive balancing act required of indigenous leaders. It is possible that the recent General Assembly of Indigenous Peoples called by the Elders' Council in Puerto might have mollified local grievances somewhat. Nonetheless, the Elders' Council cannot hope to have resolved this problem with one meeting alone. They will need to develop a way of regularly informing the communities of their actions, to cater to the

20 The Wangki is not only considered the heartland of Miskitu culture; before the war, the main town of this River, Waspam, was also the centre of regional commercial and political activities, but since being evacuated during the war, has never regained its pre-war status. Miskitus from this area somewhat resent the fact that in the 1990s, the regional centre has undeniably become Puerto Cabezas, and are therefore liable to criticise leaders who do not actively seek to inform, involve and visit them personally as well.

21 The speaker is not referring to Brooklyn Rivera, but to Rodolfo Rivera, the President of the Elders' Council.
peoples' need to maintain regular contact with their leaders, and show that they have not lost their cultural identity as Miskitus (as Fagoth and Brooklyn Rivera are often accused of having done) in order to retain local legitimacy.

Local constraints on indigenous leadership

The difficulty experienced by the Council in achieving legitimacy both external and local leads us to consider the impact which immersion into the non-indigenous world of political representation and negotiation can have upon indigenous cultures and leadership. The Miskitus represent a particularly interesting case in this respect, since as has been demonstrated in this and preceding chapters, they have a long-standing history of involvement with non-indigenous cultures, but are nevertheless finding the task of wholesale accommodation to an imposed framework and norms of behaviour, norms and leadership associated with political democracy, difficult to adjust to. Arguably, prior to the 1990s, although the Atlantic Coast was part of the Nicaraguan nation-state, their involvement and understanding of the political system was limited, as demonstrated by ALPROMISU's failure. Moreover, since the state itself was not an elected democracy, but a dictatorship, the indigenous peoples of the Atlantic Coast today are effectively defining their political identities, strategies and leadership for the first time. Although their actual political agenda has remained fairly constant - rights to own land, use resources, and be included in the formulation of management policies - how to achieve these objectives without risking either their local or external legitimacy is much less clear.

Certainly, although the Elders' Council offices in Puerto were usually packed with people, even their own professed supporters could describe them in equivocal terms, as this interview extract demonstrates:

"in these difficult days, the elders are directing us younger people, they are teaching us how to use the land, how to love our own people. We are seeking the truth through them, they know a great deal about international laws, their advisors are educated, and we are learning from them to see what we can do for the new generation, so they don't destroy themselves, so that indian children learn to grow in the language and customs of their ancestors.... However, the elders also need to teach us not to love money, to be trustworthy, to do good and not bad things. As things are going, we're losing our customs...if they teach us how to eat, be and think, then we will learn, but if they don't teach us, they will have made a big mistake. We have been seeing since the war that those in politics only do bad things - if the elders teach us to make these same mistakes, there will be much distress, for if we carry on this way, our trees, sea and land will be destroyed..."

Though on the one hand, the speaker was extremely supportive of the Elders' Council, his enthusiasm was unmistakably guarded. If the Elders also allow themselves to be co-opted, and appear to be directed by money and politics rather than their community, they will doubtless lose their support. The Elders' Council seems aware of local concerns, given that they approved the following decree at the IX General Assembly:
"7. Should leaders commit the crime of administrative corruption, they will be punished with 5 years in prison, and expelled from life from participation in the indigenous movement."

Although it is unclear how this decree could ever be enforced, it is nevertheless indicative of the high standards which the indigenous population in the 1990s expects of its leaders. Perhaps because corruption is so pervasive in Nicaragua, suspicions are easily raised - even when it has not occurred. Similarly to the widespread incidence of intracommunal jealousy noted in Chapter 6, the taint of corruption can easily develop if an individual acquires a higher than average standard of living. At present, the Elders' Council is operating on a shoestring which means that they have so far remained "clean" in the eyes of their followers. Should the Council ever acquire a regular income, they might find the taint of corruption, justified or not, difficult to avoid.

**The torturous path of indigenous leadership**

Although both the Elders' Council's analysis of the problems and grievances facing the indigenous peoples, and the political agenda and objectives they present seem to largely reflect opinions held in communities throughout the RAAN, they nevertheless face multiple challenges and difficulties in garnering support and achieving legitimacy as indigenous leaders. Part of their problem is that in order to acquire the resources and connections to be effective as indigenous leaders, they need to operate, appeal, gain legitimacy in cultural and political circles other than their own. And although they try, they cannot be accepted as indigenous leaders externally until they are considered as such by their own people. Indigenous leaders today are in a sense caught in a Catch-22 situation. In order to attract support, they use a wide range of discourses and representations of indigenous identity. However, whilst particular refrains appeal to some factions (for example, the radical fringe of Miskitus attracted by the idea of independence), they can also end up alienating others in the process. For example, although the Elders' Council speaks of the "indigenous peoples" of the RAAN, and although Mayangnas representatives have coordinated activities (such as the Press Conference) with them, the organisation nevertheless remains considered as an essentially Miskitu organisation. Given that the Executive Board of the Council, at least prior to the General Assembly, was entirely constituted by Miskitu representatives, the Mayangnas' detachment from the Elders' Council is understandable. Meanwhile, there is little about the Elders' Council to attract non-indigenous residents of the RAAN, the Creoles and Mestizos.

Without adequate finances, the Elders' Council's operations are inevitably limited in scope, which forestalls the necessary development of grassroots support. They are likely to only become truly effective when and if they manage to obtain both regular financial backing, and a position within the regional or national political infrastructure from which to implement their agendas. However, if they do acquire significant financial backing to allow them to strengthen their position within the communities, they might nevertheless end up attracting a new type of
criticism, that they are solely interested in leadership for personal financial gain or political advantage. Indeed, although the Elders themselves have so far remained free of this accusation, many costeños suspect that their younger advisors are only involved with the organisation because they hope to acquire political power for themselves. Moreover, should they become accepted into national political circles, they will have to be careful to avoid the taint of affiliation with political parties, the political system, and the government itself, which Miskitus in the 1990s feel very alienated from. Ultimately, local support will depend upon their ability to effect changes in indigenous circumstances whilst remaining true to local culture and expectations of leadership.

All things considered, as we have argued throughout this chapter, indigenous leaders face the extremely difficult task of representing indigenous interests beyond the local cultural context, whilst balancing different, and sometimes conflicting cultural expectations of indigeneity and leadership. The process of participation in political circles, similarly with resource management negotiations, affects the way indigenous identities are projected and political strategies determined. Further research needs to be done into how participation in the negotiation and implementation of resource management policies and co-management initiatives impact indigenous cultures themselves. In the meantime, greater appreciation needs to be paid by non-indigenous stakeholders involved in resource management negotiations which include indigenous leaders, to how both the process itself, and the particular indigenous cultural perspectives, can place constraints upon indigenous leaders' freedom of expression, legitimacy, and ability to secure grassroots support for decisions taken in contexts far removed from local reality.
Chapter 8 State Institutions, Commercial Forestry, and Indigenous Perspectives Today

Introduction

In this chapter, the particular institutional, economic, political and cultural characteristics of north-eastern Nicaragua described in previous sections will be related to two contemporary instances of regional forestry management, to show how these factors shape resource management practices and indigenous environmental perspectives in the region today. The first case, to which the greatest attention will be devoted, concerns the Mayangna village of Awas Tingni, and the co-management tripartite lumber agreement involving the community, a Dominican lumber company, MADENSA, and the national government. This example will be followed by a briefer examination of the circumstances and implications related to a controversial lumber concession granted by the national government to a Korean lumber company, SOLCARSA in 1995, on land claimed by the indigenous communities. In order to contextualise and inform this analysis, some theoretical characteristics of optimal forestry policy frameworks will be presented, to which actual forestry practices in Nicaragua in the 1990s can be compared.

State policies and forestry management

States have often conceptualised their forestry resources according to one of two simple imperatives: conservation or production (and usually the latter). However, today there is growing recognition that forestry policies need to reflect the diversity of concerns and factors related to forestry resources, and incorporate both conservationist and productive imperatives. For this to occur, management needs to become a joint undertaking:

"... forests must be managed in a much more interdependent and complex context which requires a partnership process among all major actors and beneficiaries" (de Mantalembert & Schmithusen, 1993: 4)

States therefore need to consider a variety of factors when formulating progressive policy frameworks. For example, they need to be aware of the negative impacts of macroeconomic and structural adjustment measures. Their policies need to develop according to long-term sustainability considerations, rather than short-term revenue requirements. They must consider the behaviour and interests of the various social groups sharing an interest in forestry resources. Their aim should be to involve communities as preferential partners in the management process. And finally, they must recognise the rights of indigenous groups to own and use the resources on which their livelihoods depend (de Mantalembert & Schmithusen, 1993: 4-5).

In an ideal world, state forestry policies would reflect these types of management priorities. However, in reality, multiple factors can undermine states' ability or willingness to
design collaborative and far-sighted management approaches. Numerous and complex reasons can be cited for states' failure to encourage social participation in ecologically sound management initiatives, something which often occurs in developing country contexts. As discussed in Chapter 6, states might prove vulnerable or subservient to business interests. Under these circumstances, forestry resources are often made available to companies at low prices. Government agencies can also fail to monitor the environmental impact caused by resource extractive industries. At times, government policies can even be seen to be actively subsidising ecological and social destruction by providing fiscal incentives to companies to pursue environmental destruction (Baland & Platteau, 1996: 256-7). In areas of high unemployment and low incomes, government representatives can prove quite vulnerable to corruption by company agents, as observed by Colchester in Malaysia:

"in Sarawak, 'the corrupting influence of the timber trade has promoted the domination of the economy by nepotistic, patronage politics', with the consequence that rural peoples 'can no longer rely on their political representatives to defend their interests" (Colchester, 1994: 79).

Meanwhile, the economic conditions which such policies and economic circumstances impose upon local peoples tend to encourage them to also become involved in the destruction of the environment, for example by selling local forestry resources to logging companies. In areas where jobs are scarce, and agricultural productivity is limited, natural resources, even when unsold, nevertheless provide vital ready sources of cash for households struggling with immediate survival concerns (Sierra & Saylings, 1998: 153)

**Nicaragua: Changing trends in State Approaches to the Forestry Industry**

As was discussed in Chapter 6, the forestry policies of the successive Somoza governments were not responsive to the co-management, indigenous rights or sustainability principles of progressive forestry management regimes. Instead, the government allowed lumber companies to exploit forestry resources in the Atlantic Coast relatively free of institutional constraints. These practices left regional forestry resources, particularly the pine savannahs, severely depleted, while doing little to improve the local economy or social conditions (Castilleja, 1993: 31).

During the 1980s war, the environment of the Atlantic Coast won a temporary reprieve, as foreign resource industries largely shut down and left the country, and the expansion of the agricultural frontier also notably decreased. The value of the forest industry was reduced to less than U.S. $500,000 in 1986, from $70 million in 1976 (Vandemeer, 1990). In 1990 however, under the intense structural adjustment policy initiative of the new President Violeta Chamorro, the export sector was once again promoted and major incentives for foreign industry created (see Chapter 3). A return to pre-revolutionary conditions of resource management seemed to be occurring.
However, the Chamorro government soon realised that the top-down governmental approach to forestry management practiced by the Somozas would no longer be countenanced in the 1990s: both political and ecological consciousness had developed considerably in Nicaragua since the 1970s. In 1991, a Taiwanese company, Equipe Enterprise S.A., asked the Nicaraguan government's permission for a concessionary area of 375,000 hectares in the northeastern region. They also requested full tax exemption for five years and 80% exemption for the following fifteen (Hale, 1991: 26). The terms were completely unfavourable to Nicaragua and the RAAN alike. Moreover, since this represented the parent company's first venture into the forestry industry, they had no prior experience in tropical forestry management to draw from. However, since Equipe Enterprise was promising to bring large-scale investment and employment to the country, and particularly given that Taiwan was itself offering almost $90 million in loans to Nicaragua, the government signed a "letter of intent" with the company, committing itself to move forward with the agreement (Gaia, 1991: Internet). No effort was made to consult either the Regional Council or indigenous communities living in lands affected by the proposed concession.

When news of this incipient agreement leaked out to the public, autonomous government leaders, indigenous communities and environmental groups alike joined in condemning the proposed concession. The environmentalist sector managed to transform the issue into an international campaign, including the Rain Forest Action Network, Rain Forest Alliance, Bianca Jagger, and *The New York Times*. This led to international condemnation of the proposed concession. In face of the growing outrage, the government established a forestry commission, integrating governmental and non-governmental organisations, to evaluate the Taiwanese application. The commission unanimously rejected it.

*The Forestry Regulation Code*

According to Castilleja, the case was "crucial for defining the forest policy of Nicaragua under the new economic policy" (Castilleja, 1993: 32). The Nicaraguan government was forced to recognise that forestry policies would henceforth have to be responsive to both local and indigenous rights, and social and ecological concerns. As a result, a new conceptual policy framework designed to foster sustainable and consultative forestry management practices was developed. The *Reglamento Forestal* or Forestry Code was approved by the National Assembly on the 19th of October, 1993. The new Code obliged governmental institutions to:

"a) Involve the local population, especially the owners of forested lands and owners of forestry industries, in the planning, decision-making, and forest management processes..."

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1 One of only a handful of countries prepared to invest in Nicaragua during this period.
b) Ensure that the local populations are the first beneficiaries in terms of employment in the forestry industry, and economic and social benefits, derived from these concessions.

c) Make appropriate technologies, financial support and industrial forestry management expertise available to local populations....

d) Promote the participation of women and indigenous peoples in the development and management of forestry projects.

e) Protect the rights of land owners by protecting their forests and ensure that both private and state forest resources are respected.

f) Prohibit the extraction of forest products without the permission of the forest owner."

(Reglamento Forestal, 1993: Art.4)

The same act created ADFOREST,2 a branch of what was then IRENA,3 to administer state forests not designated as natural reserves where industrial development could occur. In Article 11, ADFOREST was given the responsibility with "identifying, demarcating and recording all State lands in the Public Record." Once the boundaries between State and indigenous lands had been determined by ADFOREST, in conjunction with the communities themselves, it would no longer be possible for the government to grant forestry concessions on indigenous lands.

By all appearances, the Forestry Code addressed all the various problems which had arisen in 1991, and seemed to herald a new era of conscientious forestry management in Nicaragua. According to Castilleja:

"...the intention of this policy is unprecedented, not only in Nicaragua, but for other countries in the region where state forested lands are inhabited by indigenous communities."

However, as he rightfully observed, the Forestry Code's implementation:

"... is currently complicated by the lack of a legal definition of the tenure rights of most indigenous communities in the Atlantic region. Cases ... will show whether mestizo governments are willing to recognize legally the role of indigenous communities as stewards of the forest, and, more important, whether these communities can successfully incorporate commercial forestry as part of their traditional practices" (Castilleja, 1993: 33)

Has the Nicaraguan government managed to break free of historical management trends, and incorporate the principles of co-management, sustainable development, and indigenous rights to a sound policy framework and approach to forestry management? And have indigenous communities managed to successfully reconcile participatory forestry management relationships with existing cultural values and practices? As the two case studies of Awas Tingni and SOLCARSA demonstrate, both institutional and indigenous adaptations to the principles embodied in the Forestry Code, the Autonomy Law and the constitutional reforms leave much to be desired.

2 ADFOREST stands for Administracion Forestal Estatal, or State Forest Administration.

3 IRENA was the Institute of Natural Resources and the Environment which became the Ministry of Natural Resources, MARENA, in 1993.
Awas Tingni and the tripartite agreement

Awas Tingni is an inland, Mayangna community located on the banks of the River Wawa, in the municipality of Waspam. The community consists of 141 families or 629 individuals (Macdonald, 1996: 5). The majority of families are Mayangna, although 7 Miskitu families are also part of the community. Whereas the concentration, and cultural centre of Mayangna communities in the RAAN revolves around the village of Musawas in the mining district of Bonanza, the community of Awas Tingni is the only Mayangna village in the sub-region of Tassba Raya (New Land), which is primarily dominated by Miskitu communities.

Access to the community is fairly difficult; there is a rough road leading off from the main causeway between Puerto Cabezas and Waspam, which can be used during the dry months, but invariably becomes impassable following the heavy rains of the wet season. The drive to the community takes just over half-an-hour, but by foot, the journey is closer to three hours. The community owns only one vehicle, which in late 1997, had broken down because of the rough terrain it is forced to negotiate. Although infrastructure linking Awas Tingni with the outside world remains poor, it is a vast improvement from conditions 50 years ago, when the community lived further west along the River Wawa, at a site known as Tuburus. According to an elder in Awas Tingni, the community was larger then, with around 1,000 inhabitants, until disease devastated the village. In 1934 the village pastor persuaded 10 families to leave Tuburus and seek a new location further east. Eventually they settled upon the present site where they have since been located.

Conditions within Awas Tingni itself are fairly basic. The community has one small school and a Moravian Church, which is the focus of all community activities. At the time of research, the medical centre in the community was no more than an empty building. Given the lack of trained medical staff and adequate supplies, traditional home remedies are used in this community as is the case throughout the region, although people consider Western medicine to be preferable for most sicknesses. Indeed, many curable and preventable diseases in the communities prove fatal because of poor medical services. Awas Tingni also has three small stores which sell a varied assortment of basic goods, such as batteries, aspirin, flour, sugar and soft drinks. Stocks depend on how recently the shop owners have been able to travel to Puerto or Waspam, trips which given the poor state of transport, are fairly irregular. The primary productive activity pursued in the community is agriculture. However, since establishing the contract with MADENSA, villagers also have the possibility of acquiring additional income both

4 The name "Awas Tingni" is a Miskitu term meaning "Pine River."
5 A few families still remain in Tuburus today. Awasingni's land claims, for practical and historical reasons, therefore stretch from the present to the former site (see Fig.8).
6 October/November 1996.
directly as labourers for the company, and collectively, from the moneys paid to the community by MADENSA for wood extracted from their territory. Having presented a brief characterisation of the community of Awas Tingni, a more detailed examination of the circumstances from which the contract with MADENSA was established, and the nature of the agreement itself, will now be considered.

**Background to the MADENSA contract**

The initial response by the Nicaraguan government to the interest expressed by MADENSA\(^7\) (a Nicaraguan company with financial backing from the Dominican Republic) in harvesting lumber from lands located around Awas Tingni seemed to suggest that they had absorbed the lessons of the Taiwanese Equipe Enterprise S.A experience. The company was encouraged to approach Awas Tingni for permission by the government - although the community did not possess a formal title to the lands in question, the government showed itself willing to recognise their claim to this area. Under MADENSA's instigation, the community sought and received a permit from the Forest Service (SFN) of MARENA to exploit 1,500m\(^3\) of timber (Anaya & Crider, 1996: 351).\(^8\) In 1992, this work was carried out. However, given the community's inexperience, and the lack of supervision from MARENA, the company was given a free rein, and neither social nor ecological interests were protected. MADENSA even refused to pay Awas Tingni workers' salaries at the end of the year, claiming that since the villagers had not extracted as much wood for the company as anticipated, the *community* owed MADENSA money, rather than the reverse (Acosta, 1996: pers. comm.). Meanwhile, MADENSA moved to expand its sphere of operation, seeking permission to exploit an area of approximately 43,000 hectares from the community and MARENA (see Fig. 7). In 1993, the government approved MADENSA's management plan, the company having already secured the agreement of Awas Tingni's leaders for a vaguely worded thirty-year contract. Although the new Forest Code had not yet been approved by the Assembly at this stage, given the scale of the commitment and land involved, the government might nevertheless have provided the community with legal and technical assistance to get better terms and controls inserted into the agreement, and to take an informed decision before giving their consent. As it was, given the loose terms of the contract, and the inability of MARENA institutions to effectively monitor lumber operations in the region, the sole party likely to benefit from the arrangement was MADENSA itself.

Fortunately for the community, the World Wildlife Fund intervened at this point, concerned about the potential ecological and social ramifications of the existing contract. The

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\(^7\) MADENSA is an acronym for Maderas y Derivados de Nicaragua S.A., or Lumber and By-Products of Nicaragua Corporation.

\(^8\) Even if the area is considered community land, MARENA nevertheless remains responsible for approving the technical aspects of management agreements, and for monitoring the company and ensuring that the management plan is properly implemented.
WWF offered to secure legal and technical assistance for Awas Tingni, to allow the community to take informed decisions and to protect its interests in the proposed contact. They also committed to help the community develop the necessary administrative and organisational skills necessary to manage the funds they would acquire from the MADENSA operations. For a community with no prior experience of contractual negotiation or industrial forestry management, and which had moreover low levels of trust in the national government, international assistance and intervention was both necessary and crucial. The WWF enlisted the help of lawyers from the University of Iowa College of Law, who were accepted by Awas Tingni as its legal representatives. An experienced forestry professional also came on board to help the community. The community informed its new technical and legal advisory team of their various concerns over the 30-year agreement they had signed, which partly due to their lack of confidence in both the company and the government, they felt was too long. They requested that their advisory team negotiate a shorter, five-year contract, which would also have more favourable terms for the community. A new contract was therefore agreed upon between the community, company and MARENA in December of 1993. However, only days after this was signed an rumour reached the advisory staff that MARENA had been conducted simultaneous, secret negotiations with MADENSA, and had incredibly granted a concession to the company for the same area of land. Although MARENA initially denied this rumour, in January 1994, MADENSA showed up in the area saying that they were about to begin work according to the concession granted them by MARENA, rather than the December contract, and that the community would not be receiving any income from lumber extracted (Acosta, 1996: pers.comm). Understandably, the community's advisory team and WWF vociferously condemned MARENA's actions, and the Ministry was eventually forced to suspend the illicit concession they had granted. Further negotiations for another tripartite contract took place in May 1994.

The new contract represented a trilateral co-management agreement between the community, MADENSA and MARENA. The 43,000 ha. area, although still not formally demarcated, would nevertheless be treated as Awas Tingni's for the duration of the contract. The contract also established a procedure for annual, sub-contracts to be drawn up between the community and the company, to determine the amount of lumber to be extracted for that year, and the price for wood to be paid by the company to the Awas Tingni community fund. The price would be set according to the value of the U.S. Dollar, rather than Cordoba at the time of

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9 Concessions are granted by the state on national land, and are qualitatively different from contracts, which involve the recognition of private or communal ownership rights.

10 The assumption being that the land demarcation process, by the end of the 5 years, would have been completed. If the 43,000 ha was considered to have other owners besides the community of Awas Tingni, such as the state or other communities, these parties would receive income from lumber felled from their areas from this point onwards (assuming that further permission to operate in the area were granted to MADENSA after the 5 year contract period).
renegotiation, in order to protecting the community from possible radical fluctuations of the Nicaraguan market and currency (Acosta, 1996: pers.comm.). Strict environmental safeguards were included in the contract, as well as provisions ensuring community input and influence over the management process (Anaya & Crider, 1996: 49). Since this period, forestry management and extraction by MADENSA in the 43,000 ha. have been conducted under the terms of the tripartite agreement.

**Implementation and implications of the tripartite agreement**

The implementation of the new agreement has however been less than ideal. Most obviously, MARENA has failed to effectively monitor MADENSA's operations, leaving the local environment and people at the mercy of a foreign company for whom profit remains the primary objective. According to MADENSA's own forestry technicians, although the company has carried out some reforestation in the area, it is piecemeal at best, limited to the borders of the makeshift tracks the company cuts into the forest in order to extract wood. Indeed, the two main forestry technicians, (both Nicaraguans) who were working for MADENSA in 1996 became so frustrated with the ecological destruction perpetuated by the company that by the end of the year they had resigned. Moreover, despite MADENSA's detailed management plan, there is in practice little control over where and what they cut. The management plan obliges MADENSA to cut a variety of species, not merely precious hardwoods, according to a quota system intended to increase the proportion of non-precious wood being extracted over time. However, in practice, MADENSA tends to cut to the limit of their hardwood quota within the 43,000 ha. area, and then supplements their annual amount of regional exports with precious woods bought from other communities. Initial negotiations between MADENSA and the company coincided with a general moratorium forbidding lumber harvesting in the region; given the economic needs of the community, the government nevertheless made an exception to this rule and issued them the permit to extract 1,500m$^3$ of timber. However, since the moratorium was lifted, MADENSA has had considerable freedom to buy wood from communities throughout the region. All communities in the RAAN are allocated to sell 150m$^3$ of wood per year by MARENA without a management plans being required. This limit is however neither respected by the communities or companies, or enforced by MARENA. As MADENSA records showed, the company often bought 150m$^3$ amounts of woods from members of the same community, whose permits to sell had moreover been granted by MARENA itself. With the help of governmental institutions, it is easy for companies like MADENSA to buy wood illegally (and indeed, more cheaply than under the tripartite agreement) from communities throughout the RAAN.

Since the government does not prevent communities from selling MADENSA precious woods on an unregulated basis, both national forestry management laws and the tripartite agreement terms are proving ineffective in practice. Meanwhile, while MADENSA is busy
buying wood from outside the 43,000 ha area, Awas Tingni is systematically receiving less income than projected from the sale of wood from their lands to MADENSA. However, MARENA does nothing to force MADENSA to work in the Awas Tingni area; if the company chooses to buy elsewhere, there is little that the community can do about it. MADENSA often even tries to delay paying Awas Tingni for the wood they do extract from the area, thereby often forcing the community's Nicaraguan lawyer into the uncomfortable and expensive position of having to make repeat visits to the company's offices in Managua, in order to make them respect their obligations (Acosta, 1996: pers.comm). Since this lawyer's services are moreover paid for from these funds, these delays obviously make its more difficult for her to assist Awas Tingni, when she does not enjoy a secure source of funding for her work (Report to WWF, 1996: 13).

As an employee of ADFOREST rightly and realistically pointed out to me, all the stakeholders involved in the tripartite agreement are in effect pioneers, attempting to define a new approach to regional forestry management. Teething problems were inevitable, and mistakes would be committed by each party concerned. However, there is a point beyond which mistakes, when committed as frequently and as consistently as they have been by MADENSA, and particularly MARENA, should be perceived as conscious rather than unconscious acts. If the primary offenders do not appear willing to learn from their mistakes, but seem largely content to remain embroiled in a web of mismanagement and destruction, then the excuse of inexperience can no longer be countenanced. Certainly, MARENA seems in no great hurry to improve its institutional performance, and fulfill its responsibility of monitoring the potentially grievous impact which MADENSA is having upon the local environment. And as long as MARENA remains incapable to enforce forestry regulations in the region, historically exploitative practices are likely to continue. As one of Awas Tingni's legal advisors has observed, MARENA is:

"...disadvantaged by a lack of financial and human resources and an unstable political environment affecting the Nicaraguan government generally. Both these elements plague government institutions in many developing countries, but they are particularly acute in Nicaragua in the aftermath of the civil war that gripped the country throughout the 1980s."

(Anaya & Crider, 1996: 350)

Furthermore, given the widely-reported close friendship between the heads of MADENSA and MARENA in Managua, there is a distinct possibility that MARENA is unwilling to force the company to improve its operations. The Nicaraguan government (represented by MARENA) indeed demonstrated an equivocal commitment to the principles of co-management, local consultation, and indigenous community rights which its forestry management policies were expected to reflect, by blatantly disregarding Awas Tingni's rights, and closing the secret deal with MADENSA in December of 1993. Without the pressure applied by the community's advisors to reverse this decision, MADENSA might conceivably have been able to cut wood
from the area without paying Awas Tingni a centavo. From an institutional perspective, although there are many reasons to commend progressive initiatives and legislation in Nicaragua geared to encourage more socially and ecologically equitable forms of forest management, in practice, the example of the tripartite agreement do not suggest these will be easily realised.

Awas Tingni: the community perspective

The focus of this chapter so far has been upon institutional, political and economic contexts and considerations related to the tripartite agreement. This section looks at how the Awas Tingni inhabitants themselves have responded to the tripartite arrangement. Although Awas Tingni is a predominantly Mayangna community, it is reasonable to assume that many of the situations being confronted by the village in attempting to adapt to the requirements and challenges of joint management in the particular institutional, economic and political context of the RAAN could also be faced by other indigenous communities in the region in similar situations, whether Mayangna or Miskitu.

Attitudes towards the company and commercial forestry

In general terms, Awas Tingni appears favourably disposed to commercial forestry, which represents to them a desperately needed alternative means of generating income in otherwise dire economic conditions. As Jim Anaya, the head of the community's legal and technical advisory team has observed,

"community members generally are impoverished and look to the forest resources within their claimed lands as a potential source of income." (Anaya & Crider, 1996: 349)

However, beyond the impression of general approval given by community members lay a wide spectrum of considerations, reactions and qualifications colouring their responses to the tripartite agreement, as will now be discussed.

Ecological concerns

Although one of the greatest problems with the tripartite agreement, as noted in the previous section, is that MARENA is failing to monitor the company's treatment and impact upon the local environment, this consideration did not however feature very highly in the Awas Tingni residents' list of priorities. Environmental concerns within the community did vary, however. A minority of interviewees complained that the company was scaring animals away and failing to reforest, and that MARENA was not monitoring the company. It does not seem a coincidence the informants voicing this opinion were largely of the older generation, who are not being employed by the company and therefore have less to gain from it, and who are moreover
better able to compare past with present ecological health from personal experience.\footnote{Both generational, and as research in Asang indicated, gender differences in perspectives can exist within indigenous communities, and affect the viability of management systems.} Another small group more respondents, located on the opposite end of the spectrum, considered that the company was abiding by the ecological stipulations of the tripartite accord, and was being well monitored by MARENA. As one of the community's health leaders told me, the contract had strong provisions to protect the local environment, and MARENA was doing a good job in enforcing them. The majority of informants, however, lay somewhere in-between. Although they considered that MADENSA could be damaging the environment, the impact was not considered to be extensive, and although MARENA could do a better job at monitoring the company, it was generally considered to be performing their duty. As one informant told me:

"MADENSA has worked partly well, partly badly, over the last two years ... they sometimes cut wood and leave it rotting in the tracks because they cannot carry it out, which is a waste ... but if they fulfill the technical criteria established by the agreement there shouldn't be any problems... It's still as easy to hunt as it was before. I have confidence in MARENA .... "

Ultimately, community members seemed far more concerned about economic and social issues related to the MADENSA contract, which I will shortly consider, than with the ecological impact caused by company activities. Awas Tingi is not unusual in this respect. Given the state of the regional economy, material concerns are invariably prioritised in indigenous communities. If livelihood needs were not so pressing, the level of environmental concern expressed in communities might be greater. However, in present circumstances, communities cannot really afford to become conservationists; particularly, as discussed in Chapter 4, if they have not traditionally regarded the environment from such a perspective. Moreover, it is not surprising if communities, when looking back on all the resource exploitation which has historically occurred in the RAAN, from which they gained so little, are now determined to be the beneficiaries of any forestry, mining or fishing industries which might develop in the area. According to Karl Offen, who examined contemporary political-ecological attitudes in the Mayangna community of Wasakin:

".. as the people tell it, Wasakin's ancestors once controlled all of Nicaragua: they now ask, should not those few that remain have the right to use their resources as they see fit, as those who once deceived them did? If so, should we be surprised to see them imitate "development" models literally etched into their cultural landscape....." (Offen, 1997: 9).

Regional, and indeed national cultural attitudes also lead indigenous peoples to pay more attention to the non-ecological aspects of management agreements. "Resource management" is generally presented as a complex and highly specialised scientific exercise, intellectually removed from popular understanding. In Nicaragua, as no doubt in other developing countries, Western science has not undergone the same process of demystification as has occurred extensively throughout the industrialised societies. This is particularly true in an isolated region
such as the RAAN, where the knowledge of the tecnico, or technician, tends to be accepted as superior and definitive, even if the person in question only holds the equivalent of a Bachelors degree in their particular field. The respect paid to the knowledge of the "resource managers" therefore encourages indigenous peoples in the region to defer responsibility of monitoring forestry management and health to the tecnicos of MARENA, MADENSA and their own advisory staff. After all, as a man in Awas Tingni told me:

"we are not capacitados [trained] .... MARENA's tecnico know what they are doing, we see that they are doing a good job."

Lack of capacitacion or training is indeed a problem which affects many areas of regional society, not just environmental management. Nevertheless, as long as the knowledge of the tecnico is treated with such inordinate respect, indigenous peoples will continue to defer the responsibility of environmental issues to others. Given the poverty of institutional control in Nicaragua, the absence of local vigilance only makes it all the easier for resource extractive companies to exploit the environment at will. It is therefore important to both demystify the realms of science and resource management, and to encourage local peoples to assume greater responsibility for environmental protection.

Primary concerns: material benefits and indigenous rights

Given that the primary concern of the indigenous communities throughout the region is to see their land and resource rights respected, in order to safeguard their material and cultural futures, it is not surprising that informants in Awas Tingni were more animated by economic issues, and their rights as indigenous peoples than by ecological concerns. The low wages paid by the company was a particular sore point in the community. The wages being paid by the company, 30 Cordobas or approximately $3 US per day for regular workers, 50 Cordobas or $5 to those able to use chainsaws, although about average for the region, are nevertheless far too low to support an average family's needs. However, average regional wages being so poor, it is hard to see how MADENSA might be justifiably compelled to pay more to their workers. This is an issue the government must urgently address.

When the Mayangna of Awas Tingni complain vociferously about the poor wages paid by MADENSA, their anger is however not animated by material concerns alone. Low wages are also seen as evidence that the lumber company is disrespecting their rights as indigenous peoples - particularly the rights to own and benefit from the use of natural resources on their lands. Community members were also very angry that the company had failed to fulfill a promise to rebuild the poor road leading to the community, a promise made by a MADENSA representative during a visit to Awas Tingni. Although neither the December 1993 nor May 1994 treaty included provisions obliging MADENSA to rebuild the road, community informants believed
that the company was failing to fulfill its commitments to them, and infringing their rights. This popularly-held viewpoint not only pointed to the strength of belief in indigenous rights held in indigenous communities; it also suggested that Awas Tingni community members were still not entirely comfortable operating within the confines of a formal, legalistic relationship. The MADENSA representative's flippant promise was considered as binding a commitment by the villagers' as the terms of the treaty itself.

Awas Tingni community members' reactions in this case can also be explained by the history of paternalistic relationships between communities and companies which all indigenous communities in the region confront. Although companies like Standard Fruit and NIPCO might not have paid villages for the wood extracted from their surrounding lands in the past, they often provide financial support for the construction of churches, or gave donations of planks, medical and educational supplies. The tripartite agreement between Awas Tingni, MADENSA and MARENA however represents an attempt to provide greater definition to the relationship between company and community, and to make the community solely responsible for the management of funds accrued from commercial forestry (Acosta, 1996: pers.comm). Communities can nevertheless still expect companies to help them in informal ways, and feel slighted if they do not. Communities will need time to adapt to these new types of arrangements.

**Underlying community detachment**

One of the characteristics of indigenous behaviour towards the lumber company and contract which most struck me in Awas Tingni, and which I had least anticipated, was the underlying sense of detachment expressed by informants towards commercial forestry in general. Although the community obviously welcomed the income which the company brought them, informants frequently said that if the company were to consistently fail to "respect" the community, then they would have to ask it to leave. This surprised me somewhat, for given the present economic depression, and the long history of enclave economy and marginalisation in the region, I had expected them to be quite enthusiastic about the company's presence.

I developed two explanations for these attitudes. On the one hand, indigenous political awareness throughout the region has greatly increased in the last few decades (see Chapter 6). In Chapter 5, we examined how attitudes had changed in Asang since the 1950s, when NIPCO's subsidiaries were given free rein to cut down wood from land which today is being claimed by the community as their property. Asang now is determined not to allow further companies to exploit the forest, unless acceptable terms have been agreed upon with the community. They moreover have fully accepted their new role as active owners of the land, with the right to determine access and use of the resources on them. As a Miskitu journalist working in the region told me, popular attitudes have been radically revised since the war:
"today it would be difficult for you to cut a piece of fruit from someone else's tree ... in the past it was no problem. People interpret their rights differently today. The same differences separate the experiences of NIPCO in the past from attitudes today.... there is much greater demand for land demarcation now that the value of forests is being recognised"

Indigenous people in the RAAN have a far more active, radical understanding of their rights today, which combined with a history of cultural pride and community integrity (see Chapter 3), leads them to overtly resist exploitation in the present day context. Hence, although Awas Tingni welcomes the opportunities which the MADENSA contract brings them, they are however not fully satisfied with the material benefits they are receiving from this arrangement, and suspect that the company might be taking advantage of them. Contemporary indigenous determination to defend their rights and environment from external exploitation in many ways represents progress towards community empowerment.

However, the other factor identified does not reflect so positively on the future of sustainable co-management initiatives in the region. Community members' equivocal attitudes towards the company are not just the result of history, but direct experience. Although the tripartite agreement theoretically represents a new departure for forestry management in the region, in practice it nevertheless shares many characteristics with the exploitative resource industries which have dominated the history of forestry management in this region. Forestry companies still continue to operate in incredibly lax and uncertain institutional environments, which provide them with little incentives for long-term commitments or sustainable management. In the meantime, the future of the local environment and communities alike is being imperiled. Awas Tingni's experience of the tripartite agreement so far has therefore not provided them with the evidence or the security that forestry resources could be managed both in the long-term, and in their interests, to bring lasting improvements to the community. The lumber industry continues to be regarded a short-term way to earn cash. Few informants indeed felt that the community's economic future lay in the forestry industry, which was characterised as far too unstable; agriculture and cattle rearing (both great consumers of land) were considered far more appropriate livelihood strategies to pursue. As long as the example of Awas Tingni fails to indicate to both members of this and other communities how careful use of lumber resources can lead to long-term, lasting development for their villages, than it will have done little to reverse the short-termist mentalities which motivate, and have historically motivated, resource use practices in this region. In order to appreciate the ways in which Awas Tingni has so far failed to provide a progressive example for forestry management so badly needed in the RAAN, it is important to consider the social costs they have incurred from participation in this process.
The community fund and community leadership

According to the May 1994 agreement, the community of Awas Tingni is treated as the de facto owner of the 43,000 hectare area of forested land where MADENSA operates, and thus receives payment for all wood extracted by the company. According to community members, they had been paid 240,000 Cordoba (approximately $30,000 U.S.), by the company from the previous timber harvest (pers.comm, 1996). Although not an enormous amount of money, this income nevertheless represents a considerable opportunity for Awas Tingni to improve general conditions and services in the community. Unfortunately, however, the full potential of the community fund (until late 1997 at least) has so far not been realised. In theory, management of the funds was to occur according to a joint-decision making process involving all community members, but in practice, successive community sindicos or mayors, with the authority to withdraw funds from the bank in Puerto Cabezas, have tended to abuse this privilege. In 1996, the community found itself forced to replace their mayor of four years who was found to have squandered community funds. The next mayor, a young man of 24, turned out to be even worse, and after indulging in his own spending spree, was removed after only three months. The community reportedly took much more care in selecting his successor, opting for an older man, who was also a co-pastor in the Moravian Church and a teetotaler. The personal qualities of the new sindico, it was hoped, would be able to protect community funds from further abuse. This new mayor has so far been seen as a marked improvement on his predecessors. This does not mean, however, that he has managed to steer clear of criticism. In 1997, informants from Awas Tingni told me that they were still unhappy with the way the fund was being run. They claimed that rather than being openly and collectively discussed and determined, the mayor and the community forestry representative were together unilaterally deciding how to spend the money. Although these claims were not strictly true, since the question of the funds had been debated at an general community meeting, it nevertheless appears that these particular leaders had dominated the session, and been able to secure majority proposal for their plan to spend the money on improving the road to the community, and for buying a truck. Those who had wanted money spent on health and educational services in the community were made even more suspicious when the mayor and forestry representative took three weeks in Managua to buy a second-hand truck. Worse still, soon after being brought over to the RAAN, the truck broke down in Puerto Cabezas, where it could still be seen three months later.

On the basis of my experience in other community meetings, it seems likely that many community members, particularly women, might not have had the confidence to voice their opinions openly about how the money should be spent. Moreover, as a number of informants in Awas Tingni told me, community members avoided outright confrontations with one another wherever possible. The fact that the resentful mayor-before-last was still in possession of the community map, but no one had so far been willing to make him hand it over to the new leaders,
seemed to confirm this impression. It is also possible that immediate, majority decision-making practices, rather than consensus-building procedures, developed over a certain period of time, are not comfortably practiced by indigenous communities. Ultimately, community members were very upset that their fund, in which they had placed so much hope, was failing to deliver anticipated improvements. Rather than helping Awas Tingni progress, the fund had in fact been cause for major tension and discontent to develop within the community. Faced by widespread criticism, the leaders claimed that the majority did not understand what they were doing, or how to manage the fund as they did. Community unity was being undermined. As one informant complained:

"we have no idea how the money is being used, we know it's all been spent but we don't know how.... people aren't very happy, they can't see any improvements in the community while there's nothing left in the bank....."

A community member whom I spoke with in 1997, a year after witnessing these tensions in Awas Tingni first-hand, told me that these problems had continued, and that in his opinion, the fund had impoverished, rather than improved the quality of life in Awas Tingni. In the previous chapter, we talked about the problems faced by indigenous leaders representing local interests in external systems and circles. The example of Awas Tingni shows that similar problems can arise when non-traditional tasks, such as the administration of income earned from the resource expropriation, are introduced into communities without the appropriate experience to deal with them. Within Awas Tingni itself, leaders were being accused of distancing themselves from the community, of taking decisions unilaterally, of betraying their people. It is no wonder that Awas Tingni community members expressed equivocal feelings about the tripartite agreement.

**Social costs of co-management involvement**

The problems experienced by Awas Tingni in adapting to new forms of social organisation and management made necessary because of the tripartite agreement show that despite the generally positive characteristics associated with co-management initiatives, the localities they involve can nevertheless suffer unanticipated social costs in non-quantifiable community resource areas such as co-operation, trust and legitimacy. Communities and community-based management have been lauded in the literature for providing ideal social forums for sustainable and egalitarian management:

"Common-property systems normally provide mechanisms for the equitable use .. with a minimum of internal strife or conflict" (Berkes, 1989)

However, as shown by the case of Awas Tingni, a community which treats land and resources as common-property assets, traditional customs and ethics are not easily be transplanted to new circumstances; they can even become undermined by them. Involvement with commercial forestry and a co-management arrangement has in fact led to an inequitable use of the fund and a
considerable amount of internal strife and conflict between village members. The highly personalised relationships found in small groups can therefore present advantages as well as disadvantages in management contexts, creating:

"...a fertile ground for strong negative feelings, such as envy and rivalry ... [and] lead to group implosion if not properly checked" (Baland & Platteau, 1996: 314)

Even if co-management arrangements are able to guarantee indigenous peoples' rights to own land and share in the material benefits of resource exploitation, if the social costs of involvement in these arrangements become too high, communities might logically choose to withdraw from them. Should this occur, opportunities to develop new methods of integrated, equitable management will have been squandered. Awas Tingni has not reached this stage yet, but it is conceivable that should present circumstances persist, they might choose not to renew the contract with MADENSA after the five-years term is complete. Indeed, it is interesting to note that whilst forestry professionals in the region argued that the original proposal of a 25-year contract would have been better for the community, since the company would have far more reason to reforest areas it knew it could later reharvest them, Awas Tingni were nevertheless not willing to put their faith in the company and government for such a long period, fearing that this agreement would ultimately not benefit them. Since Awas Tingni's experience of forestry co-management to date had not dissuaded these original fears, nor provided them with a concrete example of how forestry resources, when managed carefully, might generate long-lasting social benefits, it is possible that they might not decide to pursue the contract further - irrespective of how sensitive the framework of the agreement appears to be to co-management, indigenous rights and sustainability principles.

**Awas Tingni and the WWF**

The mismanagement of Awas Tingni's funds is fairly understandable, given that community leaders and members collectively have little or no accounting experience to draw from in administering them. The problems which have arisen were not, however, unavoidable. When the WWF initially decided to become involved in this case, and assist Awas Tingni in defining its relationship with the company and defending its land interests, the organisation also undertook to help train and prepare the community for the challenge of managing their income to bring lasting benefits to the community. Following the signing of the tripartite agreement in May of 1994, this commitment was reinforced by the launching of a new joint international project initiative, headed by the WWF, to not only implement the prior agreements, but to also assume a new objective of helping Awas Tingni to secure the demarcation of community lands. Whilst the WWF remained primarily responsible for the first task, the Iowa College of Law legal team, supported by the Indian Law Resource Centre and the community itself, would pursue the land claims process.
The Awas Tingni legal team soon became exasperated by the Nicaraguan government's obvious unwillingness to address the outstanding problem of undermarcated indigenous community lands, and therefore decided that more confrontational tactics had to be adopted, if progress on these issues was to occur. In October of 1995, the team therefore submitted a petition on behalf of the community to the Inter-American Human Rights Commission of the OAS, which faulted Nicaragua for not carrying out its own constitutional and international obligations to guarantee the indigenous peoples of the Atlantic Coast the ownership, use and enjoyment of their community lands (Report to the WWF, 1996: 6). By this action, the Awas Tingni case had suddenly been transformed from being a fairly localised issue, to one of national and international significance. The WWF, which was unwilling to follow the legal team into politically delicate territory, through association with the Awas Tingni case, decided to silently withdraw from the joint project. There was little either the community or its legal advisors could do to prevent the WWF from abandoning Awas Tingni, before its commitments had been fulfilled. The WWF's withdrawal meant the scope of the project became radically reduced, leaving only the land claim component being pursued by the legal team, but without the resources or personnel necessary to help the community adapt to the tripartite agreement, and acquire the administrative and organisation skills they so urgently required to make it a success.

In a letter to Jim Anaya, one of the community's legal advisors, the regional WWF representative attempted to justify their decision:

"WWF has a range of concerns relating to Awas Tingni.... Principal among these is whether the implementation of the contract, limited as it may have been, has been a positive force for achieving or fostering sustainable development in the community and leading to the improved management of Awas Tingni forests.. [we] confirmed that the community was ill-prepared in terms of its leadership and organisational capabilities to make decisions that reflected a community-wide interest regarding the income received from the project. Moreover, the project itself represented a divisive force and had contributed to the generation of conflict..." (Letter from WWF representative to Jim Anaya, May 7th, 1997)

Not only had the decision to withdraw been taken on the basis of observations made during an unannounced visit to Awas Tingni (which was not received well by community members); all of the obstacles identified by the WWF representative which prevented the organisation from helping the community, were precisely those which the WWF had committed to resolve. Of course the community was "ill-prepared" to manage the community fund; they were still waiting to acquire the administrative skills which the WWF had previously promised them. The WWF's withdrawal meant that Awas Tingni was therefore left to make all possible mistakes on its own.

Independently, Awas Tingni has in fact managed to improve their management of the community funds: the third mayor in succession, although still criticised, is clearly a vast improvement on his two predecessors. The internal problems they have experienced can
probably be resolved, given that the community remains united in defending their common interests and identity. Nevertheless, the failure of the WWF to follow through with its commitment to the community was extremely influential in making the process of community accommodation to the co-management agreement more difficult, and the potential benefits, harder to realise. This example shows how complex and delicately balanced co-management initiatives can be, and how dependent progress in this area is upon the collective and sustained commitment of all parties concerned. International projects designed to improve community administration, management and negotiation skills are not only extremely vital prerequisites of successful co-management initiatives; when conceptualising these projects, international facilitators must moreover be prepared, and if possible, obliged to fulfill all prior commitments to the letter, so as not to undermine, rather than improve, the local capacity and enthusiasm for management innovation in the long-run.

Inter-community relations in Tasba Raya

Participation in co-management arrangements do not only threaten indigenous communities with social costs from within: further costs can also be incurred if inter-community conflicts and jealousy result from them. Inter-community relations in Tasba Raya\textsuperscript{12} have indeed been considerably strained by the unique material and legal benefits which Awas Tingni has acquired from the tripartite agreement and international facilitation. Although when Awas Tingni moved to their present location in the 1930s, the area was relatively unsettled, by the late 1960s, the government moved a number of Miskitu communities from the flood-prone lower River Wangki to the locality; communities which had moreover lost considerable land when the northern banks became Honduran territory in 1960. The government was also motivated by a desire to move these communities away from forested land being appropriated by INFONAC at the time, as a preemptive strike against the growing community movement to obtain land titles in this area (see Chapter 7). The communities agreed to move on the condition that they would be given land titles, as well as financial and technical assistance, improved social services and other benefits in the new area which became known as Tasba Raya (Jenkins, 1986: 246). The government never fulfilled these promises. Even so, the communities, unified rather than divided by the hardships and conflicts they had endured in their old location on the lower River Wangki, adapted well to their new circumstances, and with the help of French NGO assistance,\textsuperscript{13} they rebuilt their villages anew (Jenkins, 1986: 247). Today, the Miskitu communities of Francis Sirpi, Santa Clara, Wisconsin, Esperanza, Tasba Pain, Miguel Bikan and Bodega, along with Awas Tingni, also live in the area (see Figs. 5 & 8).

\textsuperscript{12} As mentioned earlier, the sub-region of indigenous communities within which Awas Tingni is situated.

\textsuperscript{13} Francis Sirpi, the main town of Tasba Raya, was named in recognition of the French help which continued for many years - the name in Miskitu means "Little France."
Fig. 8 Map by Awas Tingni, Depicting Location of Awas Tingni & Neighbouring Miskitu Communities, Areas of Communities' Principal Subsistence Activities, Location of SOLCARSA Concession, and Land being Claimed by Awas Tingni
In an area of "soft borders" (Kofinas, 1998; pers. comm.) which has only fairly recently this century become the focus of concentrated, permanent settlement by indigenous communities, Awas Tingni's claim over an area of 90,000 ha, including a large proportion of the area where MADENSA is operating, has caused considerable consternation amongst the Tasba Raya communities. Although they are more recent arrivals, they point out that Awas Tingni's prior claim to a large part of this area (excluding Tuburus) dates back only 50 years. Moreover, since they had been promised by the Nicaraguan government when they moved to this area that they would be given land titles, they feel that their claims are just as valid as Awas Tingni's.

At a meeting held between the various villages held at Francis Sirpi in October 1996 to discuss the land question, representatives from the Miskitu communities expressed their resentment that Awas Tingni should be the only community in the region which, with the benefit of outside legal and technical assistance, was not only receiving income from commercial forestry but had also made significant progress towards attaining their own individual land title. Awas Tingni's advisors had helped the community develop a GIS-generated map of their claimed lands, had conducted an anthropological survey to provide evidence of the historical validity of their claim, and were applying legal pressure at both national and international levels for the community's land claims to be granted. The other communities, without Awas Tingni's parallel support or regular sources of income and employment, understandably felt threatened and envious of the Mayangna community's advantages. They moreover argued that Awas Tingni's claim incorporated areas considered the property of other communities. Since so much of the area is shared by the communities, and since the areas they each used did not necessarily fit into precise boundaries, Awas Tingni should not be attempting to determine local territorial boundaries unilaterally, without consulting the other communities. As a senior figure from Francis Sirpi told the assembled representatives:

"the Sumos had no right to draw a boundary line on their own - they should have met up with the others to decide whose land was whose..... why didn't they? So they could steal most of the land? The Sumos shouldn't try and take advantage of the others.... Francis Sirpi was also affected by the MADENSA and SOLCARSAs concessions. If you look at the area you can see that the Sumos have drawn illegal boundaries.... the Sumos have to..."

14 In Awas Tingni's petition to the OEA Human Rights Commission, their community lands are presented as their ancestral territory: "Point 14. The community's possession of its territory, of communal lands, extends far back in time to the earliest moments of Mayangna history recorded by the elders of the community." Whilst this assertion may indeed be true for the lands around Tuburus, it is more debatable for wider area being claimed, and currently occupied by Awas Tingni. The wisdom of basing community land claims on historical tenure will shortly be considered in this chapter.

15 As mentioned in Chapter 1, the Mayangnas were until recently known as "Sumos", a term imposed by the Miskitus and considered derogatory by the Mayangna. In practice, many people in the region, including Mayangnas themselves, still use this term. However, in the context of the hostile Francis Sirpi meeting, the F.S. representative's use of the term might not only have been out of force of habit; it could also have been interpreted by the Mayangnas as an insult, a sign of disrespect.

16 Discussed later in the chapter.
remember that Francis Sirpi is a much bigger community than theirs. We know that the Sumos might be able to get themselves a title with the help of their foreign friends, but if they have problems at home then they'll never be able to live peacefully...." (Francis Sirpi, 1996)

The tension between Awas Tingni and the other Tasba Raya communities shown at this meeting was aggravated by long-standing historical differences between Mayangna and Miskitu, discussed in Chapter 3. Although relations today have improved, Mayangnas still harbour resentment towards Miskitu for centuries of subjugation and harassment, whilst many Miskitus, although they do not say as much, arguably continue to see themselves as superior to the "Sumos." However, in terms of global opinion, it appears that the Mayangnas are today doing better than the Miskitus. Somewhat ironically, the Mayangnas' historical marginalisation, which encouraged them to be more withdrawn and closed to outside contact than the Miskitus, now seems to make their indigenous culture more "marketable" than the Miskitus', whose culture has not only been obviously open and affected by external associations, but who arguably also still carry the stigma of their recent, more prominent involvement in the Sandinista-Contra conflict. It might be just a coincidence that whilst the general regional trend is for NGO-withdrawals, the main communities still enjoying the benefits of external assistance are the Mayangnas of BOSAWAS, a nature reserve in the north-west of the RAAN, and the Mayangnas of Awas Tingni. Whether this is the case or not, even if the ultimate goal of the external advisors involved in both initiatives is to create precedents for indigenous land rights and co-management ventures of benefit to all indigenous peoples of the region, in the interim, whilst in the short-term, the neighbouring Miskitu communities continue to feel excluded from them, such efforts could potentially cause more conflict at the local levels than they resolve. It was obvious at the meeting that both Miskitu and Mayangna were far more concerned with the immediate, rather than potential long-term ramifications of the Awas Tingni land claim. Given the threats to livelihoods, from the government, and from the companies which they face, it is understandable that the Miskitu communities affected by the Awas Tingni claim might find it harder to appreciate that it could eventually advance their claims as well. Meanwhile, the Mayangnas continue to hark back to historical problems with the Miskitus, and are determined to stake their claim. As a senior community leader in Awas Tingni told me:

"our problems [with the other communities] are difficult to resolve. We've been fighting for our land for a long time, and then suddenly they get in there and want a piece. Many people say Sumos don't have a right to so much because we're a small community, but we're thinking of the future, our population is growing so we need land in reserve. Other communities have rights to land as well, but this land is historically ours, so we have first claim..... we're not looking for trouble, but if we have to, we'll fight for our land to the end.

17 Although the Tasba Raya communities have significant problems with the Awas Tingni claim, many Miskitu communities not affected by it support the actions the community's advisors are taking in regards to the OAS, as they hope it will force the Nicaraguan government to resolve all indigenous land claims in the region. Even some Tasba Raya leaders support it from this perspective, though they are quick to point out that they nevertheless remain concerned about the potential threat of the Awas Tingni claim to their own community lands.
This isn't the Miskitus' land, they used to live by the River Wangki, now they decide to come here and violate our rights for the fun of it - but we're going to fight for our rights. As Sumos, we've always suffered, the Miskitus threw us out of Bilwi to the mountains, and now they want to throw us off this land as well.... but we won't let them." (Awas Tingni, 1996).

However, there are also indications that the villages involved in the inter-community conflicts in Tasba Raya might be able to resolve their problems. Only a minority of members in Awas Tingni wanted to pursue their land claims at the risk of perpetual conflict with the other communities. Indeed, although somewhat reluctantly, the majority said they were prepared to join forces with the other communities of Tasba Raya, in order to present a joint claim to the land. Ultimately, they recognised that it would be impossible to live in the area if they had to worry about antagonistic Miskitu neighbours. As one of the Awas Tingni representatives in Francis Sirpi reminded the assembled representatives:

"... because of conflicts over land, we got ourselves involved in a war during which many people died - the few of us who survived have analysed the situation. We have to be careful to analyse all our problems, in order to avoid conflict.... we know we made our boundaries on our own, but we did so to stop outsiders benefiting from them, not to steal land, this isn't true.... we wanted to empower ourselves... but we have good intentions, and will redo the work with the other communities.." (Francis Sirpi, 1996).

After this meeting, it appeared that relations between Awas Tingni and the other communities did improve. When I spoke to some informants from Awas Tingni a year later, they told me that although they were still not happy about the idea of having a joint title and block of territory to share with the Miskitu communities, they needed to preserve good relations with their neighbours. Little practical progress has actually been made in Tasba Raya towards fashioning a joint land claim, whilst Awas Tingni's advisors continue to apply pressure in national and international courts in the community's name alone. Nevertheless, the Tasba Raya communities do seem more disposed to communicate and collaborate since the great tensions witnessed at the 1996 meeting, and a more congenial inter-community atmosphere has persisted. However, if Awas Tingni does go ahead and secure a land title for themselves alone, the local crisis could swiftly reemerge, for the Miskitu communities' jealousy has not dissipated. These types of inter-community tensions are not restricted to situations in which Mayangnas are pitted against Miskitu. As showed in Chapter 5, the 5 (Miskitu) Communities of the upper River Wangki, in which Asang is a member, are currently embroiled in conflict over land with other Miskitu communities from above the rapids. Efforts to secure land titles for indigenous communities, in order to facilitate the development of co-management initiatives in the region, therefore need to incorporate all the villages of a particular sub-region affected, in order not to foster local tension, and produce unsustainable arrangements.
Defining criteria for land demarcation

Although the principle of indigenous land rights is defended by both the Nicaraguan constitution and the Autonomy Statute, specific criteria to define the parameters of community land have yet to be developed and agreed upon. According to the National Land Demarcation Commission for Indigenous Lands (see Chapter 7), community land rights would be defined according to traditional occupancy (Article 1a), Decreto No. 16-96, La Gaceta 6-9-96). This is however a tenuous and potentially discriminatory criteria upon which to base the regional process of indigenous community land demarcation. Whilst indigenous communities can overall, morally and viably exercise the argument of ancestral tenure to enforce the legitimacy of their land claims before threats from non-indigenous parties, ancestral tenure does not necessarily facilitate the definition of inter-community boundaries. Given that in contemporary circumstances, numerous indigenous communities live in what were previously much less inhabited areas, with each depending upon the local land and resources for their survival, if the criteria of historical seniority is used to give preferential treatment to one over other sub-regional communities, it will be difficult to construct tenure systems at the locality which all parties can agree to. Communities' land claims will therefore need to be flexible, in order for mutually compatible land boundaries to be determined. All communities have core areas of influence, and historical or emotive attachments to given areas, which a land demarcation process can obviously not ignore. However, beyond these areas lies more land, often forested, where it becomes more difficult to determine which communities' claims should take precedence. As argued in Chapter 5, contemporary indigenous land claims are in many ways not so much reflections of past land use patterns or beliefs, but responses to present livelihood and commercial needs and perceptions. As a result, inter-community conflicts over land are the products of contemporary circumstances, desires and values, rather than the result of traditional land holding patterns being violated. Historical occupancy is moreover a particularly tricky criteria for demarcation given that communities retained nomadic characteristics until early this century, or have been forced to relocate in recent decades because of war or natural disasters. All of the communities paid particular attention in this thesis - Asang, Awas Tingni and those of Tasba Raya - fall into these categories. Sarah Howard, who looked at land conflicts which had arisen between the communities of Santa Marta and Auhya Pihni, when the former community had been forced to move from the northern bank of the River Wangki in 1961 (after this area was conceded to Honduras), concluded that:

"this case.. illustrates the dilemma of establishing historical rights to land .... [and] highlights the necessity of developing other criteria, such as need or equity, for the establishment of indigenous territorial rights" (Howard, 1993a: 224)

The discrimination of communities by communities which could occur if historical tenure is used as the primary criteria for land demarcation, could be moreover substantially compounded by the discrimination which this principle would enable the national government to
perpetuate against indigenous communities as a whole. The tenet of ancestral tenancy could potentially allow the national government to limit the extent of land granted to the communities, for example by arguing that since the communities had not themselves traditionally and systematically extracted and sold lumber resources from the land, forestry resources should not be included within community territories. Since the rights of communities to their land has already been theoretically recognised by the Nicaraguan constitution and Autonomy Statute, their long-term interests will be better served by a land demarcation process which takes into account the needs of the various indigenous communities, and does not give reason for inter-community conflicts to occur, or room to the government to restrict the definition of these needs by the argument of traditional occupancy. Need and equity do not only appear more realistic and sustainable criteria for addressing the issue of indigenous land; by collectively involving indigenous communities in the land demarcation process, greater levels of local cooperation and organisation could also be facilitated.

On an optimistic note, there are signs that communities themselves are recognising the need to fashion their land claims according to collective and equitable criteria. Whilst communities are becoming increasingly conscious of the value of natural resources and the need to secure legal titles for the land on which these are situated, many are nevertheless managing to resist pursuing titles on an individual basis, recognising that in the interests of local harmony, and in recognition of the "soft borders" between communities them, it is more appropriate that villages pursue their land rights collectively.18 Both the communities of Asang and Awas Tingni have taken steps in this direction. External facilitators need to encourage, rather than discourage, this realisation. By recognising all communities' land claims as equal and valid, and by pooling resources collectively in order to secure their rights, indigenous peoples will strengthen grassroots solidarity, and thereby increase the potential success of their land claims. However, since the traditional social unit regulating resource use in indigenous society is the community, inter-community management could prove problematic. The Awas Tingni case provides an example of how traditional forms of organisation have not been able to translate to new circumstances within the community; perhaps their present problems would only be aggravated by the introduction of other participants. In some cases, individual titles might prove more appropriate (Howard, 1993a: 240). If collective titles are however pursued, the communities involved are likely to require continuous and reliable training and support until multiple community management institutions have been able to develop at the local level.

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18 Joint community land claims are indeed not a recent invention: the 10 Communities of the Puerto Cabezas region (which includes Tuapi, Kamla, Auhiya Pihni, Kum, Bum, Kwakil, Sanni Laya, Krukira, Sisin and Kuiwitingni) have had a collectively recognised land claim since the period of the Harrison-Altamirano Treaty, a claim which was formally titled in 1976.
The Awas Tingni case: a Summary

The tripartite agreement between the indigenous community of Awas Tingni, the government, represented by MARENA, and the Dominican lumber company MADENSA has implications for both the future of co-management initiatives in the region, and for our understanding of indigenous environmental perspectives, and how they might react / be influenced by involvement in such contexts. On the one hand, the tripartite agreement provides us with reason to be optimistic about the future of co-management arrangements in the RAAN. The Nicaraguan government's approval and active participation in this process suggested that national forestry institutions had learnt from the fiasco of the 1991 Taiwanese concession, and had acknowledged the need to formulate future commercial forestry agreements according to co-management, sustainable development and indigenous rights considerations. Moreover, the forestry industry had been made to comply to this new management framework. Meanwhile, research in Awas Tingni showed that community members were not merely the passive beneficiaries of changes in the political climate, but considered themselves to be legitimate participants in the management process by virtue of their status as indigenous peoples, traditional occupiers and owners of the land. Their determination to see their historical rights of land tenure respected shows that communities are not simply being "manipulated" by external facilitators, but are actively struggling to get their rights recognised (if reluctantly) by government, and incorporated into new approaches to forestry management. Furthermore, the example of the Francis Sirpi meeting showed that whilst inter-community conflicts can develop, communities can also choose to forego individualistic and competitive methods of achieving their land rights in favour of collaborative approaches which both reflect the historical realities of "soft borders", and traditional community ethics of equality, mutual assistance and cooperation. If such local initiatives prove successful, it would suggest that indigenous communities in the RAAN had been able to adapt to the new demands of co-management, land demarcation and commercial forestry without having to sacrifice their self-identity in the process.

From another perspective, however, the lessons of the tripartite agreement appear less optimistic. Although Awas Tingni as a unit strongly defended community rights to land and participation in the management process, social cohesion and trust within the village seemed to have deteriorated over conflicts related to the community fund. It is in fact quite interesting to compare perspectives on commercial forestry between Awas Tingni and Asang, or villagers from other communities in Tasba Raya. Whereas the villages, which were not involved in commercial forestry arrangements, expected they would bring substantial material changes to their communities, attitudes in Awas Tingni were less positive, more detached. The first three years

19 The national government has frequently alleged that Awas Tingni's land claims have nothing to do with the community's own wishes, but the ulterior motives of their legal advisors. My visit to Awas Tingni clearly showed this not to be the case, that the community's primary concern is to secure themselves a land title, and that they fully consider the land they are claiming to be theirs.
of the contract having brought few tangible benefits to the community but having encouraged
greater inter-personal tensions and an erosion of leadership authority, many members expressed
disillusionment with the process. Although Awas Tingni members themselves have been
collectively working to improve management of the fund, they continue to suffer from low levels
of education and lack of experience which inhibit their ability to realise the full development
potential of the income they are receiving from commercial forestry. Meanwhile, it is highly
unlikely that Awas Tingni, irrespective of their new levels of political consciousness, would have
been able to negotiate with the government and MADENSA to obtain the terms of contract they
currently enjoy without the benefit of external legal and technical assistance. Since external
assistance can be both unreliable and limited in scope - WWF withdrew when the issue became
too politically volatile for the organisation's liking - if indigenous communities have to rely upon
such sources in order to obtain even imperfect benefits from participation in multi-stakeholder
management arrangements, then the future of co-management initiatives in the RAAN must
surely still be characterised as tenuous.

Moreover, as long as Awas Tingni fails to reap the full potential benefits of this
agreement, not only is the community personally losing out; the example of consensual and
sustainable co-management of natural resources which it is supposed to represent will in
practical terms, appear little different from the historical patterns of resource exploitation in the
RAAN. Financial benefits accrued from resource exploitation are being squandered in the short-
term, to little lasting regional benefit. The community would not, however, have to take sole if
indeed majority responsibility, should this occur. Historical patterns are not merely being
replicated because the community fund is mismanaged; this is also the outcome of institutional
weakness, which means that MADENSA is not being forced to comply with either the
environmental management provisions included in the tripartite agreement, or the terms of
logging and payment revised annually by the three parties concerned. Whether MARENA is
inhibited by an inability or an unwillingness to defend the community's rights is unclear; the
fact remains however, that although the Nicaraguan government appears to support co-
management, sustainable development and indigenous rights in theory, they fail to adequately
translate their convictions into practice.

The weakness of Nicaraguan political institutions is also demonstrated by the example of
the tripartite contract, since the Regional Council, the principal regional authority which

20 In late 1997, there were rumours that the national government was considering demoting MARENA
from its ministerial status to its previous status as IRENA, the Institute of Natural Resources and
Environment, because it was not bringing in enough revenue. This would mean a drastic reduction in the
institutional budget. In order to forestall this decision, MARENA was seeking to increase its income
from taxes on the sale of natural resources, a policy priority which had necessarily led to a neglect of its
conservation duties.
according to the Nicaraguan Constitution, needs to approve all concessions and contracts (Article 181) of resource extraction granted or decided in the RAAN, was totally excluded from the agreement. The Regional Council was apparently completely dysfunctional at the time when the agreement was drawn up, and unable to participate in the process, although asked to do so by Awas Tingni's advisors. Even so, in a region with complex jurisdictions and multiple competing interests, co-management initiatives ultimately need to incorporate all potential stakeholders - in this case the Regional Council, municipal authorities of Waspam and neighbouring communities - if they are to prove sustainable. Indeed, both Regional Council and the municipal authorities interviewed in Waspam during 1996 and 1997 appeared to feel slighted by their exclusion from the tripartite agreement, and as a result, were not prepared to assist the community in any of its subsequent problems with the company, or support their petition for human rights violations against the Nicaraguan government presented before the OAS.

As long as tenure rights in the region remained undefined, political systems and authority in conflict, and environmental regulations not enforced, the regional basis for sustainable co-management regimes will inevitably remain unstable. Moreover, given the poor state of the regional economy, and the extremely difficult material circumstances which indigenous communities throughout the RAAN are forced to cope with, it is extremely possible that indigenous communities will ultimately exercise their land and management rights in the interests of foreign companies and national export quotas, rather than socially and ecologically sustainable modes of resource use. It is important not to lose sight of the theoretical and moral significance of the tripartite commercial forestry agreement, which in truth, has brought certain, albeit limited benefits to individuals and the community as a whole. Nonetheless, if the weaknesses of this arrangement are not acknowledged and redressed, then its ability to serve as a new model for forestry management in the RAAN will have been squandered.

SOLCARSA

The difficulty of translating the principles encapsulated by Nicaragua's October 1993 Forestry Code into practical, effective policies, given the climate of political and institutional uncertainty which prevails in this country, was further underlined by the SOLCARSA case, which will be briefly examined in this section. SOLCARSA is a lumber company from South Korea, part of a much larger corporate conglomerate called Kum-Kyung, whose background is primarily in the textile industry, and which had no prior experience in the tropical forestry industry. The company first approached the Nicaraguan government for a permit to exploit forest resources in the RAAN in 1993. After a long period of closed negotiations between the national government and SOLCARSA, on March 13th of 1995, the then Minister for MARENA

21 SOLCARSA is an acronym for "Sol Del Caribe S.A." or Corporation of the Caribbean Sun.
granted the company concession to exploit forestry resources in an area of 62,000 ha. which they
had chosen to treat as national property (Acosta, 1995: 32). However, since tenure rights in the
RAAN have yet to be determined, the government obviously had no right to assume that this area
was national territory, of interest to no other stakeholders. As a map drawn by Awas Tingni
residents depicted in Figure 8 demonstrates, the area in question clearly affects not only their
land use patterns and claims, but other communities besides (see Fig. 8). Furthermore, by
granting the concession without consulting the Regional Council of the RAAN, MARENA was
flagrantly violating the terms of Article 181 of the Nicaraguan Constitution, which establishes
that concessions and contracts for the exploitation of natural resources granted by the State in the
Autonomous Regions of the Atlantic Coast must be approved by the Regional Council
concerned. Although in February 1995, the Executive Board of the then Regional Council had
given the company approval to proceed with its explorations, this did not constitute a formal
approval by the Council, since the Executive Board is not empowered to make decisions of such
magnitude in name of the Council itself. SOLCARSA was therefore in possession of an invalid
permit, illegally granted by MARENA.

A few Regional Council representatives, realising that their constitutional rights had been
violated, lodged an appeal before the Supreme Court. On the 27th of February, 1997, the Court
resolved in favour of the petition presented by Alfonso Smith Warsman and Humberto
Thompson Sang, both members of the RAAN Regional Council, declaring that the concession
was illegal since it clearly infringed Article 181. The concession, and the Nicaraguan
government's blatant attempt to disregard the constitutional rights of the autonomous region and
indigenous communities appeared to have been thwarted.

However, the Nicaraguan government refused to accept defeat. The policies of the new
Aleman government, which entered office in January 1997, have if anything, been even more
focused towards attracting foreign investment to Nicaragua than the preceding Chamorro
administration. Before the crash of the Asian market, South-East Asian nations had shown
particular interest in investing in Central America, given the exceptionally low wages and lax
working conditions / regulations which characterise this region (Envio, 1997; 9). However, as a
SOLCARSA employee informed me, although many investors in South Korea were extremely
interested in moving their operations to Nicaragua, they were nevertheless monitoring
SOLCARSA's experience first, in order to determine whether the institutional climate was really
favourable and secure for investment or not. For the government therefore, a swift resolution of
this matter was vital for their long-term international and national political and economic
interests, priorities over and above local social and ecological concerns.
Seeing as the Supreme Court had declared the concession illegal on the grounds that the Regional Council in full session had never approved it, the government tried to make amends retrospectively. On May 29th, 1997, the Minister of MARENA, sent a letter to the President of the Regional Council, in which he formally asked the RAAN Regional Council to approve the concession. However, the Regional Council, whose finances had been mostly withheld by the Nicaraguan government during most of 1997, was largely inoperational during this time, and had not met in full session since July of the previous year.22 As an article in a national newspaper noted in May 1997,

".. the liberal government reduced the autonomous Regional Councils' budgets to trivial levels, whilst evicting various officials without taking the indigenous authorities into account at all" (Barricada, 21/5/97)

In order to secure the Regional Council's approval, the national government could not simply encourage them to accept the concession: they would have to provide them with the financial means to hold a session. As a result, MARENA personally put up the majority of funds necessary to mount a Council session to approve what had already been deemed an illegal forestry concession by the highest court in Nicaragua to an inexperienced lumber company; money which reportedly - and if so, ironically - came from MARENA's Forestry Fund.23

A Regional Council session had been scheduled for October 1997, but just because MARENA had financed the meeting, they were not necessarily guaranteed a favourable vote. The SOLCARSA concession had been the subject of widespread and growing criticism, not only at the regional, but perhaps even more so, at national and international levels, particularly from environmentalists. A number of steps were therefore taken by MARENA, in conjunction with their allies in the Council, in order to ensure the concession's approval. According to a Regional Council delegate from the mining town of Rosita, the President of the Council brought a small group of influential Council members together at a closed session, prior to the full Council meeting, at which he urged them to use their personal influence to ensure the approval of the SOLCARSA concession. If the Council did not approve the SOLCARSA concession, he told them, the National Government had threatened to retaliate by withholding what remained of the Council's already severely reduced budget. The session itself was personally attended by the national Director of ADFOREST,24 who delivered a speech prior to the Council's debate over

22 A joint session between the RAAN and RAAS Councils had been held in Puerto Cabezas in November 1996; however, the objective at the session was to address matters of collective concern to the Atlantic Coast, rather than those matters exclusive to the RAAN.
23 The remainder of the finances were provided by ASDI, the Swedish NGO which has for some time been providing technical support and training to the Regional Council. ASDI representatives had deep misgivings about the SOLCARSA concession, but since they needed an opportunity to formally redefine their relationship with the Regional Council, they reluctantly chose to jointly carry the costs with MARENA (ASDI, pers.comm, 1997).
24 The MARENA institution responsible for administering state lands
the concession, in which he reportedly urged Council members to vote in its favour. According to various people who heard his speech, he presented a forceful defence of SOLCARSA, dismissing the various accusations currently being made against them: that they paid little care to the environment, that they were untrustworthy, that they treated their workers badly. Council members are also likely to have been influenced by party affiliations; members of President Aleman's Liberal Party being cognizant of the fact that to defy the party line and vote against the concession, would inevitably end their hopes of being nominated for re-election in the forthcoming regional elections of March 1998. In a region of such high unemployment, where political office represents both a vital source of income as well as a position of some power and influence, decisions of long-term and collective consequence can nevertheless be determined by short-term, individualistic considerations. Rumours also circulated throughout the region after the session that various members of the Council, the President in particular, had been bribed by either MARENA or SOLCARSA to vote in favour of the concession, although this was impossible to confirm.

The eventual outcome of the Regional Council's vote, given all these extenuating circumstances, was probably not all that surprising: 26 in favour, 8 against, with 11 absentees out of a total of 45. Since the Council had now approved the SOLCARSA concession, the national government declared the Supreme Court's objections to have been resolved, and the company was given leave to proceed with all considered legality. However, the Regional Council's approval in October 1997 did not undo the original and essential illegality of the concession - that it had violated the rights of the autonomous region and indigenous communities combined - and the Supreme Court did not change its original decision. In February of 1998, MARENA was eventually forced to acknowledge their authority and do what they should have done the previous year: cancel the concession outright, with SOLCARSA being given two months to wind up operations and leave the country. The SOLCARSA concession had been definitively abandoned, but its implications for the future of sustainable co-management arrangements and indigenous rights in the region persist. Throughout this debacle, the behaviour of the Nicaraguan government suggested that despite the Forestry Code and the tripartite agreement with Awas Tingni and MADENSA, national political institutions essentially continued to resist adopting new management approaches. The Aleman government acted deviously and unilaterally in trying to ignore the rights of both the region and the indigenous communities. Given MARENA's inability to effectively monitor lumber companies and enforce environmental regulations in the region, combined with SOLCARSA's poor management credentials, had the government been truly concerned with sustainable forestry management, they would surely not have entertained the prospect of allowing the company to gain a foothold in Nicaragua. The case

25 Although SOLCARSA was not working within the concessionary area itself, they were buying wood independently from communities and individuals.
of SOLCARSA suggested that the Nicaraguan government remains unwilling to change historically learnt institutional behaviour, which given that state policies remain so heavily influenced by developmentalist, export-oriented objectives, is perhaps not all that surprising. Indeed, the political trend in Nicaragua seems to be leaning ever-more towards, rather than away from such criteria: the Liberal government of Arnoldo Aleman was much more persistent in attempting to secure approval of the SOLCARSA concession than the Chamorro government had been in 1991. As long as the Nicaraguan governments continue to thwart, rather than promote, the implementation of new policy frameworks for forestry management which uphold local and environmental interests, progress in this area will remain difficult.

The SOLCARSA case from regional perspectives

Although the SOLCARSA concession violated both regional and indigenous rights, it nevertheless received both guarded, and even some outright support in the region. An examination of regional attitudes to the SOLCARSA case shows how local perspectives can be affected by historical experience and national economic policies, however detrimental these might be to the locality in the long-term. The Regional Council's approval of the SOLCARSA concession, though partly the product of manipulation by the national government, and the individualistic concerns of the Council members, also reflected the personal convictions and concerns of the costeño representatives involved. As records of the October session26 at which the SOLCARSA issue was debated demonstrate, members advocating approval of the Solcarsa concession pointed to the need to attract investment to the region, arguably the most isolated and backward part of the country. As one Miskitu delegate, now a Puerto resident, but originally from the River Wangki argued, the contrary position of some of the other delegates only served to turn investors away from the region, to the detriment of the whole. Did the region want to develop, or did they want to preserve their indigenous communities and forests for the sporadic interest of foreign anthropologists? SOLCARSA had so far invested around $15-16.5 million dollars in the RAAN; he argued that by rejecting the motion, they would not only lose these funds, but would deter further potential investment in the process. The concerns expressed by this delegate reflect those of many other members of the Regional Council, whether mestizo, Creole or indigenous. In the same way that community members of Asang and Awas Tingni defend their right to expropriate resources for personal benefit out of necessity, given the paucity of alternative ways to eke out livelihoods in the region, so too do indigenous members of the Region Council.

Furthermore, even though some Council members expressed misgivings about the concession, they nevertheless must consider the immediate needs of their constituents, and do

26 The IV Ordinary Session of the Regional Council for the Legislative Period of 1996-8.
their utmost to bring jobs and investment to the localities. Delegates from Rosita were under particular pressure in this respect to approve the SOLCARSA concession, where the company had established its headquarters and was constructing a sawmill. SOLCARSA was already employing over 200 people in Rosita, and was anticipating a workforce of nearly 700 once operations were fully under way. By approving the concession, the Rosita delegates (which included the President of the Regional Council) were fulfilling their pre-election promise to bring much-needed employment to a severely depressed municipality. They also hoped that the company would support the improvement of social services in Rosita, which has no electricity, and one of the most disease-ridden water systems in the region. With these considerations in mind, and even though labour conflicts had already arisen between the company and workers from Rosita, the Rosita delegates voted in favour of the concession, soliciting and receiving the support of delegates from the other mining municipalities in the process. It is therefore apparent that given the backwardness of the economy, the pressing livelihood needs of the regional population (indigenous and non-indigenous alike), and the absence of alternative sources of employment, income or investment, both Council members and their constituents, constrained by the institutional, economic, political and historical contexts might choose to make the best of a bad option, and suffer the long-term consequences when they arise.

Not all people in the RAAN share this perspective, however. Affected indigenous communities such as Awas Tingni opposed the concession primarily because it violated their territorial rights. However, the community, in common with most others, does not object to commercial forestry per se. Indeed MADENSA, the company they are currently involved in a tripartite agreement to exploit forestry resources with, has an equally poor record of environmental management, leading MARENA to reportedly consider revoking their permit on numerous occasions.27 Representatives from the Elders' Council objected to the SOLCARSA concession because it violated the territorial rights, and rights to consultation, of the indigenous peoples in general; although informants said that in theory, they welcomed the prospect of generating regional development through commercial forestry. The educational institutions, the media and NGOs in Puerto Cabezas were the only group to forcefully express their concerns about the system of commercial forestry per se, and the historical exploitation of regional resources. They also tended to present their condemnation of the SOLCARSA agreement in regional, rather than specifically indigenous terms. In an article by a professor from the local university, URACCAN (read by the local radio stations28), the region was urged to resist the SOLCARSA concession:

27 Personal communication from MARENA delegates in Puerto Cabezas and Managua
28 The main form of communication in the RAAN is by radio; the sole local newspaper has only a monthly, and sometimes only bimonthly, edition with limited circulation.
"How long are we going to continue allowing the policies of particular regional, national and transnational groups to be imposed upon us? ... Fellow costeños, let us protect our region, let us defend her from those who, masquerading themselves as children of the Nicaraguan Coast, abuse their positions, and leave future generations without resources for their livelihoods. A movement must be initiated by civil society to present the excesses and abuses of authority within our very own regional autonomous institutions." (Zapata, 1997)

A brief survey of the various types of attitudes found in the region, and amongst indigenous peoples, towards the SOLCARSA concession shows that only the small professional class showed marked concern for the long-term effects of contemporary approaches to resources management in the region whose forestry industry, despite progressive legislation and conceptual policy frameworks, continues to be more defined by the past than the future. Hopefully, the professional classes will manage to affect changes in dominant regional perspectives, which continue to largely see the value of natural resources in terms of historical industrial exploitation, rather than as vehicles for sustainable development. The different attitudes expressed by indigenous informants towards the SOLCARSA case also indicates the need to acknowledge the diversity of opinions which can be expressed not only throughout regional society, but within indigenous cultures themselves. Although indigenous peoples in the RAAN primarily associate their interests with their communities, they can nevertheless also defend inter-community or ethnic, and regional interests as well. A future policy framework for management of natural resources in the region will need to combine all the different interests - community, inter-community, regional and national - if it is to prove truly sustainable in the complex jurisdictional and social context of the RAAN.

Summary

Significant advances in indigenous claims for rights, sovereignty and development can depend, in the final analysis, on "a moral premise, a shaky support in a world of realpolitik and the cold logic of capitalism" (Gartrell 1983, quoted in Wilmsen, 1989: 12). According to Wilmsen's research in Australia, aboriginal gains in the past decade have only occurred when the status quo has not been unduly threatened by conceding them. If they threaten to shake the foundations of the establishment, and undermine the sovereignty of the nation-state, they are much more difficult to achieve. As he observes,

"...in the process of securing the rights of one segment of society, the inclusive body politic redefines its own internal relations to itself." (Wilmsen, 1989: 13).

Few states are however prepared to allow such radical changes to the systems they preside over. On balance, it appears that although the Nicaraguan state was willing to develop a new policy framework for forestry management, sensitive to co-management, sustainability and indigenous rights principles, it remains largely unwilling to translate theory into practice. The government is not willing to permit its own authority to be undermined. And whilst the state remains
reluctantly disposed to honour the constitutional rights of indigenous communities, their incentive to violate rules imposed by the state bureaucracy, and fail to cooperate with state authorities, increases (Baland & Platteau, 1996: 251). Trust and willingness amongst the various stakeholders to co-operate with one another are both extremely tenuous in the RAAN.

This chapter has examined indigenous environmental perspectives in relation to state institutions and commercial forestry in the region today. Analysis of case study material has shown how historical precedent, institutional behaviour, political expediency and economic constraints not only inhibit the realisation of progressive legislation and co-management objectives, but also confine the parameters of indigenous outlook and action. For indigenous communities in a marginal region like the RAAN to wrest control over the management process, and make both regional and indigenous rights effective, greater co-operation between all the levels and perspectives represented in the region will have to occur. However, as long as regional stakeholders continue to remain trapped by the control and the example set by national institutions, the integration of co-management, sustainable development and indigenous rights principles into management approaches will be difficult to achieve. The national government cannot just enact progressive policies; it must implement them as well. Meanwhile, there is an urgent need for the respective authorities of the national, regional and municipal governments, and the indigenous communities, to be clarified.

This chapter has also shown how involvement in co-management arrangements themselves can incur significant social costs for indigenous communities. Community leaders, chosen according to traditional criteria rather than their skill to deal with new administrative, organisational and political challenges, can prove disappointing and can lose authority when faced with situations and responsibilities they are unfamiliar with. The problems they experience can also provoke tension to develop within the community itself. Inter-community rivalries can also arise from the introduction of non-indigenous systems and values. Co-management initiatives will ultimately prove more lasting if they can manage to adapt to the complexities of local contexts. Of course, not all indigenous communities will necessarily confront such problems in co-management situations. Some will successfully adapt local institutions, behaviour and perspectives to cope with the new circumstances in which they find themselves. Certainly, the Miskitus of northeastern Nicaragua have throughout history demonstrated a remarkable propensity to adapt to new contexts whilst retaining their particular indigenous identity; similarly, the Mayangnas, despite the bitter persecutions they have suffered from Europeans, Miskitus and diseases throughout time, have resiliently preserved themselves and their culture into the late twentieth century. However, as this chapter has demonstrated, even they can find the task of practically and conceptually adapting to sustainable resource management regimes and approaches developed in non-traditional contexts difficult to realise.
In the next and final chapter, following a summary of conclusions made regarding indigenous environmental perspectives in this thesis, the future for joint approaches to management in the particular context of the RAAN will be considered.
Chapter 9 Summary, Implications and Recommendations

In what ways has this thesis facilitated appreciation of the environmental perspectives held by indigenous peoples, particularly the Miskitus, in the RAAN, and what are the implications of this analysis for the future of long-term collaborative approaches to regional resource management? In order to address these questions, this chapter has been divided into three sections. In the first, a summary of the salient characteristics of indigenous attitudes towards environmental use and management context are discussed in this thesis is presented. In the next section, following a brief theoretical review of the types of conditions which can either thwart or encourage sustainable co-management initiatives, the potential prospects of such management systems evolving in the RAAN, in light of regional characteristics discussed, will be assessed. In the final section, suggestions, designed for local and international consumption alike, on how the development of co-management regimes might be facilitated in this region, will be considered.

Indigenous Environmental Perspectives

By examining the Miskitus from a variety of conceptual perspectives and through different historical experiences, this thesis has revealed the multiple layers and complex motivations which determine indigenous environmental concerns and agendas. I will briefly summarize some of the major observations made regarding the indigenous environmental perspectives common to the Miskitu people. This thesis has shown how indigenous resource use practices have historically been determined by both instrumental and ideological considerations. For example, in terms of instrumental or material motivations, it is possible to point to the long-standing indigenous tradition of participating in external economic systems, to acquire what Helms called "purchasing power." Subsistence strategies are not sufficient to provide psychologically satisfying livelihoods for indigenous peoples; the commercialisation of natural resources remains a fundamental material motivation of their livelihood systems. Meanwhile, ideological motivations also affect how the Miskitus use natural resources. Today, as in the past, land is treated as a common resource, and although the resilience of community solidarity and values is currently being strained, there is nevertheless a remarkable lack of competition over the diminishing land and resource base within communities themselves. A variety of factors are however making material considerations dominate indigenous preoccupations. Population increases in indigenous communities during the twentieth century have put greater pressure upon the local environment to cater to expanding needs. Indigenous needs have however not only expanded because of population change; foreign companies and the Moravian Church have in particular inspired the growth of indigenous material aspirations in indigenous society, which have arguably developed disproportionately with the communities' ability to fulfill them. These
changes within local society moreover occurred concurrently with the increased activity of unregulated resource extractive industries, and the influx of peasant migrants from the west. In combination, these factors have meant that by the 1990s, indigenous environmental perspectives are being formulated within the context of ecological scarcity.

Although indigenous communities are currently recognising that both resources and land are being consumed at unsustainable rates, communities have nevertheless not made significant modifications to their livelihood systems to address these problems. In order to understand why indigenous communities have not developed local institutions to regulate their own use of resources, an appreciation of how Miskitus react to ecological scarcity is necessary. The principle motivating factors shaping their responses to scarcity would appear to be their (and the region's) traditional approaches to resource use, contemporary livelihood needs, and the historical mistrust with which they view national governance systems. As argued in Chapter 4, pre-Christian beliefs did not encourage indigenous peoples to assume responsibility for the management of natural resources, a concept which was probably alien to their understanding of how the natural world functioned. However, their fear and respect for the powerful and vengeful natural-spirits which they believed owned the natural resources, and directed the natural cycles (a cosmology which moreover appears highly suited to the ecological characteristics of the often merciless and destructive environment in which they live) seemed to promote unconscious conservationism by limiting the amount of resources used by the indigenous peoples. Other factors also served to historically minimise local impact upon the environment, including low populations, primitive technology, and the ethics of equality, sharing and co-operation according to which indigenous communities functioned. The development of local management institutions under these circumstances did not become necessary. However, the characteristics of traditional indigenous cosmology, the settlement and livelihood practices, and their internal community values would all be substantially revised under the influence of Christianity, regional commercial enterprises and the paradigms of modernisation and development which both Church and company brought to the indigenous communities. The levels of local and commercial demands upon the environment would subsequently both increase. However, given communities' lack of management traditions, indigenous peoples tend to leave these responsibilities to government and the tecnicos, as shown by the case of Awas Tingni. They have moreover received no encouragement from government to take more responsibility for local resource management; if anything, the policies of the Nicaraguan government serve to promote, rather than deter, ecological destruction.

Furthermore, the historical lack of trust which exists between indigenous communities and the Nicaraguan government, combined with the dire economic conditions which national policies have foisted upon them, has compounded their tendency to use resources according to
immediate, rather than long-term considerations. The major issue for communities, given their almost total lack of confidence in government systems, is not how resources are used, but who gets to own or benefit from their use. Since government is viewed as a competitor rather than collaborator in the management of natural resources, indigenous communities have developed a defensive, almost siege-like mentality towards the land and resources which they claim. In the absence of inter-stakeholder trust, their primary response to the situation of ecological scarcity is to protect their own immediate interests. Competition over resources, motivated by fear of the future, is occurring throughout the stakeholder spectrum. Besides competition between government and communities, conflict amongst neighbouring communities, between communities and the regional leaders, and even within the communities themselves (for example in Awas Tingni, over how the community forestry fund should be spent) is occurring. On a positive note, some communities are independently taking steps to resolve inter-community conflicts, by choosing to present their land claims on a collective rather than individual basis. Collective land claims are able to accommodate the historical reality of shifting or "soft" community borders, which have expanded over time, in response to increasing patterns of land use and indigenous reevaluations of natural, particularly forestry, resources. These changes have left so much room for debate over land ownership between indigenous communities, that many have recognised the wisdom of inter-communal land claims. However, even by pooling their resources and pursuing their land claims collectively, the efforts of indigenous communities, in the face of government intransigence, are not proving effective. And as long as the national government resists demarcating indigenous community land, and facilitating the entry of local stakeholders into the management process, natural resource "management" in the region will continue to be determined by competition and short-term concerns.

Summary

Contemporary indigenous environmental perspectives in the RAAN have therefore been influenced by a variety of factors, including community traditions, livelihood requirements, historical experience, institutional and economic systems, poor relations with government, and especially in present times, by fear and uncertainty about the future. The diversity of influences and considerations which, as this research has shown, motivate indigenous attitudes towards natural resources, and thereby affect the nature of regional resource management in the region, has clearly demonstrated the need to integrate not only political and economic, but cultural and historical considerations as well into resource management research and policy approaches. Social considerations become especially relevant when co-management initiatives, which so heavily depend upon interpersonal relationships, are the focus of inquiry.

However, in regards to co-management, the findings of this study do not appear to suggest that conditions in north-eastern Nicaragua favour the consensual and sustainable
governance of natural resources. In order to fully test this assumption, the following section will review the theoretical conditions which both foster and undermine the formulation of co-management regimes, in order to then develop an informed assessment of their prospects for success within the RAAN itself.

Developing Co-management Regimes: Obstacles and Opportunities

The theoretical and practical appropriateness of a co-management approach to resource management has already been discussed in Chapter 1, and will therefore be only briefly considered here. Co-management initiatives recognise the centrality of local peoples to the management equation, and allow communities to retain their local autonomy and control over resources - while at the same, acknowledging that in modern contexts, local and particularly indigenous communities might not be able to successfully manage their resources alone. In co-management arrangements, states need to play a continued, if modified, role in supporting local management efforts. A co-management approach to regulating common property resources therefore represents a more integrated way of conceptualising management issues, than if the systems and problems of private, state and common resource property and management regimes are treated as separate and distinct. The objective is not to make the state withdraw from local contexts, but to modify the nature of governmental intervention and institutional role in order to become, and be seen, as partners with the locality (Baland & Platteau, 1996: 346-7). In the case of indigenous peoples, the conceptual approach of co-management, which implies a pooling of both knowledge and responsibility, enables them to retain culturally-distinct identities and practices, whilst at the same time, acquiring useful non-traditional skills to enhance their capacity for successful local management. Co-management initiatives therefore hope to maximize the viability of management regimes by adopting a cross-system, multi-stakeholder, consensus-based management framework, to bring together rather than segregate all the various interest groups.

From a theoretical standpoint, co-management seems to represent a magical solution to the dilemma of managing common property resources. However, how is a co-management regime actually developed? Most crucially, what kind of conditions serve to either inhibit or promote the successful development and implementation of co-management regimes? Identifying and addressing these factors is obviously a vital pre-requisite, and constant responsibility, of those wishing to implement co-management regimes. A selection of both negative and positive characteristics are considered below.

Factors Inhibiting the Development of Co-management Regimes

If governmental institutions remain reluctant to devolve and share power with the locality, co-management regimes are unlikely to develop. Co-management regimes have little chance of developing against the tide of government resistance. Moreover, when a reluctant
government is also compelled to define local land rights, rights which it contests, as a pre­
condition of a co-management enterprise, it is all the less likely to attempt them. In addition,
many states, particularly in developing countries, can lack either the ability, resources or
disposition to experiment with new administrative approaches. If they are already having
difficulties enforcing existing laws, they will probably be reluctant to assume further institutional
responsibilities. Alternatively, they might go ahead and create the legislative and institutional
trappings of co-management, but do little to make them effective. Even if states are willing to
countenance co-management regimes, they might nevertheless be bound by the rules of
international lending agencies which force them to restrict social spending to the bare minimum,
and concentrate their energies on the export economy instead. Under these circumstances, state
policies will tend to favour centralised power and vested economic interests, rather than long­
term social and ecological interests and co-management regimes (Baland & Platteau, 1996: 379).
For example, although the Honduran government has done a great deal to promote communal
use of forestry resources, it is nevertheless pursuing developmentalist policies which inevitably
undermine them. Increased economic hardship and social inequity is presently threatening the
resilience of common property institutions in this country (Tucker, IASCP: 1998)

Meanwhile, communities might themselves be either reluctant or unable to pursue co­
management initiatives. Where local communities view the state with hostility and mistrust, they
will not only resist collaborating with government authorities; they are also likely to defy
legislation which restricts their (possibly historical) autonomous use of resources. If the
relationship between government and the locality is poor, local people might not want to become
involved in government initiatives which they do not understand, and whose objectives they
probably suspect. In Uganda, forests are under the control of a centralised government which
relies heavily upon putative measures to enforce its decrees. Local peoples, who resent
governmental authority and punishments, inevitably try to defy the management systems which it
imposes. In the meantime, since the government and local peoples are locked in competition
over forest resources, these are inevitably becoming degraded (Ongugo; IASCP, 1998).
Communities are meanwhile unlikely to independently explore new ways of using resources,
since experimentation risks undermining tried and familiar practices. This is particularly true if
the local peoples concerned lack the requisite organisational, technical and administrative skills
needed to develop new approaches with. Outside "experts" are however often unwilling, unable
or unaware of the need to help communities acquire them. Moreover, indigenous communities
can suffer from long histories of dependency upon external political and economic systems
(Berkes, 1991: 17). Traditional norms and practices regulating the use of common property
resources can be undermined over time by external intrusions and the usurpation of local
authority and agency, leaving the locality passively dependent upon outside support and
economic systems. Alternatively, economic and political intrusions by the state can over time
foster great resentment at the locality, encouraging radical assertions of indigenous communal rights to be adopted, and power-sharing arrangements with the government to be resisted. An example of this is provided by Filkret Berkes, from his research amongst the indigenous tribes of Northern Canada

"The rights of southern non-native Canadians over northern wildlife, and the concerns of resources scientists .. are not high on the priority list of northern native elders. For many, the issue of aboriginal rights is at the top of the agenda: northern natives are not merely one of the "user-groups" ... they are the owners of the resources of "their" land ... some native leaders believe that genuine co-management is possible only with native self-government" (Berkes, 1991: 17)

Conditions facilitating co-management

We have so far considered the types of circumstances which inhibit the development of co-management regimes. What kind of conditions might however encourage their development? Obviously, if the governance systems are committed to real institutional changes, and recognise that the costs of increasing social capital are ultimately less than those required to replace degraded resources, then much progress can be made. For example, in Tanzania, the state has recognised itself as an inadequate manager of resources, and has therefore spearheaded the empowerment of local villages. Once registered, villages in Tanzania become a recognised level of local government, with extensive legislative powers of management. The responsibility and trust being afforded by the state to communities, has encouraged them to develop long-term environmental perspectives, and develop self-regulatory mechanisms designed to use resources more sustainably, since they trust the national government not to threaten their local resources and authority (Wily; IASCP, 1998).

When governments are however reluctant to devolve power to the localities, there are a number of steps which communities can employ in order to overcome government resistance. As Evelyn Pinkerton has argued, local communities can make alliances with other stakeholders, NGOs or agencies sharing similar political objectives. They can also appeal to the general public interest, in order to increase their political leverage. By involving other sources of power, such as national or international courts, or non-governmental political interests, useful additional pressure can be applied on the government. When in 1986, the New Zealand government attempted to evade the terms of an earlier treaty to settle Maori land claims in Crown Land, by passing an Act allowing the transfer of Crown Land to a new (state-controlled) Land Corporation, where it could be sold to third parties and would remain out of the reach of the Maori claimants, the Maori Council filed a complaint before the national Court of Appeals.¹ In June 1987, the Court ruled that the government’s failure to set up a system acceptable to the

¹ The Treaty which specified that only Crown Land could be used in treaty settlements was the Treaty of Waitangi Act of 1975. The subsequent treaty, which attempted to skirt government responsibilities, was the State Owned Enterprises Act of 1986.
Maori for the transfer of potential indigenous land to state owned enterprises represented a breach of its partnership responsibilities (Prystupa, 1998:136). By utilising the Court of Appeals, the Maori were able to prevent the New Zealand government's attempt to isolate them from the land management process. When governments do not threaten local rights, however, indigenous communities can pursue less confrontational tactics to facilitate the development of power-sharing arrangements, for example by showing themselves willing to negotiate and compromise with government, and to devote their own efforts and resources to the development of co-management institutions (Pinkerton, 1989; Senecal-Albrecht, IASCP, 1998).

Ultimately, whilst multiple obstacles can obviously impede progress in joint management, there are also a number of ways in which these can be overcome. The commitment of the various stakeholders, particularly government and local peoples, to co-management regimes is obviously a crucial precondition of co-management regimes, as is the clarification of property rights, and the development of new institutional structures able to operate on multidimensional levels, to foster responsibility and accountability for management amongst all stakeholders concerned. In light of the theoretical considerations raised in this section, how feasible does the development and implementation of co-management initiatives appear to be for the context of northeastern Nicaragua? This question is assessed below.

The potential for co-management in north-eastern Nicaragua

The first, and probably most crucial question which must be posed regarding the potential for co-management institutions in north-eastern Nicaragua is: does the Nicaraguan state appear favourably or negatively disposed to co-management principles, and the devolution of power and institutional reforms which it implies? Although as discussed in Chapters 2 and 8, Nicaragua has approved extremely progressive legislative and constitutional rights to both empower indigenous communities and the Atlantic regions, and promote sustainable, collective approaches to resource management, post-war governments have however been notably reluctant to implement these principles. Rather than furthering regional autonomy, by empowering the Regional Councils, or granting indigenous communities titles to their land, the government has largely sought to retain its centralised power. As a result, boundaries between state and indigenous lands remain unclear, whilst the Regional Council has failed to provide the support and leadership which the isolated and disparate indigenous communities so desperately require. The various powers and responsibilities of the national, regional and municipal governments remain in practice, muddled and conflicting. Meanwhile, Nicaragua's institutional traditions of weak government from the centre, despite being temporarily challenged by the Sandinistas in the 1980s, have continued to characterise governance systems in the 1990s. Neither the empowerment of regional institutions and local peoples, nor sustainable management practices are being encouraged. For example, the regional branch of MARENA based in Puerto Cabezas...
is severely under-equipped, and has suffered considerable cutbacks on staff over the past couple of years. MARENA's headquarters in Managua appear by contrast, remarkably well staffed and equipped. The centralisation of the institution's resources is certainly not conducive to good management practices in the outlying regions where resources are actually located. Moreover, appointments in MARENA, as indeed in all walks of government, are as likely to be determined by political allegiance than by merit, meaning that the best person for the job is not always the one holding it. For example, the former head of MARENA in the RAAN was a political appointee with no experience in resource management, and was clearly out of his depth. The lack of dedicated, professionally-trained governmental employees is therefore a significant factor inhibiting the development of good governance and management systems. The Nicaraguan government is itself, however, operating in less than ideal conditions. The demands of contemporary structural readjustment measures imposed by international lending agencies heavily influence Nicaraguan policies to show more concern to foreign economies and interests, than to long-term local needs. Government energies are not being directed to protecting, but exporting, the natural resources of the country. The government's own policies, and the developmentalist constraints which it submits to, tend to discourage the development of co-management regimes in the RAAN.

In regards to the communities, historical mistrust of the government has not abated in the 1990s; if anything, it has increased. Negative local perspectives of state authority have been transplanted and applied to the regional autonomous authorities as well. Local, and arguably unrealistic expectations that despite the difficult conditions of the post-war period, swift changes would result from the regional autonomous system have since been sorely disappointed. Popular disappointment has in turn fuelled social instability in the RAAN (Howard, 1993a: 424). As a result, communities are more likely to suspect than welcome governmental initiatives to address land and resource issues (such as occurred with the INFONAC reforestation project of the 1970s, or the National Land Demarcation Commission of 1996).

On the other hand, Awas Tingni's commitment to the tripartite agreement with the government and MADENSA suggests that although communities remain suspicious of the authorities, they can nevertheless be willing to experiment with co-management approaches involving a partnership with the state, if it is clearly in their advantage to do so. However, it is debatable whether this tripartite agreement should really be treated as an example of regional co-management. The community has in practice, little to do with the government, which in turn, has little contact with the community. The government has not bothered to either help them develop the requisite organisation, technical and administrative skills to deal with the new challenges they are facing, or to protect community, and indeed regional and national interests as well by forcing MADENSA to respect the environment regulations of the agreement. Moreover,
since the community is being treated as the *de facto* owner of the 43,000 hectares in which MADENSA is operating, though they might very well not ultimately receive a land title for all of this area, the agreement is in many respects, very much in their favour. They have not had to make much accommodation to the *terms* of the agreement itself. Would the community have been so favourably disposed to this agreement had more substantial sacrifices been required of them? For example, had a condition of the agreement been that they reduce their land claims in other areas to accommodate the needs of the neighbouring Miskitu communities, would they have accepted? It would be interesting to see whether if other communities become involved in similar agreements, which however require greater accommodations from them, they will prove as willing to collaborate with the government or not. Meanwhile, if the state, represented by MARENA, became compelled to actually fulfill its co-management responsibilities - to monitor the lumber company and to train and support the community - would it be so willing to enter such an agreement? It is ultimately difficult to predict how both state and communities would behave under these circumstances without further case study examples, but given that they remain extremely distrustful of one another, the possibility of *real* collaborative management efforts emerging in the near future does not seem very good.

The internal problems which Awas Tingni has confronted as a result of their involvement with the tripartite agreement, most notably in trying to manage the community funds obtained from lumber extraction, have largely occurred because they have been left to fend for themselves, and have not received vital training and support to enable them to cope. As a result, many of the benefits of this agreement have been lost on them. This example suggests that indigenous communities are not traditionally and independently equipped with the requisite skills to develop sustainable management regimes in modern contexts. Local communities in the RAAN will not function successfully within co-management arrangements without concerted institutional support. Sarah Howard's research in this region led her to make similar conclusions:

"...forestry case studies in particular, show that there needs to be a greater appreciation of the barriers to local self-management in the RAAN, notably the low levels of literacy and lack of technical and administrative skills. This is not to deny the Miskitu their rights to control their own destiny in favour of the continuing hegemony of outsiders; but to highlight the need to lay the foundations for development in terms of investment in education and training for the long-term .... a high level of support [is needed] to foster confidence in projects." (Howard, 1993a: 396-7).

The WWF's contentious decision to abandon the Awas Tingni "project" deprived the villagers of the crucial support they needed to transform the forestry funds into concrete improvements for the community. Then again, the responsibility to provide communities with the requisite technologies, financial assistance and management skills necessary to cope in co-management forestry arrangements ultimately lies with the government, as exemplified by Article 4 c) of the Forestry Code (see Chapter 8). Other communities are currently eager to follow Awas Tingni's
example, and develop formal contracts to extract their lumber resources. However, unless precautionary measures are taken to strengthen their self-management capabilities, Awas Tingni’s problems are likely to be replicated in other communities, damaging the basis for local management. And in the absence of institutional training and support involving all communities of the region, whilst their territorial boundaries remain unclear, inter-community conflicts can easily emerge.

In north-eastern Nicaragua, a long history of dependency has led to both an erosion of local systems and values, and radical local assertions of indigenous rights. In Chapters 3 to 5, analysis of the subtle modifications in community livelihoods, values, beliefs and organisation through time showed how both traditional approaches to resource use had become modified, and community cohesion undermined, by cultural and contextual change. Informants in Asang clearly believed that trust, co-operation, morality, and cohesion within the community had weakened considerably over the last few decades, particularly since the 1980s war. It is conceivable that should the community of Asang start gaining income from the sale of their lumber resources without parallel training and support, existing internal community tensions could conceivably increase. However, whilst some aspects of community solidarity have been eroded (to the considerable distress of village members themselves), communities nevertheless remain the central focus of indigenous material and ideological concerns. The continued vitality and meaning of communities within indigenous experience (demonstrated for example by the continued practice of common land tenure) could help encourage them to assume greater responsibilities for the use and future of local environmental resources. Despite internal tensions, Asang villagers were solidly united in their determination to defend their common interests, in this case, over land rights. As Sarah Howard has observed:

"Despite the upheavals experienced by Miskitu communities, the basic building blocks of community development are still in place and customary forms of organisation continue to be important ideals in the minds of the indigenous population." (Howard, 1993a: 427).

The potential ability of community affinity and co-operation to provide a strong social basis from which locally-based management systems might develop needs to be recognised. States, international agencies and management systems alike must foster, and not undermine, the integrity of local indigenous communities.

**Indigenous attempts to gain entry into management processes**

What kind of strategies have the indigenous peoples in the RAAN pursued, if not to specifically develop joint approaches to management, at least to obtain a greater share of control
and responsibility in these processes? Indigenous peoples have a mixed record of forging alliances in order to strengthen their cause. As Chapter 8 argued, sometimes too much effort can be expended by indigenous organisations (as exemplified by the Elders' Council) in attempting to elicit the support of outside sources of power, such as the United Nations or the World Bank, while grassroots mobilisation is being neglected. However, since these appeals can also be successful, as demonstrated by Awas Tingni's case before the Inter-American Human Rights Commission (which could give a much-needed boost to the land demarcation process) and by the action of the Nicaraguan Supreme Court of Justice, in annulling the SOLCARSA concession, following the petition by the Regional Council members, they should and will continue to be pursued. It is important, however, that indigenous leaders strive to maintain a balance between their local and external commitments, so as not to stray too far from their local and cultural support base. In 1998, the Elders' Council has indeed made positive attempts to reverse past imbalances by paying much more attention to the communities than they previously did, as exemplified by several meetings and workshops they have organised designed to increase community awareness and mobilisation over indigenous rights issues in the region. The level of consciousness and political concern within indigenous communities, following an initial period of disorientation and voluntary isolation which they experienced immediately after the war, is reportedly increasing. Communities have become eager for change, and are looking to the international community to help this come about.

Indigenous peoples and organisations in the RAAN have therefore been attempting to harness the support of international, and at times, national juridical bodies. However, they rarely attempt to appeal to national public sympathies. The physical and historical distance between East and West, coupled with prejudice and a lack of interest in the Pacific towards costeños, who themselves view the Nicaraguans to the west with mistrust, has discouraged indigenous communities from seeking national support. Despite their common identity as Nicaraguan citizens, the weakness of national institutions is paralleled by the fragility of nationalist sentiments able to truly unite the Atlantic and Pacific societies of the country. Another factor which likely discourages indigenous peoples from forging national-level alliances is the sheer logistical difficulty of effectively communicating, and maintaining interests, between the two

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2 Ultimately, given that regional and community rights recognised by the Nicaraguan Constitution and Autonomy Law are intended to be exercised within, and are to an extent subordinate to, the sovereignty and policies of the Nicaraguan state (and moreover given that the Nicaraguan state remains responsible both for the welfare of its citizens and the environment) local rights and autonomy are still likely to be implemented within co-management frameworks.

3 A linguistic example of the gulf which remains between Nicaragua's Pacific and Atlantic Coast is provided by the way in which the different sides represent the events of 1894, when the Mosquito reserve was occupied by General Cabezas, and made part of Nicaragua. Whilst the Pacific Nicaraguans refer to this event as the reincorporation of the Atlantic Coast, implying that an unprecedented state of national unity had somehow been restored, costeños are far more likely to speak of the incorporation of the region, in recognition of the fact that it was never previously part of Nicaragua (and thereby suggesting that the area was in fact, illegally seized by the Nicaraguan government).
sides of the country. Indeed, they have a hard enough time forging cross-cultural alliances within the RAAN itself. Regionalist multi-ethnic approaches rarely tend attract much support outside Puerto Cabezas: the Regional Council and autonomy have so far in the 1990s failed to psychologically unify the diverse *costeño* population of Mestizos, Miskitus, Mayangnas and Creoles. Both ethnic, and to a degree, class divisions still keep the groups distinct. Moreover, there still remains a great deal of distance between the Miskitu and Mayangnas; despite certain efforts at collaboration, they can still conceptualise their interests as distinct. On a positive note, however, at least the indigenous peoples in the region are gradually appreciating the need and wisdom of pooling their efforts (even if multi-cultural regional alliances are still difficult to construct) as was noted at the Elders' Council's July workshop:

"The need for unity between the indigenous peoples to defend their territory, and the necessity of building alliances between the Miskitu, Mayangna and Rama peoples was declared..." (Memoria, 1998).

At the community level, both alliances and factionalism are simultaneously emerging. On the one hand, groups of communities such as the Five Communities in which Asang is a member are deciding to combine their efforts in seeking a joint land claim to both enhance their chances of success, and to reflect historical patterns of land use. On the other, the opportunities for inter-community conflicts to develop would appear to be increasing, given the pressing concerns of villagers to secure control over available resources and land. Overall, indigenous patience with government intransigence is running low. Unless the government grants communities land titles, ratifies regional autonomy, and actively includes local peoples in formulating long-term management strategies, militant ethnic discourses and strategies, characteristic of the Miskitu in particular, will continue to enjoy a resurgence in indigenous society. Some indigenous peoples have already rejected legal and negotiation avenues, and have opted for military confrontation with the government instead, as briefly mentioned in Chapter 7. Although a regionwide indigenous military mobilisation against the government seems unlikely, the decision by the indigenous organisation YATAMA in March of 1998 to rearm must nevertheless be seen as a reflection of common grievances. And interestingly enough, although the rearmed YATAMA fighters might seem to represent an extreme form of ethnic militancy, their political agenda is in fact quite reasonable and difficult to dispute. As reported in a Nicaraguan daily newspaper (not a source likely to look kindly on indigenous militarisation) the re-armed YATAMA contingent is simply asking for the demarcation of indigenous land, ratification of the Autonomy Statue and social and economic investment and development in the region (*La Tribuna*, 01/08/98). It shows just how poor relations are between the government and

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4 Although ethnic and class divisions are not necessarily the same, the professional and political positions still tend to be dominated by Mestizos, whilst the indigenous peoples, although enjoying greater control of natural resources, are still inhibited by language and educational barriers. The Creoles in the RAAN primarily reside in Puerto, and are generally more prominent in commerce than Miskitus or Mayangnas.
the indigenous communities, and how reluctant the governance system is to respect the constitutional rights of the localities, that YATAMA members have felt compelled to resort to military tactics in order to make the government respect their legal and constitutional rights. The example of YATAMA also suggests that within the spectrum of political strategies available to the indigenous peoples of the RAAN to achieve their management goals, from co-management at one end, to civil disobedience at another, the communities of this region lie closer to the latter than former extreme. Although most indigenous people have not actually followed their example, the YATAMA protesters nevertheless seem to enjoy a certain degree of local support. At a meeting of indigenous representatives held by the Elders' Council in July 1998 in Puerto Cabezas, the participants reportedly:

".. discussed the situation of the rearmed ex-fighters, who have mobilised for the region in defence of their territory and who are prepared to fight on until achieving the demarcation of the territory, and advancing the autonomy process and administration of natural resources." (Memoria, July 1998)

These participants clearly appear sympathetic to YATAMA's cause and grievances. Continued government resistance to local rights will probably only serve to increase indigenous support for the radical ethnic discourse and militant political strategies.

Overall, whilst alliances and appeals by indigenous organisations and communities have managed to lift the profile of indigenous issues, and increase their ability to overcome government resistance further opportunities for alliance-building (particularly at the regional level) are still being squandered. In light of government intransigence, and given the lack of trust which exists between communities and the government, it is moreover not surprising that indigenous groups tend to pursue the more confrontational than accommodating types of strategies listed in the previous section. The example of the Regional Council, which seems to have become co-opted, rather than strengthened, by association with the national government, appears to underline the wisdom of this strategy. If the gulf of misunderstanding which exists between the indigenous communities and government is to be breached, one side is going to have to take the initiative. At present, the greater responsibility for performing this task lies with Managua, since it is the government which must accept the larger share of responsibility for allowing inter-stakeholder mistrust to perpetuate and fester, by repeatedly denying the indigenous peoples their rights to land and inclusion in the management process. However, Managua continues to resist resolving the land demarcation problem or ratifying the Autonomy

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5 At present, the Regional Council is being run entirely by Liberal Party members, whilst the new Coordinator or Governor of the Regional Government, Alba Rivera, was formerly the national government's representative in the RAAN. Sandinista and YATAMA councillors elected in the regional elections in March were protesting at the time of her election, which was therefore decided entirely by Liberals. The FSLN and YATAMA councillors have not reportedly returned; it was partly in protest at Alba Rivera's election that the YATAMA ex-fighters decided to take up arms against the government again.
Law, and shows little sign of wishing to enter into genuine and frank dialogue with the communities. Hopefully, combined local and international pressure will eventually manage to overcome government intransigence. But whether reform of the context and systems of regional resource management, assuming this ever takes place, will occur in time to offset the rapid pace of social and ecological destruction presently taking place is difficult to predict.

**Conclusions**

The prospects for sustainable and consensual resource approaches emerging in the RAAN in the near future appear, on the basis of the case study evidence assessed, unfortunately quite bleak. Despite progressive legislation promoting local rights and sustainable resource management, and irrespective of the appearance of shared management responsibilities provided by the creation of regional government institutions, neither process has been able to become effective in practice. The preconditions for co-management regimes stated earlier in this section - government willingness, mutual stakeholder trust, defined property regimes and tiered, mutually supportive and accountable institutional systems - are all strikingly absent from the context of the RAAN. Without government commitment, these preconditions will never be met. If the international community is truly interested in promoting indigenous rights and ecological sustainability on a global scale, it must begin to directly and effectively address the politico-economic conditions and governance systems which presently make indigenous and ecological interests so difficult to protect.

**Improving the Management Context: Suggestions for future action**

Natural resource conflicts between indigenous peoples and nation-states will not be resolved without appropriate appreciation of the local perspectives and contexts which determine them. As this study has shown, management contexts and indigenous environmental perspectives need to be considered within the multiple historical, institutional, political and economic levels and layers of experience from which they have arisen. In light of the considerations raised by this thesis, what are the lessons for international facilitators or organisations attempting to improve the management context in this region? What kind of issues does the case of north-eastern Nicaragua suggest that managers and institutions must consider prior to launching management initiatives in local communities, particularly when these affect indigenous communities? A few suggestions indicated by the thesis are presented below.

**The role of governance systems**

This study has clearly demonstrated the need to conceptualise indigenous perspectives both at the community level, and in relation to the governance systems and nation-states within which they are located. Although indigenous communities are often marginalised within nation-states, their livelihoods, objectives and resource use practices are nevertheless considerably
affected by them. It is therefore essential that managers and international agencies consider the role which governance systems play in shaping local decision-making, by promoting and enforcing, or discouraging and undermining, long-term and equitable management practices at the localities. For example, does institutional fragility or political corruption create entrenched disincentives for sustainable environmental use amongst the local communities, and within the management system in general? This thesis has shown that despite the semblance of power sharing between the centre and the localities, and regardless of the theoretical promotion of sustainable resource management, neither have in fact yet occurred in northeastern Nicaragua. Moreover, the discriminatory policies practices of the national governance system are provoking considerable frustration amongst the indigenous communities, fueling hostile and defensive attitudes which do nothing to improve the region's co-management potential.

This research has also severely questioned the wisdom of attempting to construct co-management regimes in contexts marked by weak, ineffectual and resistant state institutions. Although co-management remains a commendable objective, it will arguably remain an elusive goal if the problems posed by poor governance systems are not first addressed and reformed. In order for this to occur, the international community and international lending agencies will need to take more responsibility for fostering the very economic, political and institutional climates which fail to prioritise local and ecological interests in national policies and management systems. There are indeed signs that organisations like the World Bank have recognised the need for policy reform, and are attempting to develop policy frameworks and practices able to encourage more responsible and equitable governance systems. In the Bank's recent Initiating Memorandum for their Forestry Policy Review Process, it was recognised that in the past, the Bank had focused primarily upon the symptoms of environmental degradation, like deforestation, rather than their underlying causes. And although the Bank has for some time been subscribing to the objectives of environmental sustainability and local integration within forestry, and indeed all resource management systems, translating these principles into action has however proved far more difficult to achieve:

"... while a good deal of discussion and analysis has surrounded this issue of mainstreaming environmental and certain social goals into Bank activities, in the case of forests these goals remain unfulfilled at this time." (Initiating Memorandum, World Bank, 1998: 4).

As the Initiating Memorandum went on to recognise, more attention needed to be paid by the Bank to the various levels of government, and the particular perspectives of the various stakeholders concerned, whilst greater resources would need to be provided for regional staff and management. Timetables of action would also have to become more flexible, in order to allow advisory and consultative process to be implemented and trust in new forestry management processes to be fostered at the localities (Initiating Memorandum, World Bank, 1998: 7). The very fact that the deficiencies of past policies are now being so openly debated within
organisations like the World Bank (which has historically tended to undermine local and environmental interests through its projects, rather than promote them) is surely evidence that a paradigm shift is occurring in international perspectives on the linked problems of poverty and environmental degradation.

However, the World Bank cannot alone force the reform of global governance systems. Co-operation from international countries is also urgently required. Richer countries wield great control over the policies of less advantaged states. In Chapter 8, it was shown how financial incentives from the Taiwanese government almost managed to secure the Chamorro cabinet's approval of the Equipe Enterprise S.A. concession. Unless the inordinate influence which states can acquire in those developing countries areas willing to accept the often disadvantageous terms of bilateral aid agreements to secure immediate loans is limited and monitored, local and environmental interests will continue to be abused. Greater commitment and accountability is therefore required from nation-states to take responsibility for the potential harm which their policies can cause to endangered resources and communities. In this mercenary modern age, it might perhaps appear naive to expect many nation-states to willingly participate in international agreements designed to limit their economic and policy freedoms, or that such agreements, if achieved, could ever be implemented in practice. The objective is admittedly formidable, but the reality is that we have simply no alternative; the cataclysmic global problems of environmental degradation and social poverty can no longer be ignored. As the same Bank Memorandum observed:

"Significant risks are associated with taking on the global issues.... However, the apparently less adventurous approach... in fact carries no less risk. In many of the countries where serious damage is occurring, the forest resources have considerable economic and environmental significance." (Initiating Memorandum, 1998: 4).

**Linking communities with governance systems**

This study has also pointed to the need to integrate local communities and administrative bodies within national systems of governance. The case of northeastern Nicaragua clearly shows how institutional and stakeholder accountability and respect of resource management regulations is discouraged by their exclusion from, and resentment of governance systems. Good management is also inhibited by ineffectual institutional frameworks, in which respective administrative responsibilities and jurisdictions remain conflicting and unclear. International agencies must therefore try to encourage reforms of national policy and institutional systems, to enable local authorities and communities to become responsible participants in resource management frameworks. The integration of the various stakeholders into a co-operative management system will however not prove successful if the arrangement does not reflect and accommodate the various capabilities, concerns, and indeed, the relationship between, the various stakeholders involved. Managers cannot expect that the transition from exclusion to
inclusion in the management process will necessarily prove easy for local peoples. The problems experienced by both the Regional Council and Awas Tingni in coping with new administrative responsibilities underline the need to acknowledge the potential limitations of local management, and to provide adequate training and institutional support to make them effective, rather than still marginal participants. Although the Swedish NGO ASDI has worked hard to improve the functioning of the Regional Council, its achievements will ultimately remain limited whilst the national government simultaneously works to undermine the precepts of regional autonomy. International facilitators and NGOs can therefore not expect to achieve progress without first enlisting the co-operation of the national governments themselves. International agencies will moreover need to monitor governments, to ensure that institutional and legislative reforms they enact become effective in practice; something which has not occurred with regional autonomy and the demarcation of indigenous land in the RAAN.

The question of inter-stakeholder trust is also an extremely important point to consider: do inter-stakeholder relationships in the particular management context encourage participants to develop common or conflicting objectives in regards to the management of natural resources? And how does trust affect the actions of stakeholders? The case of the GEF-World Bank Biological Corridor, which encouraged the formulation of the National Land Demarcation Commission in August of 1996, is an example of how inadequate appreciation of the relationship between the local actors can undermine, rather than increase, the possibilities for inter-stakeholder cooperation. Whereas the World Bank probably expected the indigenous communities to welcome the establishment of the Commission, whose creation had been required of the Nicaraguan government as a prerequisite for receiving project funding, high levels of mistrust between the Miskitus and Mayangnas, and the national government authorities, meant that the indigenous communities largely rejected it. Although the primary goal of indigenous peoples remained, and indeed remains, the demarcation of community lands, they could not trust the government-dominated Commission to carry out this task in their best interests. The creation of the Commission in fact only served to confirm their suspicions that the national government wanted to hijack the land demarcation process, and keep most of regional land for itself. An attempt to create one of the conditions for co-management, without adequate appreciation of the historical relationship between the indigenous peoples and the Nicaraguan state therefore severely backfired. And even if the indigenous communities had not opposed the Commission, it remains doubtful whether this body would ever have been capable (or willing) to fulfill its given mandate.

Indigenous lands in 1998 have still not been demarcated, and the Nicaraguan government appears no closer to resolving this issue. As long as the crucial issue of land ownership remains unresolved, stakeholders are likely to continue competing for remaining land. The repercussions
of environmental destruction will inevitably be borne most heavily by the indigenous communities, whose livelihoods completely depend upon the local natural resources. A process of land demarcation able to address not only the lack of trust between government and the indigenous peoples, but the potential problem of competing indigenous community claims for land as well, is therefore urgently required. This is one recommended area of action where international facilitation and assistance is urgently required, since the relations between the Nicaraguan government and indigenous communities makes it unlikely that these parties will be able to surmount their great differences, and resolve the regional land tenure problem on their own.

**Conceptualising the community**

Within the community itself, many issues must also be considered. As this research has shown, indigenous environmental perspectives and aspirations have to be taken into account. This cannot however be achieved without dedicating the time and commitment necessary to both gain the trust of the local participants, and to begin to appreciate the multiple layers and complexities of their concerns. Although facilitators and managers might find it easier the existence of temporarily and spatially fixed and unified communities, they are in reality areas of heterogeneity and contestation, and the products of particular historical experiences and circumstances, and must therefore be conceptualised as such. Conflict and difference are inevitable aspects of community realities. International agencies and facilitators must indeed try not to compound local conflicts, which can occur both between and within communities. For example, inter-community conflicts can arise if international agencies operating in given sub-regions concentrate their efforts solely upon individual communities, to the exclusion of all others; as shown by the case of Awas Tingni. The Awas Tingni’s Project has been extremely successful in gaining the community entry into the forestry management process, in furthering their land claim, and in placing the overall regional problems of undemarcated indigenous lands and government intransigence before the scrutiny of the international community. Nevertheless, particularly since the departure of the WWF, its limited resources and mandate (upon land demarcation for Awas Tingni alone), have meant that however beneficial their efforts might prove in the long-term for all regional communities, in the short-term, the Project has strained relations between Awas Tingni and the neighbouring Miskitu communities.

One of the ways for projects operating with limited resources to try to avoid inadvertently causing inter-communal resentments, could be to harness the support of additional international agencies in order to increase their available budget, and target clusters of communities rather

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6 The Awastingni project has in fact a number of participators: the University of Iowa, the Indian Law Resource Centre, the Centre for Nonviolent Sanctions and Cultural Survival, Harvard University, and until 1996/7, the WWF. Additional resources will however need to be secured, for the project to more actively incorporate the other sub-regional communities.
than individual villages. If this were not possible, facilitators could at least attempt to make other affected communities feel included, by consulting with them on a regular basis themselves, or by strongly encouraging the community benefiting directly from their help to cooperate directly with neighbouring villages, and to share with them the skills and lessons acquired from international facilitators. In this manner, knowledge, skills and conscious-building could be disseminated throughout the localities by the communities themselves, which would not only prove a empowering experience; local cooperation and collective strength could also be enhanced by this process. For example, the Awas Tingni team has educated the community both in their legal rights to land and the procedures available to secure them, as well as in new mapping technologies such as GPS (Global Positioning System Device), which allowed them to actively participate in the mapping of their projected communal lands (see Fig.8). By disseminating these legal and technical skills throughout the other neighbouring villages, and allowing the other communities to feel more included in the general lands claim process being spearheaded by Awas Tingni and its advisory team, local Miskitu resentment against Awas Tingni would probably abate. However, whilst the Awas Tingni project has had a negative effect on local inter-communal relations, it has also indirectly encouraged more active debate amongst indigenous communities, throughout the region, over the land demarcation issue. Greater levels of awareness have moreover enabled communities to more clearly identify the various obstacles which currently make land titles so difficult to secure: governmental intransigence above all, but fractured inter-community relations as well. Ultimately, if inter-communal relationships are defined by conflict rather than cooperation, land and resources will continue to be competed over, and it will be difficult for management systems to benefit from local participation. Encouraging inter-community consensus and collaboration must therefore be one of the main concerns and objectives of international facilitators, policy-makers and resource managers alike.

In terms of intra-community conflicts, these can for example develop if facilitators rely excessively upon the views provided by the village leaders, without consulting other community members as well. The authority of traditional village leaders might very well have little to do with their ability to represent community perspectives on management issues. And even if they have been selected for this purpose, since as this thesis has demonstrated, differences of opinion can be found between generations, genders, and significantly, leaders and non-leaders, a representative, cross-section of informants able to reflect community heterogeneity must nevertheless be consulted. Facilitators must also not allow themselves to indulge in any illusions about the communities they are working with: beyond the existence of internal conflicts,
communities might also be inadequately prepared for the demands and responsibilities required of co-management and community-based management initiatives.

The example of Awas Tingni indeed showed how considerable social costs can be incurred by communities when they are thrust ill-prepared into co-management arrangements. It also demonstrated the devastating effects which premature withdrawals by international projects from communities, before their obligations are fulfilled, can have upon local perspectives. Had the WWF provided the assistance which it had originally committed to give to the community to help it cope with the financial and administrative demands of the tripartite agreement, the forestry fund could have been put to better use, and the long-term development potential of community forestry better appreciated. As things stand, however, forestry resources are still primarily regarded as sources of immediate wealth by indigenous peoples, since the tripartite agreement has not been able to bring concrete improvements to the community to reverse historically-learnt familiarity with exploitative resources practices, which are implicitly regarded as inevitable. Therefore, if they undertake to help communities acquire these necessary skills, facilitators and NGOs must be prepared to fully honour these commitments. For otherwise, all prior achievements could easily become undone, with the net result of a project initiative potentially having been to reduce the community's willingness to innovate traditional management systems, and engage in future co-operative arrangements. As stated in the Awas Tingni Project Report to the WWF:

"In substantial part, the utility of past efforts funded by the WWF depends on continuing the task begun and following them up with others." (Report to WWF, 1996: 12 - my italics)

Contexting resource management

This thesis has clearly demonstrated the need to incorporate cultural, economic, political and institutional concerns within resource management research, and to adopt multi-leveled, interdisciplinary approaches to understanding and resolving the problems of management. It is not acceptable to simply tackle the symptoms of environmental mismanagement; their deep-rooted causes within the particular dynamics and characteristics of places must be identified and addressed. This study has also raised serious questions about the feasibility of promoting co-management and community-based management initiatives in areas characterised by weak and incoherent institutions, inter-stakeholder mistrust and competition, and inexperienced participants. Whilst co-management remains a conceptually attractive system for resolving these types of competition over resources, particular management contexts do not always make it a viable option. And when multi-layered, interdisciplinary studies identify governance systems and global economic policies as major obstacles to environmentally sustainable and socially equitable management, policy-makers and international agencies have to be prepared to take the
requisite steps. For until we address the contexts of resource management systems, the future of local communities, indigenous cultures and environments will continue to be jeopardised.


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APPENDIX 1: ACRONYMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADFOREST</td>
<td>Administracion Forestal Estatal Administration of State Forests</td>
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<tr>
<td>ALPROMISU</td>
<td>Alianza Para el Progreso de Miskitos y Sumus Alliance for the Progress of Miskitos and Sumus</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASDI</td>
<td>Asociacion Sueca de Desarrollo International Swedish Association for International Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBLC</td>
<td>Bragman's Bluff Lumber Company</td>
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<tr>
<td>BOSAWAS</td>
<td>Bocay, Sasalaya, Waspuk Rainforest reserve in northwestern area of RAAN.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CIDCA</td>
<td>Centro de Investigacion y Documentacion de la Costa Atlantica Centre for Investigation and Documentation of the Atlantic Coast</td>
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<tr>
<td>FSLN</td>
<td>Frente Sandinista para la Liberacion Nacional Sandinista Front for National Liberation</td>
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<tr>
<td>GEF</td>
<td>Global Environmental Facility</td>
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<tr>
<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>ILRC</td>
<td>Indian Law Resource Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INFONAC</td>
<td>Instituto de Fomento Nacional Institute of National Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INRA</td>
<td>Instituto Nicaraguense de Reforma Agraria Nicaraguan Institute of Agrarian Reform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MADENSA</td>
<td>Maderas y Derivados de Nicaragua Lumber and By-Products of Nicaragua</td>
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<tr>
<td>MARENA</td>
<td>Ministerio de Recursos Naturales y el Ambiente Ministry for Natural Resources and the Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MISURASATA</td>
<td>Miskitu Sumu Rama Sandinista Asla Takanka Organisation of Miskitus, Sumus, Ramas and Sandinistas</td>
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<tr>
<td>MISURA</td>
<td>Miskitu Sumu Rama Asla Takanka Organisation of Miskitus, Sumus and Ramas</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>NIPCO</td>
<td>Nicaraguan Pine and Long Leaf Company</td>
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<tr>
<td>OAS</td>
<td>Organisation of American States</td>
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<tr>
<td>PFNE</td>
<td>Proyecto Forestal del Nordeste Northeastern Forest Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Name</td>
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<td>--------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>PLC</td>
<td>Partido Liberal Constitucional</td>
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<tr>
<td>RAAN</td>
<td>Region Autonoma Atlantico Norte</td>
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<tr>
<td>RAAS</td>
<td>Region Autonoma Atlantico Sur</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOLCARSA</td>
<td>Sol de Caribe S.A.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SUKAWALA</td>
<td>Sumu Kalpapakna Wahaini Lani</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TNC</td>
<td>The Nature Conservancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNO</td>
<td>Unidad Nicaraguense de Oposicion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>URACCAN</td>
<td>Universidad de las Regiones Autonomas de la Costa Caribe Nicaraguense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WWF</td>
<td>World Wildlife Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>YATAMA</td>
<td>Yapti Tasba Masrika</td>
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# APPENDIX 2: GLOSSARY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aubiya</td>
<td>Miskitu name for the spirit-god / owner of the mountains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomia</td>
<td>Autonomy; both the political process, and the name of the regional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>monthly (or bi-monthly) newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barricada, La</td>
<td>Nicaraguan daily newspaper, owned by the FSLN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacitar</td>
<td>Spanish term meaning training, to train a person</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capacidade</td>
<td>Spanish term denoting a <em>trained</em> person</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cordoba</td>
<td>Nicaraguan national currency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consejal</td>
<td>Councillor; used in thesis to denote members of the Regional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Council of the RAAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costeño</td>
<td>A person from the Atlantic Coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curandero</td>
<td>Spanish name, used by indigenous peoples in the Coast, for natural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>healers or herbalists</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dawan</td>
<td>Miskitu for god</td>
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<tr>
<td>Duhindu</td>
<td>Miskitu name for the dwarf spirit-owner of wild game</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insia Prata</td>
<td>Miskitu term for cultivated and cleared land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lempira</td>
<td>Honduran currency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lasa nani</td>
<td>Miskitu for natural spirits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liwa (mairin)</td>
<td>Miskitu for water, also means water spirit (usually female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mairin</td>
<td>Miskitu for woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pana Pana</td>
<td>Miskitu term for reciprocal, collective labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parsen</td>
<td>Miskitu word for religious parson or pastor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prahku</td>
<td>Miskitu name for the god of the wind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rama</td>
<td>Small indigenous tribe found in the RAAS, living on Rama Cays, off the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>coast from Bluefields</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sindico</td>
<td>Spanish word for mayor, used by indigenous peoples as well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appears in thesis primarily to describe community-level mayors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(who are in charge of communities' external relations and affairs,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and have particular responsibilities for land issues)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirit-uplika</td>
<td>Miskitu for spirit-people, who blended teachings, practices and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>symbology of both the <em>sukia</em> and Christian priests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sukia</td>
<td>Indigenous shaman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasba Pri</td>
<td>Miskitu for &quot;Free Land.&quot; Name given to resettlement area created by the Sandinistas for River Wangki communities displaced by 1980s conflicts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasba Raya</td>
<td>In Miskitu: &quot;New Land.&quot; Name given to resettlement area created by Somoza regime for lower River Wangki communities displaced by floods and 1960 border settlement with Honduras.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tecnico</td>
<td>Spanish word for professional, technically trained individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tribuna, La</td>
<td>Nicaraguan national daily newspaper, published in Managua.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wihta</td>
<td>Miskitu word for judge, the indigenous community leader in charge of maintaining order, regulating affairs, and passing judgment on issues within the communities themselves.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 3: TYPOLOGY OF INFORMANTS

As mentioned in Chapter 1, over three hundred informants have contributed to this thesis. Although the identity of these informants must remain anonymous, I have nevertheless prepared the following typology of informants in order to provide the reader with a sense of the principal categories and distribution of informants targeted in this research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asang</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Wangki</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awas Tingni</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasba Raya cmmties</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Authorities</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MARENA / Nat.Gov.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal Auths.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indig. Orgs. / Ldrs.</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lumber Companies</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International / NGOs</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Professionals</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>229</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Beyond these specific categories of informants targeted, numerous other costeños, both men and women, indigenous and non-indigenous, also contributed interviews and information to this research.