Separate but integrated: A history of isolation and market participation among Nicaragua's Mayangna Indians

T. Mark Carey

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SEPARATE BUT INTEGRATED:
A HISTORY OF ISOLATION AND MARKET PARTICIPATION
AMONG NICARAGUA'S MAYANGNA INDIANS

by

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B.A. State University of New York, College at Potsdam

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The Mayangna Indians who inhabit the BOSAWAS Nature Reserve in Nicaragua have a unique history compared to many other indigenous groups in the Americas. Since contact, the Mayangnas have remained geographically isolated from non-Mayangnas. In order to preserve their isolation, Mayangnas have consistently chosen to live in the remote mountains of Nicaragua's interior rather than regularly participating in the market economy. Because they have maintained their ability to feed themselves and provide shelter, they still live in isolated communities today, and they are only slightly incorporated into the market economy.

The Mayangnas have a long history in eastern Nicaragua, but I argue that they have been in the region much longer than suggested in the historiography. Additionally, I propose that Mayangnas did not inhabit the Nicaraguan littoral at contact. Thus, they have inhabited the ecosystem in which they now live for centuries longer than originally thought by scholars. The Mayangnas' post-contact withdrawal into the remote interior, then, was not initiated from the coast, but rather from inland areas.

Mayangnas fled during the colonial era to evade European colonists and Miskitu slave raiders. Rather than a passive, feeble reaction to colonization—which is the traditional view held by many researchers—the Mayangnas' migration was a strategic way to survive the European conquest. By the time rubber tappers, loggers, miners, and Moravian missionaries arrived on Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Mayangnas were accustomed to isolation and limited market interaction. They had always been too far from the market and had therefore not become firmly incorporated into it. But these foreign forces of the nineteenth century penetrated Mayangna communities and created ways for them to engage the capitalist economy. Mayangnas, however, did not delve into the economy; instead they developed a system—a tactic that continues today—by which they participated occasionally in the market, but retained their homes in remote villages.

This thesis traces the Mayangnas' historic pursuit of isolation as well as their path toward market integration. Today the Mayangnas inhabit a nature reserve whose enabling legislation stipulates that both natural resources and indigenous homelands should be protected. My discussion should help policymakers understand the Mayangnas' link to the land inside the BOSAWAS Reserve.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Research in Nicaragua was conducted at the Centro de Investigaciones y Documentación de la Costa Atlántica (CIDCA) archive in Managua. Without use of their published and unpublished collection of documents, as well as the office space and computer they furnished, research would have been vastly more difficult. Thank you to the CIDCA staff. Also in Nicaragua, the Mayangna people graciously accepted me into their communities. I owe particular thanks to those who were interviewed, those who fed me, and those who guided me by dugout canoe to and from their villages.

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Map 1: Central America
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Environmental histories that explore indigenous peoples are often laden with discussions of how capitalism and the market economy wrench societies into social change and ecological transformation. The scenario is well-known: Increased trade leads to the depletion of natural resources and the loss of subsistence strategies, leaving in the wake dependent, conquered, assimilated, or annihilated Indian peoples. But the story of the Mayangna Indians living in the BOSAWAS Nature Reserve in Nicaragua is quite different. Here, the pull of the market has not led to such rapid, far-reaching change.

For centuries, the Mayangna Indians have lived in eastern Nicaragua, a region generally referred to as the Atlantic Coast or the Mosquitia. Before contact with Europeans, the Mayangnas inhabited much of Nicaragua, from the Caribbean coast to the edge of Lake Nicaragua. Today the Mayangnas exist only in the northeastern portion of Nicaragua. Roughly eighty percent of their population resides within the BOSAWAS Nature Reserve, an 8,000-square-kilometer protected area created in 1991. Attempting to account for their population decline and their retreat to remote areas of the country, one ethnographer has compared the Mayangnas to the mimosa plant, "a sensitive tropical plant that contracts and withers with only the slightest contact." Certainly, the Mayangna population did decline in the wake of Spanish and English colonization in eastern

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1The term "Mayangna" has replaced Sumu or Sumo. I use "Mayangna" because it is a word in their own language meaning "us." Mayangna is what they call themselves. The word "Sumu" is supposedly a Miskitu word that means "uncivilized savage." Quotes in this thesis often refer to Sumus or Sumos, but they always refer to Mayangnas. Sumu and Mayangna are interchangeable.

Nicaragua. Certainly, the Mayangnas did retreat inland, farther from the coast. And certainly, the Mayangnas have tried to keep their communities isolated from outsiders in an effort to preserve their cultural identity. But comparing the Mayangnas to the mimosa plant is yet another example of history that neglects Indian agency. In a sense, it leads an unsuspecting reader to think of the Mayangnas as a pathetic, dying race. The argument that follows seeks to remedy this impression.

Although the Mayangnas withdrew into what is today the BOSAWAS Reserve, they were never immune from the potential effects of trade with Europeans, North Americans, and, later, Nicaraguan mestizos. In fact, the Mayangnas have been participating in market relations with these outsiders for more than 300 years. Unique to the Mayangnas, though, is their level of incorporation into the market economy. It has been—and is still today—only slight. More significantly, the Mayangnas have actively and strategically avoided the pull of the market and many of the ensuing changes that can accompany incorporation into the capitalist system. In effect, the Mayangnas' resistance to the market is much more complex—intentional even—than simply living too far away from trade centers, which has been the usual argument advanced by scholars. Instead, the Mayangnas have chosen to limit their market interaction in an ongoing effort to retain their cultural identity, their homelands, and their non-capitalist way of life.

The Mayangna Indians' limited interaction with the market is not all that makes this story fascinating. Unlike Africa and the United States, whose conservation policies have excluded indigenous peoples from national parks, Nicaragua is on a mission to integrate Indians into nature preserves. Historically, our Crown Jewels here in the U.S.—Yellowstone, Glacier, Yosemite, Mount Rainier, the Grand Canyon—have systematically forced Indians out of parks in an effort to "protect wilderness." In fact, Theodore Catton has demonstrated that Indians in Alaska have recently been included in national preserves. See Theodore Catton, Inhabited Wilderness: Indians, Eskimos, and National Parks in Alaska (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997).

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3 I refer to the US policy of evicting Indians as a historical trend, not as a steadfast rule that persists today.

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Mark David Spence explains, "Indian exclusion from park lands was explicitly linked to preservation itself." Questioning the exclusion of indigenous peoples from parks in the U.S., William Cronon points out that the notion of "pristine wilderness" is actually an invention, an attempt to get "back to the wrong nature." He laments that the "myth of the wilderness as 'virgin,' uninhabited land [has] always been especially cruel when seen from the perspective of the Indians who had once called that land home." Perhaps Spence captures peoples' bias about wilderness best when he remarks that park managers and policymakers have neglected "the fact that Indians profoundly shaped these landscapes."

Despite the legacy of this "Yellowstone Model," Nicaragua has developed a visionary conservation program in the BOSAWAS Reserve, one that proposes to protect both the indigenous residents and the ecological diversity. The legislation that created the BOSAWAS Reserve in 1991 established a dual mission. On the one hand, the reserve is supposed to preserve the "great expanse of territory covered by tropical humid forests that still contain species of flora and fauna found only in Nicaragua's virgin forests." On the other hand, the enabling legislation is supposed to protect Mayangna and Miskitu access to the land because they "have historically depended on the environment and the natural resources for their survival and for their cultural development."

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8Presidencia de la Republica de Nicaragua. Declaracion de la Reserva Nacional de Recursos Naturales BOSAWAS, 1991. Decreto Ejecutivo 44-91, La Gaceta, Diario Oficial, no. 208 (5 November, Año XCV). Various spellings for the Miskitu Indians have been used in the past and are still in use today. I have chosen "Miskitu" because, as a PRIO report explains: "The 17th through 19th century term 'Mosquito' now has a definite derogatory connotation and is used as a racist epithet by non-Indians. We have chosen not to use the most commonly found modern spelling 'Miskito' because the 'o' vowel does not exist in the Miskitu language and traditional, mono-lingual Miskitu cannot pronounce such an anglicized/hispanicized version of their own name." (International Peace Research Institute [PRIO], "Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast—An Annotated Bibliography," in PRIO Inform No. 6 [Oslo, Norway, 1988], 1).
Unfortunately, the illegal extraction of timber and precious metals, the migration of landless *mestizos* into the reserve, and the failure to consult the indigenous residents about conservation strategies have hampered the protection of BOSAWAS. Even so, the legislation is progressive, and management strategies (encouraged by international NGOs) are becoming more inclusive not only of conservation and sustainable development needs, but also of the local, indigenous demands. Although the BOSAWAS project is not the world's first attempt to wed indigenous cultural survival with the maintenance of biodiversity, it is noteworthy and exciting that Nicaragua has adopted such an innovative plan.

That said, what is the relationship between the Mayangna Indians and the reserve's flora and fauna? How do the inhabitants utilize the natural resources in BOSAWAS? Are the Mayangnas' land use practices sustainable? What determines the manner in which the Indian residents interact with the natural world? And from the Indians' perspective: Will the protection of the reserve endanger indigenous cultural norms? or restrict their subsistence strategies? or threaten their autonomy? My goal is to place Mayangna land use practices in a historical context so that decisions about the reserve's future are not based solely on the snapshot views that have been taken in the last decade.

Because the market has traditionally been one of the principal forces driving social and ecological changes among indigenous, non-capitalist groups, I will trace the Mayangnas' interaction with the marketplace during the last three centuries. This is not to say that market interaction is the only cause of change. Nor is participation in the European economy the only motor for indigenous cultures to transform their relationship with the natural world. The collapse of Mayan society in the ninth century AD, as well as the fall of Teotihuacan in the valley of Mexico and the decline of some coastal city states in pre-Columbian Peru, reveal that Indian peoples do, in fact, change over time and that non-capitalist societies can and do alter their landscapes significantly.9

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9These examples of pre-Columbian Indians causing severe ecological transformation are cited from Clive Ponting, *A Green History of the World: The Environment and the Collapse of Great Civilizations* (New
However, history is lopsided with examples of capitalism and the market transforming indigenous cultures and their relationships with the natural world. As Richard White comments on eighteenth and early-nineteenth century Choctaw Indians in the U.S., "If any single factor is to be isolated as critical for understanding the fate of the Choctaws, it is the market. . . . For the Choctaws as a whole, trade and market meant not wealth but impoverishment, not well-being but dependency, and not progress but exile and dispossession." While indigenous societies' responses to the intrusion of a European-based economy are not uniform throughout the Americas, it is clear that, in order to unveil the Mayangnas' historic land use practices, an examination of the market is essential.

Thomas Hall's work on Indians in the U.S. Southwest provides a useful framework to help discern degrees of incorporation into the marketplace. Hall suggests that "participation in the market generally has two consequences: (1) pressure to intensify existing production processes; and (2) pressure to produce new goods for sale." Either of these two consequences could alter dramatically an Indian group's relationship with the physical environment. Consequently, the Mayangnas' degree of market articulation should be central to any discussion of land use practices.

To understand the market's potential effects, Hall identifies specific degrees of incorporation that are more precise than the broad terms, core and periphery. Hall's

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12Immanuel Wallerstein's Modern World System Theory was the first to describe a continuum of incorporation into the world economy. At one pole of the continuum, Wallerstein wrote, core states are fixed and well-defined entities while at the other pole, the periphery, a more amorphous region exists since, by definition, peripheral areas are not characterized by strong central states. Midway between the core and the periphery is the semiperiphery. Distinctions between these areas can be made by examining production and methods of labor control. The core is characterized by diverse and specialized production with wage labor or self employment. The semiperiphery engages in agricultural production where labor consists primarily of sharecroppers. And in the periphery, monoculture prevails with coerced labor such as slavery or feudalism. Clearly, Wallerstein's model needs to be reshaped in order to apply it to indigenous cultures within peripheral states, such as Nicaragua. The work by Thomas Hall successfully applies degrees of incorporation and the ensuing changes to indigenous peoples. For the outline of Wallerstein's theory, see
continuum of incorporation ranges from external areas (outside the periphery), to contact peripheries, to marginal peripheries (regions of refuge), to full-blown, dependent peripheries.  

Significantly, Hall maintains that a certain point—or, more accurately, an amorphous zone—exists where incorporation becomes irreversible. For example, there is a time when the peasantry cannot return to being a group of tribal societies. With only slight market articulation, a group may oscillate back and forth on the continuum, but at some stage a group cannot become less incorporated. In the end, the net change almost always results in greater market participation. Change, Hall contends, normally occurs in one direction. The question is, then: How incorporated are the Mayangnas?

The Mayangnas' road toward integration into the market differs from that of other groups in Latin American history. Instead of experiencing profound social and cultural changes at the hand of the market, and instead of embracing a new, extractive relationship with the natural world, the Mayangnas have maintained a low level of incorporation and thereby skirted many of the common effects of market incorporation. This story of the Mayangnas departs from a declensionist, often one-dimensional, view of the past, which is frequently a distorted history that chronicles environmental destruction and the plight of Indians who passively become consumed by the "evil" market economy.

Attacking this narrow-minded, declensionist interpretation of Latin American history, Steve Stern exhorts historians to move beyond the Black Legend, a story of heroes, villains, and victims. History was more complex. In fact, Stern argues that Indian

13Hall, Social Change in the Southwest, 19.
15Warren Dean, for example, adopts a decidedly declensionist view for the history of Brazil's Atlantic Forest. In the opening pages of With Broadax and Firebrand, Dean boldly asserts that "forest history, rightly understood, is everywhere on this planet one of exploitation and destruction" (p. 5). Conversely, I argue, forest history "rightly understood" is more complex; it examines human-land relationships and the ensuing ecological and social transformations. Environmental histories like Dean's offer only one way (often a narrow way) to look at the past. See Warren Dean, With Broadax and Firebrand: The Destruction of the Brazilian Atlantic Forest, With an introduction by Stuart B. Schwartz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
initiative and resourcefulness often foiled European colonization programs: "In myriad ways Amerindians engaged—assisted, resisted, appropriated, subverted, redeployed—European colonial projects, utopias, and relationships."\(^{16}\)

The Mayangnas, too, resisted European colonial projects. They did it not with military might, not by exploiting European institutions or laws, not by adapting to the European culture or economy, and not through everyday forms of resistance.\(^{17}\) Rather, the Mayangnas have deterred market forces by remaining geographically isolated, by relying on their ability to produce their own food, by avoiding debt, by shunning steady wage labor, and by purposefully limiting their interaction with the market economy. Their rejection of the market, along with their tenacious pursuit of isolation, represent how the Mayangnas have strategically and consciously thwarted the effects of conquest.

The logical departure point for a discussion of post-contact Mayangna history is in the pre-Columbian era. After a presentation of geography and natural history in northeastern Nicaragua, this discussion turns to this pre-conquest time. Arguing against the existing interpretations advanced in the historiography, I propose a new version of pre-Columbian Mayangna history. The Mayangnas, I believe, have inhabited Nicaragua much longer than originally thought by scholars. Also, the Mayangnas were not living on the Caribbean coast when Europeans arrived in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. When the Mayangnas fled from European colonists and Miskitu slave raiders in the colonial era, they did not leave the coast. As a result, Mayangnas today have been living in the same environment (ecosystem) for millennium, not for a few centuries.

Mayangna migrations toward the remote interior during the colonial period were driven by a long history of isolation as well as by a fear of the outsiders. In addition to the

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Spanish and English colonists who pushed the Mayangnas into the BOSAWAS region, Miskitu Indians also spurred the Mayangnas' withdrawal. Miskitus had formed a quasi-alliance with the English in the seventeenth century. With England's support, the coastal Indians dominated the Mayangnas until the nineteenth century, when Miskitu slave raids against the Mayangnas ended. Because the Mayangnas had fled from Miskitus and Europeans for the first three hundred years of contact, by the time the colonial era ended, Mayangnas were only slightly attached to the market economy. Throughout this time, the Mayangnas had participated in the market, but only occasionally, and the effects of market interaction had not been dramatic. The Mayangnas were not dependent on European goods. Rather, they continued to live in their remote villages where they produced basic necessities and grew their own food.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, four new forces swept into the Mosquitia. These forces presented clear ways for the Mayangnas to participate in the market and end their isolation. The rubber industry, logging interests, mining companies, and Moravian missionaries all eroded Mayangna insularity and brought the market into Indian communities. But the Mayangnas were accustomed to isolation, and they could live without steady wage labor or manufactured goods. Even so, the influx of rubber tappers, mahogany camps, and most importantly, mining towns ended the Mayangnas' reliance on Miskitu trade intermediaries from the coast and made goods much more accessible than they had been in colonial times. Moravian missionaries added to the proliferation of a capitalist market. The Moravians instilled work ethics and advocated a cash economy among the Mayangnas. Still, the Mayangnas resisted wholesale incorporation into the market economy. Although social and ecological transformations occurred in Mayangna communities, for the most part, the Mayangnas continued to pursue isolation rather than market relations.

My presentation and interpretation of Mayangna history will fill a gaping hole in the secondary literature. The historiography for the Mayangnas is, to put it mildly, limited. In
fact, a thorough history of the Mayangnas has, to my knowledge, not been written. Nor has anything been written about the impact of historic market relations on Mayangna land use practices. Ricardo Godoy, Kristin Ruppel, and Derek Smith have studied recent Mayangna land use, but their works rely on personal observation and lack historical context. Past market interaction of the neighboring Miskitu Indians has been analyzed, and many of these studies address the Mayangnas, but only tangentially. Bernard Nietschmann and Mary Helms, for example, have written on Miskitu incorporation but the Mayangnas do not figure prominently into their discussions. Much of the literature that deals with both indigenous groups, or that focuses on the Mayangnas, is oriented toward the fight for indigenous autonomy or the political struggle to obtain land titles. Other anthropological research, while quite valuable to the historian, describes living conditions, cultural characteristics, and land use practices only in the last half century. The lack of a


comprehensive look at Mayangna history is, in all likelihood, a function of limited resources. The Mayangnas are virtually absent from the written record, especially prior to the twentieth century. Despite the paucity of primary and secondary sources, Mayangna history can be unveiled.

The story that follows attempts to piece together the Mayangnas' past. It also strives to augment the information that policymakers, conservationists, and the Mayangnas depend upon to make decisions about the future of the BOSAWAS Reserve and its inhabitants. Further, by tracing the Mayangnas' integration into the market economy, my work examines a force that has triggered social and ecological transformation for other groups throughout history. Because the Mayangnas have chosen isolation in favor of market interaction, this study will enrich the manner in which historians and other social scientists look at the past—a history of Indians who were not victims of a dreary conquest, but who were active participants in a complex story.

Chapter 2

NICARAGUA'S ATLANTIC COAST:
A TROPICAL PARADISE?

The Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua has a diverse landscape, from a long coastline, to an extensive river system, expansive pine forests, and a mountainous interior blanketed by tropical forests. A late eighteenth century traveler to the region, Robert Hodgson, was particularly awed by what he saw in eastern Nicaragua:

Between the Sea Coast and the distant almost impassable mountains which bound the Spanish Territories behind, lies as fine a tract of land as any perhaps in the world. In extent it exceeds the kingdom of Portugal by more than one half. The Climate is most remarkably healthy, the air being much milder and more temperate than in the Islands [the British West Indies].

The Soil is various but in point of richness and fertility it yields to none on the Globe. The necessaries of life present themselves on all hands and the Country is extremely well watered by fine Rivers. Lagunes and Creeks, which abound with excellent fish, as does the Sea, which the latter affords moreover vast numbers of the finest turtle, both for food and for the shell.

In its present unadulterated state the best Cacao grows wild all over the Country, cotton grows naturally and is found to be better than what comes from Jamaica. Vanilloes likewise grow spontaneously; Indigo too is a native plant and appears to be the same sort with that of the Neighboring Province of Guatemala [which is] the best of any.¹

Much of the land Hodgson saw more than two hundred years ago has been altered since his excursion. Forests that once extended from the Caribbean Sea into western Nicaragua have now been reduced considerably. Despite widespread deforestation through much of the country, the region where most Mayangna Indians live in the BOSAWAS Reserve remains forested. BOSAWAS comprises one of the largest tracts of forest in Central America.

Thus, the Mayangnas' home continues to be one of the most remote areas of Central America, just as it has been throughout history.

To contextualize the Mayangnas' history of isolation in the BOSAWAS region, the landscape and principal features of the natural environment must be discussed. The mountains and dense tropical humid forests of Nicaragua's interior have insulated Mayangnas from outsiders for centuries. The Mayangnas, unlike most newcomers, adapted to the life along the region's rivers. They hunted deer, peccary, agouti, and other animals. Mayangnas have also learned how to weather the wet season, a nine-month period that inundates BOSAWAS with an ocean of rain. Mayangnas have always maintained an intimate relationship with their natural surroundings. They have transformed the land, to be sure, but vast forests still cover the mountains and line the rivers today. These forests have become obvious targets for conservation programs in the 1990s. Yet BOSAWAS persists as the remote place that Mayangnas depend upon for their survival: the forests conceal them from outsiders and the land supplies them with food.

Geography and Climate

In the mountainous interior of the Mosquitia, peaks tower at 1,650 meters (5,363 feet) above sea level. Many of Nicaragua's largest rivers are born here, and they weave a path through dense forest on their way from western Nicaragua to the Caribbean. The indigenous peoples of the Atlantic Coast, both historically and at present, depend on the labyrinth of rivers not only for food, but also because rivers provide the best—and often the only viable—avenue for communication and transportation. Without the rivers, movement would be stifled; survival would be more difficult. Unfortunately, with little archeological evidence to unravel the inhabitants' past, it is hard to gauge how long the

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Mayangnas have lived in the region. Based on their level of adaptation to the riverine environment at contact, though, it is probably safe to assume that the Mayangnas arrived in eastern Nicaragua long before Columbus gazed at the Mosquito coast on his fourth voyage to the Americas.  

Anyone who has stepped foot inside a tropical forest can attest that it is an overwhelming sensation. For someone accustomed to temperate forests, the tropics are remarkably discomforting. The sea of green and the ominous "lack" of animal life leaves the visitor with an uneasy feeling. What's lurking under that leaf or behind that log? What's hiding, perfectly camouflaged, right on the path or on that tree trunk? Tropical humid forests, like those within the BOSAWAS Reserve, are among the most ecologically diverse places on the planet. The inattentive observer might wonder where the life of the forest is. But the workings of a tropical forest involve millions of interconnected, interacting species. Adrian Forsyth and Kenneth Miyata describe tropical forests thus:

The complex interactions—the food webs, dispersal systems, and mutual interdependencies—that thread through the rain forest are the true essence of tropical nature. The lowland rain forests of the New World tropics are the most complex biological communities that exist; even if a cure for cancer is not to be found in one of the unnamed or unstudied plants of the tropical rain forest, the fact that rain forests are the single greatest reservoir of genetic diversity and the ultimate realization of biological complexity makes them worthy of study, admiration, and preservation.  

Although the world's most famous tropical rain forests grow in the Amazon, Central America contains vast rain forests, too. As Forsyth and Miyata point out, the "most important of these non-Amazonian rain forests are those along the Caribbean coast of Central America, the northwest coast of South America, and southeastern Brazil."  

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5 Ibid, 8.
Significantly, the largest tract of tropical humid forest north of Brazil lies within the BOSAWAS Reserve in northeastern Nicaragua. The forests of BOSAWAS are bounded to the east by pine savannas and to the south and west by the advancing agricultural frontier. To the north the forests continue into Honduras and make up the Mosquitia Rain Forest Corridor. The expansive forests of this corridor are contained in some of the largest protected areas in Central America. Moving across the Honduran border from Nicaragua, the Tawahka Asangni Biosphere Reserve and the Patuca National Park enjoin Honduran protected areas with the BOSAWAS Reserve. Still farther north, the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve extends this natural corridor all the way to the Caribbean Sea in northern Honduras.6

Because of the altitudinal fluctuations within BOSAWAS—ranging from 30 meters (98 feet) above sea level at the junction of the Waspuk and Coco Rivers to 1,650 meters (5,363 feet) at the summit of Cerro Saslaya—climatic conditions vary considerably.7 The Mosquitia Rain Forest Corridor, which is part of the Holdridge ecological system, has three life zones: tropical humid forest, very humid pre-montane tropical forest, and very humid lower montane tropical forest. The last of these three zones exists near the summit of the highest peaks in BOSAWAS, particularly those within the boundaries of Saslaya National Park, and especially on Cerro Saslaya itself.8 Coursing its way through the reserve from the southeast to the northeast, the Isabela range towers with the region’s most predominant peaks: Saslaya, El Toro, and Azan Rara.9

The Isabela range creates its own weather. Depending on the altitude and the distance from the Caribbean Sea, both rainfall and temperature vary in the reserve. Generally, the area has a dry season that lasts for three months, from February to April.

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7 MARENA, "Reserva de la Biosfera BOSAWAS," 23.
9 MARENA, "Reserva de la Biosfera BOSAWAS," 22.
The remainder of the year is the wet season. During the wet season, trade winds bring moist, saturated air from the Caribbean. When this air collides with the foothills and mountains of the interior, the moisture becomes heavy and falls as rain. Identifying the non-dry months as the "wet season," though, fails to portray accurately the true nature of these nine months. More precisely, May to December could be called the "season of inundation" or the "long deluge!"
Most of the early travelers to the region noted the tremendous rainfall and dangerous rise in the rivers that followed rainstorms. Eduard Conzemius explains that, "according to the records of the Nicaraguan Canal Co. over 296 inches [of rain] fell . . . in 1890, which makes it perhaps the wettest area in America."\(^{10}\) He goes on to mention that during the rainy season, rivers often rose as much as 40 feet in one night.\(^{11}\) Charles N. Bell, who lived on the Atlantic Coast in the mid-nineteenth century, testifies to the extreme rainfall:

Exhausted with our exertions, sore with blows from the branches, wet to the skin, and covered with slime and moss from the trees, we looked in vain for a place to land and cook. There was no dry land to be found, so we moored our canoe to the trees. . . . As night came on, the rain, thunder, and lightning increased, and we could only make out our course by the brilliant flashes that lighted up the country. The water roared and boiled through and over the trunks and branches, our pitpan frequently becoming jammed, at the imminent risk of upsetting. [After mooring again] We then lay down on the bottom of the boat, covering our faces with leaves to keep off the rain; but we were too cold and it rained too heavily for sleep, so we groaned and swore for three hours till the rain cleared off and the stars appeared.\(^{12}\)

Temperatures in Nicaragua’s interior are less remarkable than the amount of rainfall; the average temperature throughout the year is 26.5 degrees centigrade, with the maximum reaching above 35° and the minimum as low as 16° centigrade in January.\(^{13}\) As expected, the tropical humid forests maintain an average relative humidity of about 85 percent.\(^{14}\)

The wetness of eastern Nicaragua’s tropical humid forests create a water cycle that is important not only for biological processes, but also for humans. The rivers act as superb channels for transportation and communication for the Indian peoples who reside [References]


\(^{11}\) Ibid., 2.


\(^{13}\) MARENA, "Reserva de la BIOSfera BOSAWAS," 23.

along the waterways. Additionally, the Prinzapolka River, with its headwaters in Saslaya National Park and its mouth on the Caribbean coast, provides drinking water for much of the RAAN (Región Autónoma del Atlántico Norte—North Atlantic Autonomous Region).15

Figure 2: Running the Rapids—Mayangnas are skilled boaters who can travel both up and down rivers, negotiating rapids with ease. Rivers in northeastern Nicaragua fluctuate with the season. Taken in February, this photograph shows the exposed rocks that can make a river more difficult to navigate. In the wet season, rocks are submerged, but the rivers can rise dangerously in times of flood.

Recognizing the importance of the region's forests, Jeannette Aviles Campos points out that forests in eastern Nicaragua regulate the water cycle, contribute to the formation of soils, minimize erosion, and provide for both terrestrial and marine fauna that are basic ingredients for indigenous sustenance and survival.16

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Flora and Fauna

The abundant forests and various ecological life zones in the Mosquitia Rain Forest Corridor also support diverse populations of animals and plants. While extensive populations exist in the region, many of the species are either threatened or in danger of extinction. According to a recent list provided by the Nicaraguan government, seventeen species are in danger of extinction and thirty-two species are threatened within the BOSAWAS Reserve. Among those in danger of extinction are the Harpy eagle, scarlet macaw, howler monkey, puma, tiger, crocodile, and tapir. Some of those threatened by extinction include the boa constrictor, green iguana, white faced monkey, two hummingbird species, anteater, and others. Although they are threatened or in danger of extinction, the mere existence of these animals in the late-twentieth century illustrates the remoteness of the BOSAWAS reserve.

Threatened and endangered animals have ecological value in and of themselves. But many of these animals, as well as others, have cultural significance, too. Some are hunted and provide food for the Mayangnas, like the peccary, agouti, turkey, guatuza, cusuco, and deer. While not necessarily a food, Mayangnas also respect snakes. No Mayangna tangles with snakes in the forest, but the reptiles do appear in their myths and legends. Many characters in the legends who drink too much or who eat something they shouldn't, turn into snakes.

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18 The complete lists of both threatened species and those in danger of extinction are supplied by La Secretaría Nacional de CITES-Nicaragua and are cited in MARENA, "Reserva de la Biósfera BOSAWAS," 30-31.
19 Ibid., 32. In addition to the animals already mentioned, Conzemius provides an extensive list of animals found in the Mosquitia. His list includes: tapir, jaguar, puma, ocelot, black jaguar, howler monkey, spider monkey, white face monkey, peccary, three species of anteaters, armadillo, soopsum, two and three toed sloths, agouti, paca, porcupine, various squirrels, rabbit, raccoon, coati, weasel, skunk, kinkajou, alligator, crocodile, turtles, and iguanas. See Conzemius, Ethnographical Survey, 5-6.
20 For a compilation of various myths and legends among the Mayangnas, see Götz von Houwald and Francisco Rener Mayanga Yulnina Kubo Balna. Tradiciones Orales de los Sumus. Mundliche Überlieferungen der Sumu-Indianer (Bonn: Bonner Amerikanistische Studien, 1984).
Reality or legend, snakes can be dangerous. With so many species of both venomous and non-venomous snakes, heeding the advice of the locals is a good idea. Charles N. Bell, who lived in Bluefields during the mid-1800s, failed to listen carefully. He pointed out that of the various snakes in Nicaragua's tropical humid forests, "a beautiful snake marked with rings of yellow, black, and scarlet, is said to be fatally venomous; but I think it is very doubtful, as it has no poison-fangs." He could not have been more wrong. And the Indians warned him. Bell must be referring to the coral snake, one of the most dangerous (i.e., venomous) snakes in the western hemisphere. Fortunately for Bell, he was never bitten by a coral snake. His erroneous conclusion about the snakes reminds readers to scrutinize historical observations, whether about people or natural history. This story shows that local Indians usually possess a sound knowledge of natural history.

Eastern Nicaragua is rich not only with fauna, but also with flora. Trees in the region serve both economic and utilitarian purposes. The collection of latex or rubber (from *Castilla tuno* and *Castilla elastica* trees) has been important for two centuries or more. In addition to producing revenue for the country and for foreign merchants, the trees fit into the Mayangnas' economy as well. Mahogany and cedar, for example, generate income, but the Mayangnas, too, utilize both of these tree species to construct their canoes. Other trees range widely within the BOSAWAS Reserve, and Conzemius has identified many different types of palms, only two of which are used for food: the coco palm and the pejivalle. He also located other trees in the region: mahogany, Ceiba, Spanish or West Indian cedar, rosewood, rubber trees, sapodilla, lignum vitae or guayacan, Santa Maria or calaba, and balsa or corkwood.

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1. Charles N. Bell, "Remarks on the Mosquito Territory, its Climate, People, Productions, etc, etc, with a Map," *Royal Geographic Society Journal* 32 (1862): 264.
2. While both coral snakes and false corals (a non-venomous snake) exist in the region, the fact that the false coral looks almost identical to the true coral means that Bell was probably not making a distinction between the two and was not referring to the false coral.
Conservation Initiatives and Indigenous Homelands

Without doubt, northeastern Nicaragua boasts lush tropical forests. Millions of species, both flora and fauna, grow and live in each of the region's three ecological life zones. The area is a prime target for conservation. The creation of Saslaya National Park in 1971, Nicaragua's first national park, began this process. Saslaya N.P. covers roughly 120 square kilometers of forest, all of which lies within the BOSAWAS Reserve today.24 Established by presidential decree in 1991, the BOSAWAS legislation, even if the government does not adhere to it strictly, is visionary. The law follows a recent world trend to protect flora and fauna as well as the indigenous residents' homelands.

The link between humans and nature, especially for indigenous cultures, is strong. At the same time, it is important to recognize that Indians are not, by definition, conservationists. Examples abound, like the Maya, where indigenous peoples transformed the physical environment. In the Mosquitia, Indians made cedar and mahogany canoes long before Europeans arrived. They utilized a variety of forest products and likely "overharvested" some of them. For the most part, land remained intact not because of Indian conservation strategies per se, but because of small populations or other factors. But even without a modern-day environmental ethic, Mayangnas generally carried on an intimate relationship with their physical environment.

That connection between indigenous peoples and the land continues in the twentieth century. Yet conservationists all over the globe, and especially those in the United States, have sought to evict indigenous populations from protected areas in the name of wilderness protection. Fortunately, this antiquated model has lost support in the last decades. Some have argued convincingly that Indian peoples should not be removed from park lands, especially since many of them have been managing park lands for centuries, even millennium. Archeological evidence from Glacier National Park, for instance, reveals that

Indians have inhabited the area since 10,000 years ago, and have probably been using fire to alter the landscape for more than 5,000 years. The Blackfeet, however, were pushed out of Glacier N.P. in the early 1900s. Indians have lived in eastern Nicaragua for thousands of years, too. The Western ideal of a pristine, virgin wilderness vanishes under these circumstances. Recognizing the Indians' historical link to the land, the BOSAWAS legislation seeks to preserve their homelands in the reserve.

Figure 3: Mayangna Village—Mayangnas generally live along rivers in the remote sections of northeastern Nicaragua. The gentle mountains of the BOSAWAS region are visible in the background.

25 Personal communication with Brian Reeves, Glacier National Park, Montana, June, 1997. Glacier National Park has been analyzed because historians are able to trace easily how the Blackfeet Indians were removed from the park. It provides an excellent example of U.S. preservationist policies. For literature dealing with Glacier N.P., the Blackfeet Indians, and the wilderness ideal, see Mark David Spence, "Crown of the Continent, Backbone of the World: The American Wilderness Ideal and Blackfeet Exclusion from Glacier National Park," Environmental History 1 (Summer 1996): 29-49; and Louis Warren, The Hunter's Game: Poachers and Conservationists in Twentieth-Century America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

The indigenous bond to homelands transcends their historical existence on the land. Tropical forests are often the spiritual guide and the social fabric that indigenous cultures depend upon. Stan Stevens argues that the few remaining large tracts of forest today often coincide with the sites where indigenous peoples still live. As a result, Stevens asserts, "The future of indigenous peoples and the fate of the earth's remaining natural areas are entwined across much of the planet... Cultural survival and cultural diversity are often thus entwined with environmental conservation and biodiversity. The loss of either can cause the loss of both." Let's not forget, too, that Indians, in many cases, have developed an intimate understanding of their surroundings; their close acquaintance with and knowledge of the forest has been passed down through generations and often contains a sustainable way for humans (albeit small populations) to use and manage natural resources. At a minimum, their knowledge might help prevent being bitten by a coral snake!

In addition to their skills as naturalists, native myths and legends help outsiders understand forest ecosystems. Their lessons pass along strategies for interacting with the natural world; they might identify certain species or geographic locations that are particularly susceptible to overharvesting. In one Mayangna legend, the central figure is a woman who fishes more and more every day. In time, the dueño (owner or spirit) of the river becomes irritated and advises the woman to reduce the amount of fish she catches. Unhappy with the dueño's order, she appeals, and a deal is struck: in order to continue catching so many fish, she must trade her son for fishing privileges. She agrees. The message: overfishing has negative repercussions, for the river and for Mayangna families.

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27 Stevens, Conservation Through Cultural Survival, 3, 1.
Legends like this one, passed down from generation to generation, help maintain Mayangna land use practices and sustain their population in the BOSAWAS region. Protecting the forest, and protecting the Mayangnas' access to the forest, is an important step for both people and forests. Some Indian legends promote stewardship of the land and increase peoples' awareness of natural history. Everyone has heard that rain forests probably hold a cure for cancer and other diseases. It may be indigenous peoples, not scientists or local mestizos, who will lead the world to these cures. Echoing this mantra, Peter Herlihy claims that "Indigenous peoples' relationship to the land should be a central concern for conservation and development strategies of the Mosquitia Corridor."30

So far, the BOSAWAS legislation has been confined to a paper document. The federal government has not enforced the laws that prohibit logging and mestizo settlement inside BOSAWAS. The threat, then, is that the Mayangnas will lose their isolation, be inundated by the agricultural frontier, or that they will not be involved in the development of conservation policies. Fortunately for the Mayangna and Miskitu residents of BOSAWAS, it is not foreseeable that they will be evicted from the reserve in the name of conservation. A growing consciousness in Nicaragua understands that Indian peoples have lived in the region for centuries and have, both in the past and in the present, depended on the land. Mayangnas have built their culture, their identity, their way of life, and their history from the vast tropical humid forests of Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast.

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29The Mayangnas' small population and the land's carrying capacity have also played a key role in their sustainability in BOSAWAS. These factors are an inherent part of any group's sustainability in a given environment.
30Herlihy, "Indigenous Peoples," 125.
Deciphering pre-Columbian Mayangna history is no easy task. Yet the period constitutes an essential ingredient in the discussion of post-contact Mayangnas. To chronicle change after the Europeans arrived, the starting point must be described. In addition, land use change—as well as social and cultural changes—can be more thoroughly understood when we realize how long Mayangnas have inhabited the ecosystem in which they now exist. Unfortunately, a dearth of evidence from the European conquest, compounded by a lack of ethnographical studies, makes it difficult to draw conclusions about the Mayangnas. But pre-contact Mayangna history can be unearthed. A few researchers have hedged their bets about early Mayangna history and the Mayangnas' arrival time in Nicaragua. Most of these bets, though, seem to take place within a vacuum; no one, to my knowledge, has made any attempts to compile the various interpretations of pre-Columbian history. When the versions are compiled and posed against primary sources from the early colonial period, it becomes clear that the existing historiography needs revision.

Generally, there are two main camps for discussing Mayangna history prior to contact, which is to say two others besides Mayangna oral history: (1) the traditional view, which pinpoints the Mayangnas' arrival to Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast within the last thousand years and shows their migration inland from the coast as late as the seventeenth century; and (2) the revised theory, arguing that the Mayangnas arrived in eastern Nicaragua significantly earlier, perhaps as long as 4,500 years ago.

My argument goes further. I agree that the Mayangnas have lived in eastern Nicaragua much longer than originally thought. But, I contend that they did not live on the
coast at contact or in the last centuries preceding contact, which is the interpretation most scholars advance. According to the existing literature, the Mayangnas moved from the coast to the interior in less than a century. My question: How could a population of several thousand Indians move from the coast to a new ecosystem, more than one-hundred miles inland, in such a short period, without any evidence of a marine adaptation? It seems unlikely that they did.

**Mayangna Oral History**

Scholars are not the only ones who have changed and re-interpreted pre-Columbian Mayangna history. Today, the Mayangnas tell a different version of their early history than they did a century ago. Recorded at the end of the nineteenth century—before the entrance of Christianity into Mayangna communities—the Mayangna Indians had this view of the Creation and their past:

At Kaunapa Hill, on the left bank of Rio Patuca, a few miles below the mouth of Rio Guampú, there is a rock bearing the sign of a human umbilical cord, and from which were born the tribal ancestors, a Great Father (*Mai-sahana* "he who begot us") and a great Mother (*Itwana* or *Itoki*). The Miskito and the Sumu are descendants of these two primal ancestors. The first born were the Miskito who, disobedient and headstrong, as they are still to-day, cared little for the instructions of their ancestors and ran away to the seacoast.

Then the Twahka or Tawahka were born, who consider themselves to this day the nobility among the Sumu.

Then followed the Yusku, who turned to evil ways; for that reason the other tribes made war upon them and almost exterminated them.

The youngest, the Ulwa, being according to the Indian custom the favorites, profited to such an extent by the instructions of the tribal ancestors that they became especially skilled in the secrets of medicine and incantation and won the name of *Boa*, "enchancers."

Meanwhile the Twahka lived in the bush. They were wild and unkempt; their hair fell to their knees and they were full of lice. Finally the King of the Miskito sent for them and captured them; he had them washed and
altogether regenerated them, so that he won their love and obtained their support.\(^1\)

Less than one-hundred years after that legend was first published, most Mayangnas describe their history much differently. The Mayangnas' creation myths have been revised, or even replaced by Catholic and Moravian views. One Mayangna pastor commented recently that, prior to the establishment of the Moravian church in the 1920s and 1930s, the people "didn't believe anything" about the Creation.\(^2\) Obviously he either did not know or was unwilling to recognize stories like the one presented above.

Other Mayangnas, though, do remember the stories of their ancestors. For those living in Sikilta in the 1990s, for example, it is assumed that their distant relatives always lived on the Atlantic Coast. But rather than considering the Miskitus their brothers, like the legend cited above, the story goes like this:

At the beginning, and historically, the Mayangna people lived on the coast, on the shores of the sea. . . . But with the coming of the mestizos, they were persecuted and so migrated inland to the Walpa Siksa River. The Miskitos lived on the Walpa Siksa, at its mouth, and the Mayangnas lived on the other side of the river. But the two groups did not have good relations, and the Mayangnas finally had to leave their place and leave the coast.\(^3\)

As we shall see, this version is in line with academic interpretations of the twentieth century, whereby scholars maintain that Miskitu slave raids in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries forced the Mayangnas inland, to the remote areas where they live today.


\(^2\) Anonymous interview by author, 2 January 1998, Mayangna community, Nicaragua.

Perhaps the most profound change in the Mayangnas' own view of their ancient history comes when, as Götz von Houwald explains, they describe themselves not as people who were born on a mountain top in eastern Nicaragua, but as descendants of an ancient people from Asia, a group who migrated into the Americas thousands of years ago. Views like these signify a change in perspective and an evolution of the Mayangnas' historical interpretations in the twentieth century.

Revisiting the Traditional Historiography

In addition to these new beliefs on the part of the Mayangnas, those of historians, anthropologists, and other scholars have also re-evaluated pre-Columbian Mayangna history. Analyses of archeological evidence, linguistics, early written records left by Spanish and English colonists, and anthropological studies have yielded different scenarios for the pre-contact Mayangnas. Yet the scarcity of these sources has consistently vexed researchers. Richard Magnus, one of the few archeologists who has worked in eastern Nicaragua, explains that "ethnohistorical sources do not give a picture of pre-Columbian life and are not of particular value to the prehistorian working on the Miskito Coast." True, little ethnographical data is available for developing an understanding of the pre-

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Columbian Mayangnas. Consequently, the historiographical debate, combined with Mayangna oral history, produces discrepancies and contradictions.

Although different academic camps have formulated their own views of pre-Columbian Mayangna history, some basic elements of the story remain constant, such as their language family. One of the common methods used to understand where indigenous groups originated and when divisions took place between certain tribes or bands, is based on language origins. Linguists can examine certain words in different languages to see if the words are the same or if they resemble each other. The percentage of words that are the same offers linguists a clue about which peoples are related and how long they have been separated.

Using this strategy for the Mayangnas, linguists have linked them to the *Chibchan* language group. According to Gregorio Smutko, who has written on the origins of Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast indigenous groups, the *Chibchan* group separated from the *Uto-Azteca* language group roughly 6,000 years ago. After the split, the *Chibchan* members migrated south out of (what is today) Mexico toward South America. Placing the Mayangnas within this language family has not been debated; estimating when its members moved through Nicaragua, and where specifically they first settled in Nicaragua, remains much more unclear.

Smutko has determined that because roughly 50 percent of Mayangna and Miskitu words are the same today, it was about 2,000 years ago when the two groups split. Unfortunately Smutko does not mention where the Mayangna-Miskitu Indians lived before they separated. It must be pointed out, too, that Smutko makes a separate division for the Zambo-Miskitu, a group that intermarried and mixed with escaped African slaves and Europeans, especially English buccaneers who stopped on Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast, beginning in the seventeenth century. In addition to the split between the Mayangnas and

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7 Ibid., 78.
the Miskitus, Smutko points out that by 1,600 years ago the Mayangnas began to splinter into various bands. Smutko identifies seven Mayangna groups that existed as early as 1,600 years ago: Yusku, Panamaka, Bawihka, Twahka, Prinsu, Ulva or Ulwa, and Kukra. These groups, according to Smutko, lived in eastern Nicaragua from Bluefields north to the Coco and Patuca Rivers in Honduras and inland to what is today the border between the provinces of Matagalpa and Zelaya. When Eduard Conzemius compiled his list of Mayangna bands that existed at contact, he counted ten, adding Tongala, Silam, and Ku to the list above. Neither Smutko or Conzemius define when the Mayangnas arrived in Nicaragua, and more specifically, when the Mayangnas moved into the region that they inhabit today. Both of them, however, mention that the Miskitu people left the shores of Lake Nicaragua and moved east to the Atlantic Coast in the tenth century.

While Smutko's description provides a useful framework for the Mayangnas' origins, the actual migration of the Chibchan language family is still left unsettled. Julian H. Steward, who has written extensively on Central American indigenous groups for the U.S. Bureau of Ethnology, explains that the Central American Chibchan members are linked culturally to South America rather than to either Aztec or Mayan roots in Mesoamerica. He emphasizes that the indigenous groups in eastern Central America, as far north as the Mayangna and Miskitu Indians, are linked to South America and that the "cultural flow in Central America was predominantly from south to north." This theory does not refute the original roots of the Chibchan group; all indigenous peoples came to the Americas from the north at one point. Rather, Steward shows that when the Mayangnas split from the Chibchan family and came to Nicaragua they left South America, not

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8Ibid., 74.
9Conzemius, Ethnographical Survey, 14.
10Ibid., 18-19; Smutko, "Los Miskitos, Sumus y Rama," 78.
Mesoamerica. To support his assertion, Steward points out:

The occurrence of Chibchan languages through Panamá and Costa Rica north to the Ulua-Sumo-Mosquito group [the Misumalpa language group, which is an offshoot of Chibchan] seems clear evidence of tribal migrations from South America, and failure of a number of Central and South American ethnographic traits, such as coca, manioc, palisaded villages, hammocks, bark cloth, blow guns, developed metallurgy, mummification, burial of a chief with his retainers, and many art styles, to extend to or at least to take hold in México points to the origin of the particular elaborations of the Central American-Circum-Caribbean culture in South America.12

Steward goes on to clarify that there was a Mayan influence in Nicaragua, but that the archeology in eastern Nicaragua has a definite "non-Mexican character."13

Within Steward's general interpretation of pre-Columbian Central American history, the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua, including the region where the Mayangnas live today, was not influenced by Mesoamerican indigenous groups. Instead, Nicaragua was divided into two distinct regions, one that was influenced by Mesoamerican cultures (western Nicaragua) and one influenced by South American groups (eastern Nicaragua). Richard Magnus accounts for the contrast by pointing out that a north-south cordillera extends from Costa Rica to Mesoamerica and divides the isthmus into two separate regions. This cordillera also divided the flow of cultural traits: west of the mountain range was subjected to Mesoamerican influence, while east of the mountains was subjected to South American influences.14 Magnus confirms Steward's claim, declaring that no Mesoamerican traits were encountered during his archeological research in eastern Nicaragua.

If the Mayangnas were not part of the Mesoamerican groups, it still remains to be shown when they arrived in Nicaragua. The most common historiographical interpretation has been that the Mayangnas originally moved north into western Nicaragua. Later, after

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12Ibid. Note that Steward may have made an oversight with bark cloth, which the Mayangnas used for clothing and for bags or carrying cases. The Mayangnas traded bark cloth to the Miskitu Indians.
13Ibid, 27.
14Magnus, "The Prehistory of the Miskito Coast," 218.
being pushed out of that area, they moved east to the Atlantic Coast prior to contact. Mayangna legends roughly follow this theme. One legend that von Houwald recorded illustrates how the Mayangnas moved from western Nicaragua to eastern Nicaragua to escape the marauding bands of people from the north.

The story, called "How the Sumus Arrived at the Atlantic Coast and What Happened There," is as follows: The Mayangnas used to live in a place next to a very cruel neighbor. At first their neighbor said that the younger Mayangnas could go away to study and learn from them. After some time, though, the Mayangnas realized that those who left never came back. Reacting with anger and fear, some remaining Mayangnas went to search for their missing brothers and sisters—they did not come back either. It seemed at that point that the Mayangnas had to flee, that they should escape from their evil neighbor. They went east, toward the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua. On the Atlantic coast, the story continues, they searched for a tranquil place to live, which brought them to Bilwi (Puerto Cabezas). They were thrilled to find such a beautiful place to call home, but the serenity did not last forever. The Miskitus discovered them and, soon after, the Miskitu King took young Mayangnas as his slaves. Miskitu raids on Bilwi continued until the Mayangnas, once again, decided that they must move. This time they went inland to the heads of the great rivers that flow into the Caribbean Sea. As they moved, however, the Mayangna nation fragmented and the group deteriorated into many different tribes that still exist today.15

This Mayangna legend provides the framework for academic interpretations that have been advanced in the historiography. For example, von Houwald points out that the above story is an accurate view of the past: "The historical reality seems to be, however, that the first migrations that forced the Sumus to move in the direction of the Atlantic Coast, were invasions from a group arriving from the north, very likely, people who spoke

15This legend is cited from von Houwald and Rener, Mayangna Yulnina Kulna Balna—Tradiciones Orales de los Sumus, 43–45.
Nahuatl." Götz von Houwald and Francisco Rener are not the only ones who describe a Mayangna migration eastward to Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast, and pinpoint the date to be a few hundred years prior to the conquest of the Americas. In fact, much of the secondary literature relies on this interpretation. Conzemius, Smutko, and von Houwald and Rener imply that the Miskitus arrived in eastern Nicaragua before the Mayangnas, and since they date the Miskitu arrival in the tenth and eleventh centuries, the Mayangnas must have arrived more recently. Although Magnus offers no definitive estimate of when the Mayangnas or the Miskitus arrived in Nicaragua, he maintains that the "Atlantic coast of Nicaragua was a very isolated place from the time of Christ to 1200 A.D."18

Toward a Reinterpretation

While it may be the case that Mayangnas migrated from western Nicaragua to eastern Nicaragua, more recent interpretations of the pre-Columbian Indian story have challenged the notion of a migration to the Atlantic Coast as late as the tenth century. Leading the charge are Luis Hurtado de Mendoza and Anthony Stocks, both anthropologists who continue to be active with the Mayangna Indians and the BOSAWAS Reserve. Hurtado de Mendoza claims that fragments of ceramics that have been found in Sikilta, a Mayangna community within the BOSAWAS Reserve, and petroglyphs in Ki Ulna on the Rio Wasma suggest that "the territory has been inhabited since 2,500 years ago."19 Hurtado de Mendoza links the Mayangnas to the Misumalpa language family (which includes the Miskito, Sumu, and Matagalpa languages), just as most other historians and anthropologists do. However, he estimates that this particular group could be as old as

16Ibid., 47.
17Conzemius, Ethnographical Survey, 18-19; Smutko, "Los Miskitos, Sumus y Rama," 78.
18Magnus, "The Prehistory of the Miskito Coast," 216.
4,500 years. This means, according to Hurtado de Mendoza, that indigenous groups may have inhabited eastern Nicaragua much longer than expected. This revision not only throws off theories that the Mayangnas have only lived in their present-day location for less than 1,000 years, but is also suggests that the Mayangnas may not have migrated to Nicaragua from South America.\(^{20}\)

Complementing Hurtado de Mendoza, Anthony Stocks speculates that when the Chibchan populations spread south through Central America, roughly 7,000 years ago, the Mayangnas may have remained in the region and, in fact, never reached South America. This interpretation, he explains, would account for the early archeological dates that have been found in eastern Nicaragua (like those that Hurtado de Mendoza mentions). Additionally, it would explain why the Mayangnas and Miskitus developed differently than other groups. Stocks believes that eastern Nicaragua remained something of a hinterland, and the indigenous populations there did not develop the chiefdom-type social and economic formations that occurred in the South American highlands.\(^{21}\) The Mayangnas likely never made it to South America. According to Stocks, then, even Luis Hurtado de Mendoza's estimate of a Mayangna arrival in Nicaragua 2,500 years ago is conservative.

Bolstering the argument for a much earlier Mayangna arrival than other scholars have speculated, Stocks and the colonial historian, German Romero Vargas, have examined the place names that the Spanish settlers found when they showed up in Nicaragua in the sixteenth century. Setting the stage for Stocks and Romero Vargas, Linda Newson argues that the Mayangnas probably inhabited much of Nicaragua at contact.\(^{22}\) Although her work does not focus on the Mayangnas, she does make it clear that, before the slave trade began in the sixteenth century, the Mayangnas' territory extended all the way

\(^{20}\)Ibid.

\(^{21}\)Anthony Stocks, personal communication via email, 13 February 1998.

from the Caribbean Sea to the shores of Lake Nicaragua; to the north, the Mayangnas extended well into Honduras, and south nearly to the Costa Rican border.23

Romero Vargas elaborates on Newson's speculation, pointing specifically the region of Nueva Segovia. There, he finds that when the first Spanish settlers arrived, Mayangna Indians were living in the region. He goes on to explain that the Mayangnas had most likely been there for a long time since many of the place names were identified with Mayangna words. For example, he points out that the Mayangna word was, which means "river," is widespread around Nueva Segovia: Acawas, Cacawas, Oliwas, Mayawas, Cariwas, and Sawawas are all examples.24 The evidence presented in Romero Vargas' work shows that, at contact, the Mayangnas were already well-established on the upper Coco River, far inland from the Caribbean.

Looking south, Anthony Stocks recognizes the same pattern in the place names along the eastern shores of Lakes Managua and Nicaragua: the names that the Spanish colonists discovered in the sixteenth century were predominantly Mayangna words. Stocks estimates that "the Mayangna ethnolinguistic group was probably the largest Chibchan language group of tropical forest farmers in Nicaragua, with lands that extended from Matiguas, just east of Lake Managua, to the Caribbean coastal fringe..."25 The ubiquity of Mayangna place names, then, demonstrates that the Mayangnas inhabited a large portion of Nicaragua before the conquest, and it suggests that they were living there long before contact.26 Additionally, this argument implies that the Mayangnas probably did not make a cohesive migration across Nicaragua to the Atlantic Coast, as their oral history tells and as many other scholars have maintained.27

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23Ibid.
24German Romero Vargas, Las Sociedades del Atlantico en Nicaragua en los Siglos XVII y XVIII (Managua: Fondo de Promoción Cultural-BANIC, 1995), 243.
27Several authors have written about a Mayangna migration from western Nicaragua to the Atlantic Coast. See Mary W. Helms, Asang: Adaptations to Culture Contact in a Miskito Community (Gainesville:
Mayangnas in the Interior: A New Interpretation

The discrepancies that disrupt a congruent portrayal of pre-Columbian Mayangna history do not evaporate at contact. The point of departure among those who have studied contact and the colonial era revolves around when the Mayangnas arrived in Nicaragua's interior, in (what is today) the BOSAWAS region. In order to show the changes that have occurred in Mayangna land use and to understand the impact that the market economy had during the colonial era, it is useful to know how long the Mayangnas have inhabited the ecosystem in which they now live. The traditional view, which supports a migration from western Nicaragua to the Atlantic Coast a few hundred years before contact, and then a move inland (forced by the Miskitu slavers) in the seventeenth century, has been followed since Conzemius wrote in the 1930s.

In my view, this theory has problems. If the Mayangnas had left the banks of Lake Nicaragua in order to move to the coast, how can the occurrence of Mayangna place names be explained? Had the Mayangnas moved to the Atlantic Coast and then, after several hundred years, migrated to the interior? If so, why is there no record of a marine adaptation? How could the Mayangnas, in the course of fifty to seventy five years, have adapted to the interior's ecosystem and learned how to survive on the new land?

Richard Magnus asks one of the same questions about how the Mayangnas could have adapted so quickly to an "inland riverine tropical forest environment" if they had been living on the coast previously.28 Magnus does not dispute that the Mayangnas moved inland to evade the Miskitu-English alliance that developed in the seventeenth century; instead, he argues that while the Mayangnas lived on the coast, they maintained a riverine adaptation as well as a marine adaptation, and, once inland, focused on agriculture,

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28 Magnus, "The Prehistory of the Miskito Coast," 177.
hunting, and river fishing. This view, however, appears too simple, and it seems unlikely that the Mayangnas would have left behind all traces of life on the coast.

More likely, it seems, the Mayangnas were already living inland at the time of contact. The place names found on the upper Coco River and along

Lake Nicaragua indicate a Mayangna presence at contact. Additionally, the first written accounts of the Mosquito Territory do not mention Mayangnas on the coast. John Esquemeling, for example, visited the region in the middle of the seventeenth century. In his 1684 publication, Esquemeling describes the Miskitu Indians living on the Atlantic Coast, but he makes no reference to the Mayangnas. William Dampier traveled to the

Figure 4: Mayangna Boys in a Pitpan—Mayangnas learn about river travel and the water at a young age. These boys guided the pitpan (canoe) successfully, even without sticks to pole. Notice in the foreground a large canoe carved by hand from a single tree.

29Ibid., 177-178
30John Esquemeling, The Buccaneers of America: A True Account of the Most Remarkable Assaults Committed of Late Years Upon the Coast of the West Indies by the Buccaneers of Jamaica and Tortuga,
region in the early 1680s, and while he makes numerous references to the Miskitu Indians, there is no evidence of any Mayangnas on the coast. Dampier claims, however, that there were other Indians living inland, presumably Mayangnas.\(^{31}\) Interestingly, Dampier continually points out the supreme fishing skills of the Miskitu men: "for one or two of them in a ship," he exclaims, "will maintain 100 men."\(^{32}\) Had the Mayangnas been living on the coast during the seventeenth century and in the preceding centuries, it makes sense that the Mayangnas would have been excellent fishers, too. But nowhere in the written record is there evidence of the Mayangnas possessing marine fishing skills. Nor is there a single reference to Mayangna settlements on the coast.

To the contrary, when M.W. made his journey far up the Coco River in the late seventeenth century, he did not encounter Mayangna Indians near Gracias a Dios at the head of the Coco. M.W., an English adventurer known only by these initials, is said to provide the first written record of the Mayangnas. He visited the Bocay region and the upper Coco River at the end of the seventeenth century.\(^{33}\) Supporting the notion that the Mayangnas were not living on the coast in the 1600s, M.W. mentions that he had traveled nearly 150 miles up the Coco before encountering the first Mayangna Indians: "About 45 leagues higher up this great river of Wanks . . . is a pretty large branch or rivulet [the Waspuk River?] running into the fourth side of it . . . the banks wherof are inhabited by another party of Indians who are flat-headed; many of which I have seen, to their no little amazement at an [.sic] European complexion."\(^{34}\) M.W. noted that Mayangnas wore decorative shells around their necks. Though his evidence tantalizes the reader because he

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\(^{32}\) Ibid., 15.

\(^{33}\) Scholars who have researched Mayangna history maintain that M.W. was the first to visit and document Mayangna communities. For M.W.'s publication on the region, see M.W., "The Mosquito Indian and His Golden River, (Written in or about the year 1699)," in *A Collection of Voyages and Travels*, ed. A. Churchill (London, 1732), 284-298.

\(^{34}\) M.W., "The Mosquito Indian," 290. According to the *Random House Dictionary, Second Unabridged Edition*, the distance a "league" represents has varied over time, but is roughly 3 miles (4.8 kilometers).
mentions materials from the sea, M.W. attributes the acquisition of the shells to trade with
the Miskitus who live on the coast.\footnote{\textit{M.W.}, "The Mosquito Indian," 290.} Even if M.W.'s specific observations are
questioned, and if it is assumed that he exaggerated the Mayangnas' surprise at seeing a
European (to make the journey seem more noble), he probably did not see any Mayangna
Indians until he had ventured far inland. Thus, if for no other reason, his account is useful
because it demonstrates that in northeastern Nicaragua, the Mayangnas did not live near the
coast at the end of the seventeenth century.

Based on these firsthand accounts from the seventeenth century—some of the only
written documentation from that period—a revision of the historiography is needed. The
traditional view, which is supported by some recent Mayangna oral histories, suggests that
it was the Miskitu slave raids that pushed the Mayangnas inland from the coast. Within this
viewpoint, the slave raids that drove off the Mayangnas were stimulated by the English, who provided the Miskitu Indians with guns and who bought the Mayangna slaves. Yet
the English colonists did not arrive in the Mosquitia until the 1630s, when a colony was
established at Cape Gracias a Dios. Adhering to this traditional theory, then, the
Mayangnas must have retreated inland to escape from Miskitu slavers sometime after 1630.
Since the firsthand reports cited above indicate that the Mayangnas were not living on or
near the coast in the late 1600s, they would have had to move more than 100 miles inland
where M.W. first spotted them, adapt to a new environment, and lose any coastal traits or
subsistence needs—all within the scope of 60-70 years. Unlikely.

Perhaps Stocks and Hurtado are on the right track when they propose that the
Mayangnas have inhabited Nicaragua's interior much longer than originally thought.
Although a specific date of arrival in the interior of eastern Nicaragua remains elusive, I
argue that the Mayangnas inhabited the area long-before contact. Further, without any trace
of a marine adaptation, and without any written documentation to show Mayangna villages
along the coast, questions arise about whether the Mayangnas ever lived in the littoral
environment. If they did live on the coast, it must have been at some distant point in the pre-Columbian era. Moreover, it was probably not Miskitu slave raids that pushed Mayangnas inland.

Conclusions

Establishing where the Mayangnas lived at contact helps discern how they lived, how they met their subsistence needs, and how they viewed the natural world prior to the European conquest. Not surprisingly, though, the first written records of their social, cultural, and subsistence patterns do not appear until the nineteenth century; earlier reports are either too brief or remain undiscovered by researchers. Richard Magnus's archeological study, which focuses primarily on Pearl Lagoon and the Miskitu Indians, not the Mayangnas, does not sufficiently augment the lack of written materials. He concludes that eastern Nicaragua was quite isolated for the first twelve centuries after the time of Christ. \(^{36}\) Trade in the region, he goes on to explain, was virtually non-existent, "simply because there was nothing to exchange."\(^{37}\) The pre-Columbian indigenous residents of eastern Nicaragua, therefore, produced what they needed locally, and had little contact with other zones.

The Mayangnas' subsistence economy, Magnus asserts, was based on tropical farming, supplemented with wild game and fish from the rivers. His reasoning, however, is not based on archeology. Rather, he deduces that "Without European weapons and steel, hunting would have been a more difficult and less sure source of food than agriculture. For that reason, it would seem that agriculture would have been more reasonable than fishing as a primary source of food."\(^{38}\) This erroneous logic might lead

\(^{36}\) Magnus, "The Prehistory of the Miskito Coast," 216.
\(^{37}\) Ibid., 180.
\(^{38}\) Ibid., 178.
the reader to believe that before European weapons were available to the world, everyone depended upon crops—food that didn't run away. People worldwide must have been awfully hungry by the time the Agricultural Revolution rolled around a mere 8,000 years ago! Most likely, the Mayangnas living before the conquest carried out a mixture of agriculture, hunting, fishing, and gathering. Without more conclusive data, I am reluctant to adopt Magnus's theory or draw precise conclusions about the pre-Columbian Mayangnas.

Relatively little is known about the Mayangna Indians who lived before the conquest of the Americas. For the past 75-100 years, most scholars have believed that the Mayangnas migrated north into Nicaragua from South America, probably from Colombia and eastern/southern Panama. Sometime after their arrival in Nicaragua, but probably within the last 1,000 years, they moved east from the area around Lake Nicaragua to the Atlantic Coast. When the English arrived in the Mosquitia at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Mayangnas were pushed inland by the Miskitu Indians who were capturing Mayangna slaves to sell to the English. Consequently, the Mayangnas would have been living in Nicaragua's interior, along the Coco, Prinzapolka, and Grande Rivers, for roughly three hundred years. This is one of the timelines—the traditional view of the Mayangnas' origins—that I have presented in this chapter. I believe it needs to be amended.

Supported by the recent arguments made by Luis Hurtado de Mendoza and Anthony Stocks, a more plausible theory is that the Mayangnas have inhabited Nicaragua and, more to the point, the BOSAWAS region, for much longer than proposed by most scholars. The distribution of Mayangnas at contact was not limited to the Atlantic Coast; instead, they probably covered much of Nicaragua. Place names throughout the country prove that Mayangnas existed in both eastern and western Nicaragua when Europeans arrived. But Mayangnas did not live along the Caribbean coastline. Travelers' accounts from the seventeenth century make no mention of Mayangnas on the coast. Further, the
absence of a marine adaptation indicate that the Mayangnas lived in the Mosquitia's interior at contact, not along the Caribbean Sea. They withdrew even farther inland during the colonial era. Thus, when English merchants first appeared on the Atlantic Coast in the 1630s, it was Miskitus, not Mayangnas, who greeted the newcomers at Cape Gracias a Dios.
Chapter 4

EUROPEAN NEWCOMERS AND INDIAN RIVALS:
RETFREAT IN THE COLONIAL ERA

European colonization came late to eastern Nicaragua, more than a century after the Spaniards had founded Granada on the northern shore of Lake Nicaragua. But the indigenous inhabitants of the Mosquitia were not immune from the effects of the conquest. As Ronas Dolores Green, a Mayangna Indian himself, testifies:

We used to feel very happy and proud when we lived alone with our own people, just Indians. We breathed pure air and bathed in our clear, fresh rivers. We talked in total confidence with our children, grandchildren, and all of our people. We had our view of grand trees with their green leaves that gave shade to our rivers. . . . All of these trees grew on our virgin land of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua.

We used to live peacefully and full of happiness on our land. We didn't know the faces of strangers or other colors of skin—white or black—in all of our past existence. We lived only with our group, and animals like the white faced monkey accompanied us. Within our group there weren't any thieves and we did not know what money was. Our life was in the countryside, in total freedom.1

Idealism aside, Ronas Dolores Green makes a valid point: life for the Mayangnas did change in the wake of the Europeans’ arrival in Nicaragua.

Contact had many effects. Disease and the Indian slave trade caused a sharp population decline in sixteenth century Nicaragua. Spanish colonists continually crept closer to Mayangna villages in eastern Nicaragua. Pirating and commerce brought Europeans to the Atlantic Coast and Coco River. England, not Spain, became the dominant European power in the region. And the Miskitu Indians’ military prowess, including slave

1 Ronas Dolores Green, "Historia de Los Sumus," 1980 (?), Documents Collection, Centro de Investigaciones y Documentación de la Costa Atlántica, Managua, Nicaragua, 1.

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raids against neighboring indigenous groups, threatened Mayangna communities. Together, these forces shaped the Mayangnas' colonial experience. Their cumulative impact played a significant role both in how the Mayangnas responded to the European conquest and how they became participants in the European market economy.

The effects of the European conquest on Indian peoples has a rich historiography. Traditionally, Indians have been depicted as somewhat static groups who, unable to react to the rapid infiltration of Europeans, were defeated or obliterated in the sixteenth century. Many of these interpretations convey mythical transformations—like Ronas Dolores Green's—whereby peaceful Indians frolicking in the Garden of Eden were rudely and dramatically wrenched into the Europeans' despicable world. But what about Indians who adapted to the influx of Europeans? Or those who fought back—and survived? How did they do it? How did they react to colonization? What was the outcome? If indigenous colonial history is to be understood, these questions must be asked—and answered.

The Mayangnas did react promptly and strategically to the conquest. Their tactic: withdrawal into isolation. The Mayangnas' migration away from foreigners was an active way for them to confront colonization. The strategy has been overlooked by many scholars who have been too quick to write off the Mayangnas, or by scholars who consider the Mayangnas a weak group that could not handle contact with outsiders. The correlation between the Mayangnas and the mimosa plant—the plant that withers and dies upon contact—comes to mind here and exemplifies scholars' traditional portrayal of the Mayangnas.

When Indian initiative appears in historical interpretations, scholars have usually illustrated their resistance to and survival of colonization with examples of groups who fought back militarily, or with Indians who took their cases to the Spanish courts, or with those who adapted to the European economic system and culture. The Mayangnas did

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none of these, yet they did respond to the conquest. Withdrawal was not the type of resistance undertaken by many indigenous groups, either because other groups could not flee or because there was no where to flee. But flight should not be overlooked as a calculated response to the conquest, as has been the case. It demonstrates Indian agency.

The Mayangnas' retreat to Nicaragua's interior certainly had repercussions. It kept their degree of participation in the European market economy at a reduced level. For many indigenous groups, increased participation in the European market during the colonial era carried with it profound social change. The cases have been well-documented: Increased trade led to the loss of subsistence strategies and dependence upon the market for food, clothing, shelter, etc.. Since the Mayangnas often chose isolation over trade with foreigners, however, the effects of market interaction were gradual and perhaps less dramatic for them than they were for many other Indian peoples. The choice kept the them at a low level of market incorporation throughout the colonial era. On Halls' continuum, they moved from an "external area" in the sixteenth century to the "contact periphery" at the end of the colonial period in the nineteenth century.

Even with only slight incorporation into the economic periphery, the Mayangnas acquired European goods. They also produced goods for trade. Over time, the Mayangnas' subsistence economy shifted from one based primarily on hunting and fishing to one that included agriculture as well. Throughout the colonial era, though, the Mayangnas preserved their ability to grow all of their own food. In the end, the Mayangnas' participation in the market did generate social and ecological transformation, but the changes were less severe than they were for other Indian peoples in the Americas.

These transformations—and the impetus behind them—can only be understood within the context of Spanish, English, and Miskitu colonial history. The conquest in Nicaragua occurred on two fronts: the Spanish in western Nicaragua and the English and Miskitus in eastern Nicaragua. Significantly, the conquest of the Atlantic Coast was propelled by Miskitu Indians as well as English colonists. Spurred by the English, the
Miskitus captured Mayangna slaves and pushed the Mayangnas into isolation. While they were raiding for slaves, the Miskitus acted as trade intermediaries. As a result, the Miskitus controlled much of the European-Indian trade in eastern Nicaragua. European colonists and enterprising Miskitus were all part of the Mayangnas' colonial experience.

**Spanish Colonization**

Nicaragua's indigenous peoples were not immune from the customary, and rather drastic, population decline in the sixteenth century. In fact, the slave trade that ran rampant throughout Central America hit Nicaragua most severely. It caused the indigenous population of western Nicaragua to fall even more precipitously than in other Latin American nations. At the same time, because the brunt of the slave trade and Spanish colonization pounded the Pacific side of the isthmus, colonization in eastern Nicaragua was postponed until the seventeenth century. Since the Mayangna Indians inhabited both eastern and western Nicaragua at contact, many suffered from the initial onslaught of epidemics and the slave trade at the hands of the Spanish, while others did not come into contact with Europeans until the 1600s, when the English arrived in the Mosquitia.

For the Mayangnas and other indigenous peoples who lived within reach of the Spanish colonizers' tentacles, the first half of the sixteenth century was particularly dreadful. Linda Newson explains that, as in many parts of the Americas, the population plummeted not only because of the newly introduced European diseases and the slave trade, but also because of other factors: the military conquest; forced labor; lack of desire to procreate; food shortages caused by the change from subsistence to working as laborers for the Spanish; the disruption of indigenous social structures; displacement; and infanticide or abortion.3 While not unique to Nicaragua, Newson's list encompasses the various ways

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that people and societies were affected by the conquest. Indian populations could collapse without ever seeing a European colonist. The demoralizing effect that epidemics had on entire communities often devastated even those who were not physically ill. If the Indians associated disease with European colonists, the epidemics may have encouraged their flight.

Nicaragua as a whole, Newson reports, saw a 92 percent population decline by 1550, and by 1581, Indians had suffered a 97.5 percent loss. Estimates of Nicaragua's indigenous population on the eve of the Spanish conquest vary considerably. Newson, for instance, argues that the 97.5 percent decline was a drop from roughly 825,000 before contact to between 50,000 and 65,000 in 1581. Radell agrees that more than 90 percent of the population was destroyed, but he puts the pre-contact population figures much higher, maintaining that between 1 million and 1.3 million Nicaraguan Indians died in the same period.

While the specific numbers are still debated, the number of Indians living in Nicaragua certainly plummeted in the sixteenth century. Contributing significantly to the loss was the slave trade that forcibly relocated hundreds of thousands of Nicaraguan Indians to Panama, Peru, Hispaniola, and other Spanish settlements where the local indigenous population had already been wiped out. In an effort to sustain an indigenous labor force in each Central American country, the Crown outlawed the slave trade in 1536. But, as David Radell points out, it "did not end with the stroke of a pen." Because the slave trade was lucrative and the Crown lacked enforcement power in the colonies, illegal slave trading persisted for at least a decade after the 1536 law had been approved. The slave trade's toll was severe—an estimated 200,000 to 300,000 Indian slaves were

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5Newson, "The Depopulation of Nicaragua," 284.
7Ibid., 67.
8Ibid., 74.
exported. What's more, the Indians affected most profoundly were those living in western Nicaragua, close to the Pacific ports. The inhabitants of eastern Nicaragua and those who resided in remote areas only experienced occasional slave raids in their villages.

Though the Mayangnas and other indigenous groups in the Mosquitia were not the focus of the slave trade, they were still affected by the Spanish conquest. Newson points out that the Indian population in eastern Nicaragua did decline. Both disease and occasional slave raids "had disruptive effects on their economies and social organisation and resulted in further losses of population." This population drop occurred even though Europeans did not colonize the Caribbean lowlands in the sixteenth century. Actually, these areas that were not under Spanish control (i.e., most of the Central highlands and all of the Caribbean lowlands) witnessed a population drop of about one-half to two-thirds—from roughly 100,000 at contact to between 30,000 and 50,000 in 1581. As for the Mayangnas, Anthony Stocks estimates that their population fell by 90 percent in the colonial period. Because they inhabited western and eastern Nicaragua, they were affected by both Spanish and English colonization. The result: of the ten Mayangna tribes that existed at contact (Twahka, Panamaca, Bawahka, Ulva, Yosco, Prinsu, Tawira, Tunla, Silam, and Ku), six became extinct or assimilated into other groups.

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9Estimates of the number of Indian slaves taken from Nicaragua are not consistent. My figure above comes from the findings of three scholars: Radell, Newson, and William Sherman. The high figure comes from Radell, who proposed that roughly 450,000 slaves were exported from Nicaragua; see Radell, "The Indian Slave Trade," 74. Linda Newson estimates that between 200,000 and 500,000 Indian slaves were removed from Nicaragua, Honduras, and Guatemala, though most were from Nicaragua; see Newson "The Depopulation of Nicaragua," 275. The most conservative guess is Sherman's who claims that only 150,000 Indian slaves were taken from Nicaragua and Honduras; for his discussion, see William Sherman, Forced Native Labor in Sixteenth Century Central America (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979).


11Ibid., 270.

12Ibid., 269-270.


Unfortunately, a population estimate for the Mayangnas at contact is not, to my knowledge, available. The first estimates do not exist until the nineteenth century, when Orlando Roberts and Charles N. Bell reported that the Mayangnas made up half of the Indian population of eastern Nicaragua—putting the Mayangnas at roughly 7,000. Bell and Henry Wickham, who both wrote in the 1800s, saw that the Mayangna population had been steadily declining and predicted that the Mayangnas would disappear completely someday. Eduard Conzemius made the same prediction in the late 1920s. He guessed that because of the "lack of hygienic living conditions they are rapidly diminishing in numbers, and the day of their complete disappearance or absorption by the Miskito does not seem far off. Their total number is estimated at about 3,000 to 3,500." Interestingly, their population has been on a steady incline since the 1920s; today it is more than twice what Conzemius estimated.

This apocalyptic prediction corresponds perfectly with the traditional historiographical view of the Mayangnas: a fragile or feeble indigenous group that ran whimpering into the forest. The Mayangnas' retreat has also been described as ineffective, even inferior to that of other Indians. In one case, the Miskitu Indians were praised by a scholar because they engaged in trade with the English and utilized guns to help establish their dominance on the Atlantic Coast. Not the Mayangnas. The scholar writes: "in contrast to the Sumu, the Miskito were able to adjust in a positive sense to the Western contact they were continually to encounter from then on" (my emphasis). Her implication is clear—the Mayangnas did not adjust in a positive sense. Who is to say what is positive and what is negative? My argument is not that the Mayangnas responded

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16Ibid., 24.
favorably or unfavorably, but is rather that they responded at all. The Mayangnas were not static or inactive during the colonial era, or ever. They reacted to the conquest by moving to geographically isolated areas and by limiting their contact (i.e., trade relations) with European colonists.

Figure 5: Colonization and the Land—Colonists in Nicaragua (in the colonial era and at present) have cleared the forest for crops, stock animals, and settlement. Colonization has not only altered the land, but it has also triggered a Mayangna retreat into the region's most remote areas. Today, colonization continues on the agricultural frontier, which threatens both the forest and the indigenous inhabitants of the BOSAWAS Reserve.

The arrival of Europeans into eastern Nicaragua—the Spanish to the west of the Mayangnas and the English on the coast to the east—made an enduring imprint on indigenous life in the Mosquitia. It caused the Mayangnas to migrate into isolated areas, it transformed Mayangna-Miskitu relations, and it started the gradual process of Mayangna incorporation into the European market economy. The Spanish were the first Europeans to have contact with the Mayangnas. In the sixteenth century (as previously discussed) most
of the indigenous population that had inhabited western Nicaragua was either lost to the
slave trade or wiped out by disease. Some, though, survived the conquest. The Matagalpa
Indians, for example, who lived in the region of Jinotega and Matagalpa in northern
Nicaragua, lost their language and by the late 1800s had completed assimilated into the
mestizo population. Some of the Mayangnas who had inhabited the western part of the
Mosquitia, next to the Matagalpa, may have undergone the same process, losing their
language and merging with the incoming Europeans. Other Mayangna survivors who lived
in north-central Nicaragua were not assimilated. They hid from the Spanish.

When Nueva Segovia in northern Nicaragua was founded by the Spanish in 1543,
Mayangna Indians lived in the area and had some contact with the colonists. But, as
German Romero Vargas explains, these Mayangnas lived primarily in areas of "difficult
access," especially along the Bocay River and near present-day Siuna. Indeed they were
isolated. When M.W. ventured into the Bocay region at the end of the seventeenth century,
he mentioned that the "flat-headed" Indians of the interior looked at him with surprise, with
"no little amazement at an [sic] European complexion." They were "extremely terrified at
the firing of a gun," noted M.W., and they believed that an evil spirit came out when it was
fired. Though M.W. certainly could have exaggerated the Mayangnas' surprise at seeing
him, his account illustrates that the Mayangnas were not accustomed to seeing Europeans
on a regular basis. Evidently, the Mayangnas who were closest to Spanish settlements
either relocated to remote areas or chose to remain in the isolated areas that they already
inhabited. Their goal, it seems, was to avoid regular contact with European colonists.

Whether the Mayangnas fled to avoid the Spanish colonists or already lived in those
remote areas, by the seventeenth century, the Mayangnas had only limited contact with

20German Romero Vargas, Las Sociedades del Atlanticoen Nicaragua en los Siglos XVII y XVIII
(Managua: Fondo de Promoción Cultural-BANIC, 1995), 243-245. Recall from the previous chapter on
pre-Columbian Mayangnas that Romero Vargas noted a strong Mayangna presence in the Nueva Segovia
region because place names often had the Mayangna word *was,* which means "river," included in the name.
21M.W., "The Mosquito Indian and His Golden River," (written in or about the year 1699) in A Collection
Europeans. They rarely emerged from the forested mountains of the interior. Thus, they were making a conscious decision to evade the Europeans and remain isolated. Neither of these responses (fleeing or keeping themselves hidden) was passive. Yet neither involved warfare. Nor were these responses carried out within the confines of European institutions, such as the Spanish legal system. The Mayangnas had found a way to foil European utopias in eastern Nicaragua. They were not victims of a bloody, villainous European takeover.

**The English Arrival**

In addition to the influx of Spanish colonists in the west, Miskitu Indians and English merchants penetrated the Mosquitia in the east. English merchants and colonists arrived on the Caribbean coast in the early seventeenth century. European buccaneers pirated on the Coco River. And Miskitu slave raiders subjugated the Mayangnas throughout the colonial era. Together these forces all triggered the Mayangnas’ withdrawal toward the interior, and they all influenced their degree of participation in the market economy. To understand any of these forces, however, the reader must first grasp the Mayangna-Miskitu-English relationship that developed during the colonial period.

The existing historiography contains a great deal about the Miskitu-English component of this relationship, describing both the Miskitus’ military supremacy in the Mosquitia and their quasi-alliance with the English. But what about the Mayangnas? How do they fit into this scenario? Usually, they figure in only to help delineate the Miskitus’ position. The interpretation unfolds like this: Miskitu Indians controlled the Mosquitia because the backward Mayangnas fled into obscurity or were enslaved by the Miskitus. In

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22 According to German Romero Vargas, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, pirating on the Coco River probably threatened the Mayangnas, and it may have caused them to retreat farther into the mountains toward the headwaters of the Coco and other rivers. For his discussion, see Romero Vargas, *Las Sociedades*, 249.
this context, the Mayangnas are usually portrayed as static victims overrun by powerful Miskitus. But Atlantic Coast history was more complex. Both Mayangna-Miskitu and Miskitu-English relations shaped the Mayangnas’ history. My interpretation gives the Mayangnas their own place in the history of eastern Nicaragua, a tactic that has not been pursued by others. This approach presents Mayangna history vis-à-vis Europeans and Miskitus.

Although Spanish colonists had interacted with the Mayangnas in the sixteenth century, it was the arrival of the English in the early 1600s that started the colonization of the Mosquitia. Under the direction of the English Providence Company, whose grant specified that the company could occupy any land not already held by the Spanish, a trading expedition was sent to the Mosquitia in 1633. The Providence Company already had settlements on several Caribbean islands. Now it was expanding. Directed by the chairman of the Providence Company, John Pym, the expedition was commanded to “endear yourselves with the Indians and their commanders and . . . be friendly and cause no jealousy.” The expedition observed Pym’s advice. Indians at Cape Gracias a Dios welcomed the foreign merchants and initiated trade straight away, perhaps giving the English tortoise shells or manatee hides. With a peaceful reception and excellent opportunities for trade, the English set up a colony at Gracias a Dios that same year, 1633.24

The Spanish had not yet settled the Atlantic Coast in the 1630s. Their attempts had been thwarted by hostile Indians or by other obstacles. The Miskitu Indians on the coast did not express the same animosity toward the English that they did toward the Spanish. Explaining the contrast, Troy Floyd points out that after the English arrived in the Mosquitia, they did not proselytize Indians. Nor did the English try to establish permanent settlements and alter indigenous social structures, as the Spanish did with encomiendas,

24Ibid., 18-21.
congregación, or repartimiento.\textsuperscript{25} The way Floyd sees it, both the coastal Indians and the English "had something to offer the other; neither sought consciously to alter the other's religion or morals, although both were subtly changed in the years ahead."\textsuperscript{26} Although he simplifies contact and the ensuing changes to the indigenous residents, Floyd makes a valuable observation. The pattern of colonization, right from the start, was not so much one of establishing permanent settlements but one with a more directed, extractive intention: trade.

\textbf{Miskitu Openness to Outsiders}

In addition to the English adventurers who appeared in the Mosquitia, another group showed up a decade later—escaped African slaves. The influx of Africans has been a significant part of the Miskitus' history. In fact, one of the principal positions within the historiography is that without the admixture of Africans and Europeans, the Miskitu Indians would not exist. As Conzemius explains, the Miskitus were originally a subtribe of the Mayangnas, but after intermarrying with the "Negroes, Europeans, and other Indian tribes," they formed their own group.\textsuperscript{27} Following this line of thought, the Miskitu people developed after the 1640s when a ship carrying African slaves reportedly wrecked off the coast of Gracias a Dios.

Accounts of the Africans' arrival vary considerably. Conzemius argues that a slave ship wrecked off Cape Gracias a Dios in 1641. The "negroes" aboard the ship bound for Brazil from Guinea Coast, revolted and took over. When winds in the Caribbean carried

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{25}An \textit{encomienda} was the right to Indian labor (gifts of Indians) on a given plot of land. The encomendero could legally collect tribute from the Indians who lived on his land. Although he could force Indians to work for him, the Indians were not slaves. \textit{Congregación} was a process by which missionaries forcibly relocated Indians into central towns or villages. \textit{Repartimiento} was a system of Indian labor where Indians moved against their will to work for Spanish colonists. After a period of time, perhaps a few months, the Indians could return to their homes.  

\textsuperscript{26}Floyd, \textit{The Anglo-Spanish Struggle}, 20.  

\textsuperscript{27}Conzemius, \textit{Ethnographical Survey}, 17.}
them into the dangerous Mosquito Keys, the ship went aground. The survivors abandoned ship and made it to shore at Cape Gracias a Dios. Here, the escaped slaves met Bawihka Indians, a Mayangna tribe. The Bawihkas, Conzemius explains, initially enslaved the Africans, but then allowed the newcomers to intermarry with the Bawihkas; the children grew up free. Over time, the Bawihkas became the Miskitu Indians, with a mixture of indigenous, European, and African genes. Although Conzemius recounts different versions of the story, what changes is only the date the ship arrived (1641-1652), its origin and its destination. Mary Helms, too, has adopted this interpretation, calling the Miskitus a post-conquest phenomenon.

This theory not only assumes that the Mayangnas lived on the coast in the seventeenth century, but it also relies on the fact that a clear distinction between the Miskitu and Mayangna Indians did not exist until the seventeenth century. Both assumptions seem suspect. More plausible is the notion that the Miskitus accepted foreigners into their society while the Mayangnas either fled or drove them away. The addition of foreigners into the Miskitu population would have altered the Miskitus, but not necessarily created them. Michael Olien calls this post-conquest group the Zambo-Miskitus, an "Indian-Black admixture." Olien goes on to note that Zambos originated with or were formed from "shipwrecked African slaves and runaway Black slaves from the interior mining regions of Tegucigalpa and Comayagua who mated with Miskito women. The Zambos were eventually incorporated into the Miskito population and by the mid-nineteenth century were generally no longer identified as a separate population." While Olien's interpretation seems more accurate than Conzemius's, the critical point here is that the Miskitus welcomed non-Miskitus into their communities, inter-married with the newcomers, and

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28Ibid.
29Helms writes that “Biologically it seems that the Miskito are a mixed group which developed after contact through the admixture of an indigenous population with Negroes and buccaneers” (Helms, Asang, 18).
readily accepted the children. This custom was totally contrary to the Mayangnas’ behavior—they fled from outsiders and opposed marriage with any non-Mayangnas.

Not only did the Miskitus’ acceptance of foreigners change their own society, it also had ramifications throughout the western Caribbean. Their openness allowed for the development of an informal alliance between the English and the Miskitus. It was an alliance that persisted for centuries and caused four principal changes in the Mosquitia: (1) England gained a foothold in the region that lasted until the turn of the twentieth century; (2) with significant help from the Miskitus, England repelled Spanish conquerors and kept the Atlantic Coast distinctively British; (3) with help from European material goods and weapons (provided by the English), the Miskitu Indians became the most powerful indigenous group on the Atlantic Coast of Central America; and (4) the Miskitus became trade intermediaries, controlling both the flow of goods in from Europe and out from Nicaragua’s interior. None of these changes occurred independently of the others. They all affected both the Mayangnas’ reaction to the conquest and their participation in the European market economy.

The Long British Presence

Britain's presence in eastern Central America was not ephemeral. The European power dominated the region until the turn of the twentieth century. Surprisingly, the English foothold in the region manifested itself quickly, even without much guidance from London. Charles Hale, who has written extensively about the Atlantic Coast and the Miskitu Indians, mentions that the British presence in the Mosquitia was not "part of a coherent, well-consolidated colonial programme." The process did, however, introduce significant political, economic, and social changes that "fundamentally transformed inter-
ethnic relations" in the region. Throughout the seventeenth century, the English maintained a strong position on the Atlantic Coast; but, not until 1688 did the region come under the official jurisdiction of the English government at Jamaica. Soon after, in 1698-1699, the Scotch Darien Company set up a post at New Caledonia, further cementing the English presence on the coast. But Spain, perturbed with England’s move into the Mosquitia, continued to protest against their European rival. Finally, in 1786 a treaty was signed by the two European nations that called for an English evacuation of the Mosquitia.

England, however, did not leave for long. Its tenacious pursuit of a western Caribbean stronghold meant that after Spain withdrew from Central America in the early 1820s, the English returned. In 1843 the Mosquitia became an English protectorate. When the Mosquito Territory came back under British rule, the Mosquito Territory extended from Cape Gracias a Dios south to the Laguna de Chiriqui in Panama. Later, the southern boundary was moved north to the San Juan River on the Costa Rican-Nicaraguan border.

To further complicate the story, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the United States entered the picture. As Nicaragua became the principal candidate for a transoceanic canal, British-US tensions soared. Both nations wanted a strong position on the Atlantic Coast. The desired route, up until the final decision to construct the canal in Panama, had been along the San Juan River, to Lake Nicaragua, and via a short canal, to the Pacific Ocean. As the twentieth century approached, Britain’s influence in the area

32 Johnson, "Central American Cultures," 57.
33 Orlando Roberts, Narrative of Voyages and Excursions on the East Coast and in the Interior of Central America; Describing a Journey up the River San Juan, and Passage Across the Lake of Nicargua to the City of Leon, a facsimile of the 1827 edition, with an introduction by Hugh Craggs (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1965), 37.
34 Johnson, "Central American Cultures," 57.
36 Johnson, "Central American Cultures," 57.
waned until, in 1905, the British signed the Harrison-Altamirano Treaty and left the region permanently.37

England’s long stay in the Mosquitia was not without challenge. Beginning in the seventeenth century, Spain opposed England’s dominance in the region.38 Faced with a variety of obstacles, however, the Spanish were never able to colonize eastern Nicaragua. As in other Central American countries, Spain’s focus was always on the Pacific side of the isthmus. Many Spanish settlers believed that the Atlantic Coast was too remote and that the damp tropical climate made it a sweltering, disease-infested place to live.39 Those who did venture into the area were often met by hostile Indians on land or by recalcitrant English buccaneers on the seas. Olien and Dennis point out that the Miskitus, who were allied with the English, not only attacked the Spanish on the sea, but they also traveled inland to attack Spanish settlements. "These early forays,” they explain "set the pattern for the next 200 years: a Miskito-English alliance on the coast pitted against the Spanish colonial settlements to the west."40 Perhaps one of the most significant reasons Spain failed to take root in the Mosquitia was the lack of precious metals.41 Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that Spanish colonists found it difficult (or impossible) to establish themselves on the Atlantic Coast. They never could bring the Indian people under their control or harness indigenous labor.

37CIDCA, Demografía Costeña, 44. The Harrison-Altamirano Treaty is cited from an excerpt appearing in Eleonore von Oertzen, Lioba Rossbach, Volker Wunderich, eds., The Nicaraguan Mosquitia in Historical Documents: 1844-1927; The Dynamics of Ethnic and Regional History (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1990), 436-437.
38For one of the most thorough discussions of the rivalry between England and Spain in the western Caribbean during the colonial period, see Floyd, The Anglo-Spanish Struggle.
English Merchants and Miskitu Military Might

The informal alliance between the Miskitus and the English not only helped repel the Spanish from the region. It also bolstered the Miskitus’ military strength, vis-à-vis other Indian groups. Even though the English presence in the Mosquitia was not steady, in the wake of England's arrival, the Miskitus became the most powerful indigenous group in the western Caribbean.42 The Miskitus’ collection of tribute from neighboring Indian peoples, the slave raids they waged on surrounding groups, and their monopoly of the European-Indian trade network firmly placed them in a dominant position among the indigenous inhabitants of the region.

Not surprisingly, Mayangna-Miskitu relations were re-configured during the colonial period.43 Documentation of their relationship at contact is rare, and the oral history is ambiguous. One of the legends handed down, the "Myth of the Common Origin of the Sumus and Miskitus," shows a shared past with the Miskitu, and indicates that, in early times, Mayangnas considered Miskitus to be their brothers and sisters.44 If the Mayangnas had always believed that Miskitus were hostile, it seems unlikely that Mayangnas would have attributed their origin to the same place, to the same creator, as the Miskitus. They were likely more amicable neighbors before the European conquest.

A different legend, on the other hand, called "How the Sumus Arrived at the Atlantic Coast and What Happened There," reveals that as soon as the Mayangnas arrived

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43 Johnson argues that "The ensuing alliance between the English and [Miskitu] Indians resulted in the expansion of territory of the local tribe at the expense of its aboriginal neighbors [the Mayangnas]. As a consequence of this alliance the aboriginal culture was profoundly modified." Unfortunately, Johnson does not elaborate on the cultural changes that resulted; instead it is implied that the two groups became greater enemies, and that the Mayangnas became more fearful of the Miskitus. For the discussion, see Johnson, "Central American Cultures," 57.

44 Lehman originally recorded this legend; it was re-recorded by Heath in the early 20th century. It is cited here, as elsewhere in this thesis, from Götz von Houwald and Francisco Rener *Mayangna Yulina Kulna Balna. Tradiciones Orales de los Sumus. Mundliche Überlieferungen der Sumu-Indianer* (Bonn: Bonner Amerikanistische Studien, 1984), 29.
in eastern Nicaragua, they were enslaved by the Miskitu King. Obviously, this interpretation shows a long history of bitterness between the two groups. The legend, however, must be relatively new. Miskitu kingship, as it became known, was an English institution that transformed the Miskitus' extant socio-political structure. Friend or foe, these ambiguous representations of the Mayangnas' perspective toward the Miskitus cloud the story and make it difficult to draw any definitive conclusions about early Mayangna-Miskitu relations.

The ethno-historical record shows that the Mayangnas and the Miskitus did not maintain a peaceful relationship. Pre-contact inter-ethnic relations were largely characterized by warfare. According to Julian Steward, both the Mayangnas and the Miskitus had military hierarchies within their communities and trained rigorously for combat. In fact, part of a Mayangna boy's transition from adolescence to manhood consisted of training for and participating in warfare. The Miskitus, too, took combat seriously. After a victory, Steward claims, they killed the enemy, made trophies of their teeth and fingernails, and "reputedly" ate them. In the late seventeenth century, M.W. confirmed the hostile relations, calling the Mayangnas and Miskitus "deadly enemies." Whether we label the Miskitus as cannibals or not, Mayangna-Miskitu relations were not friendly.

Ironically, the near constant warfare between the Mayangnas and the Miskitus did not deter them from bartering with each other. In fact, the two groups carried on consistent commercial relations and traded for goods before the arrival of the English in the 1600s. Linda Newson confirms that trade between the two groups existed before contact, and that

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47 Ibid.
49 CIDCA, Demografía Costeña, 24.
goods in eastern Nicaragua were exchanged primarily through a system of barter.\textsuperscript{50} Unfortunately, little is known about these trade relations until the end of the seventeenth century, when M.W. visited Mayangna communities on the upper Coco River.\textsuperscript{51} Frederick Johnson laments about the lack of documentation, explaining that "Almost nothing in the 16th-century documents can be construed as a description of the Sumo, and, as a matter of fact, little was known of them until the very last of the 17th century."\textsuperscript{52} Consequently, M.W.'s observations, while perhaps the most representative of the pre-contact Mayangnas, were not made until after the English had been in the Mosquitia for more than half a century. It is difficult to gauge how the English colonists influenced Mayangna-Miskitu relations in those first fifty years. Assuming the European influence was not yet profound, his reports offer a view of what Indian commerce may have looked like at contact.

The trade that M.W. described between the coastal Indians and the "wild Indians" of the interior was peculiar. Perhaps the Mayangnas' necklaces epitomized Mayangna-Miskitu relations: on the same string were teeth from a war victim as well as shells and beads traded from the same enemy (the Miskitus). What M.W. saw was not a continual exchange of goods, or a regular interchange between the Mayangnas and the Miskitus. Rather, trade took place only occasionally. The two groups would designate a time for the hostility to end and for the commerce to begin. As M.W. explains, the Mayangnas

\begin{quote}
wear about their necks a few shells and teeth of their captives, on a string like a necklace, and some few beads which they buy of the Mosquito-men, with whom they have commerce at certain times of the year, in which they
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{50}Newson, \textit{Indian Survival}, 196.
\textsuperscript{51}M.W., "The Mosquito Indian," 284-298. There were other travelers into the region in the second half of the seventeenth century, especially Esquemeling and Dampier, but they did not venture inland and made only occasional references to Indians who inhabited the "interior" of Nicaragua. For their works, see John Esquemeling, \textit{The Buccaneers of America: A True Account of the Most Remarkable Assaults Committed of Late Years Upon the Coast of the West Indies by the Buccaneers of Jamaica and Tortuga, Both English and French}, ed. William Swan Stallybrass (London: George Routledge and Sons, Ltd., 1924) (originally published in 1684); William Dampier, \textit{A New Voyage Round the World}, with an introduction by Sir Albert Gray, K.C.B., K.G. (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1937).
\textsuperscript{52}Johnson, "Central American Cultures," 59.
Trade between these two groups was not extensive. The Mayangnas and the Miskitus would meet on the appointed days and carry on a small trade of goods, but during the bulk of the year, they were enemies.

After the English arrived on the Atlantic Coast, Mayangna-Miskitu relations became even more antagonistic. The Miskitus captured Mayangna slaves more frequently because they were selling them to Europeans. The Miskitus also became more powerful militarily. Many scholars have attributed Miskitu dominance to their quasi-alliance with the English. In particular, the Miskitus' acquisition of European arms has been stressed as the principal reason. While this notion seems too simplistic and relies too heavily on the idea that European technology reigned supreme over all other initiatives, it is, nonetheless, important to recognize that guns probably did help the Miskitus. At the same time, other factors help explain the Miskitus' dominance.

A system of kingship and tribute created and stimulated by the English, helped ensure Miskitu authority in the Mosquitia. While the institution of Miskitu kingship most likely utilized a pre-existing system of a "big man" or a "chief," it was also an English creation, one that gave the king much greater power over neighboring indigenous groups.

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54Roberts attributes the Miskitu dominance in the Mosquitia to trade relations with the British (Roberts, Narrative of Voyages, 57); Helms, "Cultural Ecology," 78; In another work, Helms claims that "Miskito dominance was achieved through ownership of a new weapon, the gun..." (Helms, Asang, 19); A CIDCA article explains that after gaining arms from the British, the Miskitus dominated the region for two centuries (CIDCA, Demografia Costeña, 24); The Americas Watch Committee argues that the British supplied the Miskitus with weapons not only to help the Miskitus dominate the other Indian tribes in the region, but also in order to fight off the Spanish colonists (Americas Watch Report, The Sumus in Nicaragua and Honduras: An Endangered People (Washington, D.C.: The Americas Watch Committee, 1987), 6).
than previously afforded. Whatever its origin, kingship was not a state-type, centralized political system. But it provided the Miskitus with the impetus to collect tribute from other Indians, like the Mayangnas, in the name of the king. Mary Helms has argued that tribute became a necessity for the Miskitus, primarily because of their precarious position in the Mosquitia: they had depended on the Mayangnas both for goods to trade with the English and for some of their food, while, at the same time, they depended on the English for European goods and arms. Tribute made the Miskitus' position more stable. It provided a steady supply of goods and economic materials to trade with the British. And when tribute was not enough for the Miskitus, they raided the Mayangnas.

Tribute, then, was brought to the king both voluntarily and involuntarily. Sometimes the payment was made with goods from the interior, other times with human slaves. When M.W. wrote in the late 1600s, he described Miskitu raids as a search for slaves and other goods, though he does not mention that it was for the king specifically. Much later, in the nineteenth century, Charles N. Bell explains that the Mayangnas brought tribute for the king on their own, without armed solicitation. At one point, Bell watched the Mayangnas bring two huge canoes, the larger of which was a cedar canoe that was 36 feet long and seven feet wide! The canoes, he noted, were filled with plantains, bananas, sugarcane, cassava, pineapples, baskets of soopa palm fruit, deer and tiger skins, as well as indiarubber. It was all for the king.

The Miskitus' collection of tribute continued after England left the Mosquitia. In the first decades of the twentieth century, when kingship as an institution had ended, the

55 Dennis and Olien contend that the Miskitu king was not merely an English puppet, as previously portrayed by many scholars. Instead, they conclude that the Miskitus probably had a similar system intact when the English arrived; the new king “was easily grafted onto existing cultural patterns, where it quickly took root and prospered” (Dennis and Olien, “Kingship Among the Miskito,” 735). See also, Olien, “Imperialism, Ethnogenesis and Marginality,” 5-7; idem, “The Miskito Kings and the Line of Succession,” 198-241.
56 Dennis, “Coronation on the Miskito Coast,” 392.
German traveler, Karl Sapper, and the Moravian missionary, George Heath, noted that the Miskitus were still attempting to collect tribute from the Mayangnas. Even in the 1970s, the legacy endured. Jenkins and von Houwald contend that the Mayangnas' agricultural plots were usually situated far from the riverbank. The distance was to keep them hidden from potential Miskitu raiders.

With Miskitu kingship and tribute persisting from the seventeenth century to the twentieth century, the institution made a lasting imprint on the Mayangnas. Attempts to avoid paying tribute drove the Mayangnas farther into the interior, into areas that were more remote and difficult to find than their earlier location. Additionally, because the Miskitus needed goods that could be exchanged with the English, they would have sought out forest products (rubber, precious woods, sarsaparilla, etc.) as much as food items. Consequently, in their quest for natural resources, the English merchants and the Miskitu tribute collectors propelled the Mayangnas into a slightly different relationship with the natural world. Tribute, for instance, may have caused the Mayangnas to hunt fewer peccaries for food and more tigers for their pelts. The Mayangnas were, to an extent, altering their land use practices. Further, to elude tribute collectors, the Mayangnas retreated farther inland in search of isolation.

Tribute was one thing. Miskitu slave raids were quite another. For approximately two centuries, the Miskitu Indians conducted slave raids throughout the western Caribbean, instilling fear among their neighbors and leaving the Mayangnas suspicious and fearful of outsiders. Like many other Indian peoples who were subjected to enslavement campaigns in the colonial era, the Mayangnas did not watch idly. Their course of action, however, was different than that of many other groups. Rather than defending themselves militarily or relying on legal channels, the Mayangnas responded quickly and strategically by fleeing

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into remote areas where they hid from the Miskitu slavers. The slave raids took their toll on the Mayangnas. Nonetheless, the Mayangnas' flight vexed both Miskitu slavers and English slave traders. Once again, the Mayangnas were unraveling a European colonial utopia.

The extent of Miskitu slaving should not be underestimated. Until the end of the seventeenth century, slaves were captured by both the Mayangnas and the Miskitus. It was a mutual exchange. M.W. observed that "Thefe people [the Mayangnas] are continually, in the dry feafons, invaded by the Mofqueto-men, who take away their young wives and children for flaves, either killing or putting to flight the men and old women."62 But the raids were accompanied by trade, and both indigenous groups raided each other. This interchange—one that may have had mutual benefits for both Indian groups—probably existed until the Miskitus started selling Mayangna slaves to the English.63

With the establishment of the English colony at Jamaica, Miskitu slave raids intensified. By 1700, the booming sugar industry in Jamaica had depleted local labor resources, which, in turn, created a demand for slaves—a need the Miskitu Indians tried to meet.64 At the turn of the eighteenth century, the Miskitus had already forged a relationship with the English. Driven by a desire to trade with the English and to emulate many of their customs, the Miskitu Indians colluded with the English. The Miskitus were providing Mayangna slaves for the English. Mary Helms has argued that the Miskitu Indians engaged in slave raids on their own initiative, in an attempt to obtain useful resources and adapt to the spread of English colonists into the Mosquitia.65 Adapt they

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63Using evidence from M.W., Helms maintains that prior to 1700, the pattern of enslavement campaigns for both indigenous groups indicates that mutual benefits resulted: "The pattern followed until 1700, in which women and children were captured in raids interspersed with peaceful trade, suggests a practice common to tribal peoples in which exchange of persons and materials goods is conducted for social, political, and ideological as well as economic reasons." For her discussion, see Helms, "Miskito Slaving," 185.
64Helms attributes the rise of Miskitu slaving to the English: "It is certainly no coincidence that the expanded scale and the increasingly specific nature of Miskito slave raids coincided with the formative years of the British colony in Jamaica, particularly with the period of economic difficulties between the decline of buccaneering and the emergence of Jamaica as a sugar-producing colony" (Helms, "Miskito Slaving," 185).
did. At the height of the slave trade, the Miskitus were selling as many as 20 Mayangna slaves at a time. To pay for the slaves, the English offered _carey_ turtle shells, cacao, or arms; at the time, cacao and shells were the only forms money in the Mosquitia.66

By the eighteenth century, the slave trade in eastern Nicaragua had changed from one of mutual benefits in the 1600s to one that epitomized Miskitu domination and military supremacy. It must not be overlooked, though, that the Miskitu slave raids occurred concomitantly with the growth of the English colony in Jamaica. Moreover, without the formation of the Miskitu-English alliance, it would have been more difficult (with less incentive) for the Miskitus to engage in such rigorous, far-reaching slave missions. Whether Miskitu slave raids were the successful outcome of a British hegemonic project is a question left unanswered. To be sure, the Miskitu slave raids and military campaigns fit nicely into England's colonial program, whereby the Miskitus provided both Indian slaves for the sugar plantations in Jamaica and natural resources from eastern Nicaragua.

The Miskitu slave raids left their mark on the Mayangnas. In the 1920s, long after the slave raids had stopped, the Moravian Missionary, Karl Mueller, noted that "One can at present discover no great love between" the Mayangnas and the Miskitus.67 In that same decade, U.S. Marine Corps Major-General Merritt A. Edson (stationed in eastern Nicaragua to find and defeat Sandino) found that "The Sumu had not forgotten the days when Miskito slavers had preyed upon them."68 On the Coco River in 1928, Edson observed that the Mayangnas escaped and hid from the Miskitus who accompanied the Marines, and ". . . remained hidden until our Miskito boatmen left us. It appeared that their fear and hatred of these few Miskitos had kept them away fully as much as their distrust of us."69

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66Romero Vargas, _Las Sociedades_, 278.
Today the Mayangnas still remember that it was the Miskitus who pushed the Mayangnas from the coast to Nicaragua's interior. A Mayangna legend, "How the Sumus Arrived at the Atlantic Coast and What Happened There," shows that the enslavement campaigns and the collection of tribute have been an indelible part of Mayangna history. According to the legend, the Miskitus infiltrated a peaceful Mayangna coastal settlement, took slaves, and forced the Mayangnas to retreat inland. The story illustrates that the initial relationship between the Miskitus and the Mayangnas had been an amicable one. After some time, however, the Miskitu King sent his emissaries to capture Mayangna slaves. Relations soured. Eventually, the Mayangnas’ only recourse was to disperse and flee inland. Once in the interior, the story concludes, the Mayangnas lived in many different, much smaller groups. At least they were able once again to live in peace.

Regardless of its historical accuracy, the legend exemplifies Mayangna reactions to Miskitu slave raids and reveals an important aspect of their worldview: the Mayangnas have been threatened by outsiders, even by people who establish friendly relations at the outset. Seeing themselves as the minority, the exploited, in eastern Nicaragua, it is understandable why they searched for remote places to live. It also hints at why the Mayangnas have historically resisted contact with outsiders, as they still do today. Additionally, this self-perception justifies their retreat to the remote parts of the interior. The story, handed down through the oral tradition, condones and explains the Mayangnas’ migration first from western Nicaragua to the Atlantic Coast, and then from the coast toward the interior. Congruous with the historical record, this legend shows that the Mayangnas have migrated farther upriver, toward the headwaters of the region’s great rivers. In the Mayangna story, the migration was the only legitimate response to the Miskitu slave raids. Fighting back was never an option. The Mayangnas’ withdrawal into the mountains, though, should not conjure up an image of weak Indian victims fleeing to the hills, as the traditional

70 Personal communication with Mayangnas, December 1997-January 1998, Nicaragua.
72 Ibid., 43-45.
historiography has portrayed it. Rather, their migration was a calculated initiative that helped the Mayangnas defy Miskitu slave raiders as well as English merchants and slave traders.

A Mayangna-Miskitu-English Trade Network

The Mayangnas' attempts to evade the slave raids did not occur without other repercussions. Their withdrawal had an impact on their trade relations during the colonial era. In fact, the Mayangnas' slow introduction to the European economy and their limited degree of market participation can only be understood within the context of Miskitu slaving. Without that threat, the Mayangnas might have remained in areas that were easily accessible from the coast. There, they could have engaged in trade directly with Europeans. And with easier access to certain goods—like guns or clothing—perhaps the Mayangnas would have developed a reliance on those materials, much as the Miskitus did.

The fact is, though, the Miskitus did dominate, and the Mayangnas did retreat to relatively inaccessible areas in the interior of Nicaragua. With the Mayangnas living far inland, they only traded with the Miskitus, not with the English. Thus, the Miskitus became the trade intermediaries in the Mosquitia: all the European goods that were traded to the Mayangnas passed through the Miskitus; all the goods the Mayangnas brought to the coast from the interior went first to the Miskitus, and later to the English.73 To a significant degree, then, the tribute collection and slave raids shaped the Mayangnas' colonial experience. Since those forces drove the Mayangnas into geographic isolation, it was the Miskitus who were left in control of the Mayangnas' level of participation in the European market economy. Of course it was always the Mayangnas who chose to migrate inland, who chose isolation over assimilation, over conquest, and over trade.

73 For a discussion of the Miskitu Indians as trade intermediaries or middlemen, see Helms, "Cultural Ecology," 81; and also, Charles R. Hale, "Inter-Ethnic Relations," 37-38.
The most common interpretation of the Mayangnas’ position in this trade triangle regards it as weak or undesirable. Because the Miskitus readily acquired European goods, either bartering for the goods with forest and agricultural products or going to work as day laborers, their response to colonization is viewed as a favorable one. \(^7^4\) Because they traded directly with the English merchants, thereby avoiding a dependence upon another indigenous group, the Miskitus are seen to have been in a more advantageous position than the Mayangnas. \(^7^5\) Because it was the Miskitus who conducted the slave raids and collected tribute, they adjusted “positively” to the English arrival, which implies that the Mayangnas reacted negatively. \(^7^6\) Charles Hale suggests that the Miskitu Indians cultivated hegemony over the Mayangnas. \(^7^7\) Was it a hegemonic relationship? How could it be hegemony when the Mayangnas continually fled farther inland, often choosing isolation instead of trade? The Mayangnas had not bought into the Miskitus’ program.

These interpretations, it seems, are based on the following assumptions: (1) that the Mayangnas needed European manufactured goods for their survival, (2) that they wanted European goods, (3) that they wanted to trade directly with the English rather than with the Miskitus, and (4) that they were unable to determine the terms on which goods were traded. I am not convinced any of these were true. They all put far too much emphasis on European technology and on the unmitigated lure of the market. Mayangna decision-making is absent from these interpretations. An alternative view recognizes that a Mayangna Indian may have chosen to stay in his village and forego the hunting rifle, especially if that meant he didn’t have to take his excess cacao to a Miskitu settlement on the coast. In other words, the Mayangnas were not so tempted by European goods that they could not limit their degree of market interaction.

\(^7^4\)Conzemius, *Ethnographical Survey*, 41.
\(^7^5\)According to Charles Hale, the Mayangnas’ “withdrawal reduced their military vulnerability to the Miskitu at the expense of increased economic dependence. Without access to trade with the Europeans (who lived only on the coast), the Sumu were left to rely on Miskitu intermediaries. By the nineteenth century this had become a well-established economic pattern: Sumu exchanged local goods... with the Miskitu for manufactured goods acquired from the British” (Hale, “Inter-Ethnic Relations,” 37).
\(^7^6\)Helms, *Asang*, 19.
\(^7^7\)Hale, “Inter-Ethnic Relations,” 37.
Limiting their commerce, however, does not imply that trade never occurred. The Mayangnas did trade, and they also acquired European manufactured goods. Unfortunately, the first written accounts of Mayangna-Miskitu trade do not appear until the nineteenth century. Before that, reports only indicate that trade existed between the Miskitus and the Indians of the interior. By the 1800s, though, Mayangna-Miskitu trade had become customary. As Orlando Roberts points out, the Miskitus living at the mouth of the Prinzapolka River were aware of the importance of commerce with the Mayangnas living on the headwaters of that river. The Miskitu Indians, Roberts explains, had "found it in their interest to encourage and protect, rather than oppress, the Woolwas and Dongulas [Mayangna tribes] of the interior; and, in consequence, they carry on a small trade in canoes, dories, and pittpans, which these tribes bring down the river. . . ."\(^78\) He believed that the Mayangnas' gigantic canoes—some more than 35 feet long, 5 feet deep, and nearly 6 feet wide, carved from a single mahogany or cedar tree—were "proof of the immense timber which grows in their country; and, of the valuable trade that might be carried on with them. . . ."\(^79\)

The desire for trade was not unique to the Miskitus. When Charles Napier Bell visited a Mayangna village in the interior during the 1800s, he recalled:

The sun had set, the soft twighlight lingered over the river a short while; then everything was dark, except the gleam of the river in the frowning gloom of its wall of forest. . . . Soon all the [Mayangna] men of the village assembled, each bringing his little solid mahogany stool, and seating themselves round the fire, [they asked] "Are there any ships on the coast? Do the white people bring much goods now?"\(^80\)

The Mayangna Indians were interested in the items British merchants brought to the Mosquitia. Sometimes, Bell explains, to acquire European goods, the Mayangnas were known to "camp with their families at the heads of the creeks, and stay two months or more

\(^78\)Roberts, *Narrative of Voyages*, 119.
\(^79\)Ibid., 120-121.
\(^80\)Bell, *Tangweera*, 124-125.
cutting down large cedar-trees, from which they cut out canoes in the rough to barter with the coast Indians. . . .”

Bell’s and Robert’s testimony shows that commerce among the English, Miskitus, and Mayangnas was established by the nineteenth century.

Another indication that trade was well-established by the end of the colonial period is the manner in which goods were exchanged and the honesty with which transactions took place. By the 1840s, the British diplomat Patrick Walker recognized that Mayangna-Miskitu relations were peaceful, and that there was "not a single instance of the old system of robbery and oppression by the Mosquito Indians on the more peaceable tribes," such as the Mayangna or Rama Indians. At roughly the same time, Bell observed that trade was executed without competition, cheating, or adulteration because prices were fixed by custom. In some cases, goods were bartered in a way that left Bell incredulous:

So much confidence have they in the honesty of transactions, that I have frequently seen at the mouths of rivers a peeled and painted stick planted in a conspicuous position, and on landing have found hanging to the tress bunches of plantains, baskets of maize, rolls of toonoo cloth and skins, and attached to each article a sample of what was wanted in return, such as a fish-hook to one, a few beads to another, a pinch of salt to the next, and so on. These were placed there in the expectation that the coast Indians passing by on the main river would make the required barter. After a while, if they are found to remain untouched, the river Indians [the Mayanganas] bring the articles to the coast villages.

Supporting Bell's assessment of their honest commerce, Roberts points out that when the Miskitus commissioned the Mayangnas to construct a canoe, they paid one-quarter to one-third of the price when the contract was negotiated (they paid with axes, adzes, machetes, and salt). Then, Roberts recalls in awe, when the canoe was to be delivered to the

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81 Ibid., 265-266.
82 Letter from Patrick Walker, Residency Consulate General in Bluefields to Her Majesty, 31 December 1844, cited in Oertzen, et al., The Nicaraguan Mosquitia, 101. It is important to recognize that Walker may have exaggerated the state of affairs in the Mosquitia. Explaining to the English Crown that inter-ethnic relations were peaceful may have improved his image, or it may have demonstrated that his post in Bluefields was necessary to keep order in the Mosquito Kingdom. On the other hand, relations may have, indeed, been peaceful.
83 Bell, Tangweera, 266.
84 Ibid., 266-267.
Miskitus, "they can with certainty reckon upon the immediate appearance of the contractor, or his friends; and in case of death, or accident, the latter invariably consider themselves bound to fulfil [sic] the agreement."  

The trade triangle that developed between the English, Miskitus, and Mayangnas quickly became an important part of life on the Atlantic Coast. For the Miskitus in particular, their relationship with the British merchants took hold early. Soon after the English arrival in the seventeenth century, the Miskitus were trading with them. From the coastal Miskitus—who supplied shells and turtle meat—to the inland Miskitus along the 400 mile Coco River—who supplied indigo, medicinal plants, furs, and mahogany—trade "was a constant factor in Miskito life and was the most important and effective foreign influence in the Mosquitia until the end of the 19th century."  

By the mid-1800s, turtle meat, caught by the skilled Miskitu hunters, had become the fad for foreigners. Bell explains that a Miskitu Indian told him that "This is the year for abundance of turtle, and the white people's ships have come after them in such numbers that they are like butterflies on the sea."  

For the tortoise shells, turtle meat, animal skins, and other goods from eastern Nicaragua, the British brought a variety of materials: cloth, machetes, salt, axes, knives, adzes, hoes, cooking pots, fishhooks, shotguns with ammunition, small looking glasses, and tobacco, to name a few of the goods. In one of the few cases where an Englishman traded directly with the Mayangnas, Orlando Roberts reportedly offered the inland Indians "fish hooks, glass beads, small Dutch looking-glasses, seamen's knives, and other articles of little value."  

Based on the number of goods exchanged, it is clear that, by the

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85Roberts, *Narrative of Voyages*, 120.
87Bell, *Tangweera*, 125.
88For descriptions of items that the English brought to the Mosquitia for trade, see Roberts, *Narrative of Voyages*, 57; Bell, *Tangweera*, 266; Conzemius, *Ethnographical Survey*, 41; and Helms, "Cultural Ecology," 81.
89Roberts, *Narrative of Voyages*, 57.
nineteenth century, European manufactured goods were making their way into Mayangna villages.

Although a few aberrations did occur whereby the English traded with the Mayangnas, for the most part, the Miskitus controlled trade. Playing the “middleman” in the colonial trade network, Miskitus ensured that the English traded only with Miskitus and that the Mayangnas traded only with Miskitus. Since the British sought materials from both the coast and the interior, the Miskitus had to obtain goods from the Mayangnas. As Bell explains, "The Mosquito Indians trade with the tribes of the interior for various articles which they cannot produce themselves. . . ." In this manner, the Miskitus acquired from the Mayangnas a variety of crafts, natural resources, and food products. At first glance, the Miskitu position seems stable since, to large degree, they oversaw commerce in eastern Nicaragua. But as they were increasingly wedged between the demands of the Mayangnas and the English, their position became more precarious. The Miskitus rose to the occasion: by the nineteenth century they were still trading consistently with the Mayangnas and with the British.

The Miskitus principal objective in their trade with the Mayangnas was to obtain goods that were not available or were scarce on the coast. Normally the Miskitus bartered for these goods, but sometimes they purchased them with local currency, such as beads and shells for the Miskitus and cacao beans for the Mayangnas. The Mayangnas supplied the Miskitus with various items that they constructed from local resources. Among these common items were baskets, pottery, hammocks, paddles, and bark cloth.

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90 Charles N. Bell, "Remarks on the Mosquito Territory, its Climate, People, Productions, etc, etc, with a Map," Royal Geographic Society Journal 32 (1862): 252.
92 Conzemius, Ethnographical Survey, 40. According to Murdo MacLeod, cacao was commonly used as money in colonial Central America (p. 68, 74). For his thorough discussion of the importance of cacao in this era, see Murdo J. Macleod, Spanish Central America: A Socio-Economic History, 1520-1720 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), chapter 4.
Roberts was especially impressed by the "extremely neat bags, or purses, of various sizes, made of silk grass, and dyed of various bright colours,—some of the threads nearly as fine as lace." But the Mayangnas were perhaps most well-known for their rough hewn canoes, locally called pitpans. Most of the early European travelers were awestruck by these huge pitpans, each carved from a single tree. Once carved in the interior, the Mayangnas traded canoes to the coast Indians.

Natural resources and food items also made up an important part of the Mayangna-Miskitu trade. While Roberts points out that sarsaparilla frequently came downriver with...
the Mayangnas, others saw the Mayangnas barter deer and tiger skins, slabs of mahogany and cedar, chocolate, maize, plantains, gourds and calabashes, Indian corn, and other goods. And one last item brought downriver to the Miskitus: a "white gum with a very pleasant smell, called pantipee," which, combined with a fragrant root from a bush, was used by "the Indian women to perfume their persons, and 'make the young men love them.'" Apparently not everything from the interior made it onto British ships.

**Effects of Colonial Trade**

Producing or harvesting a variety of goods for trade with the Miskitus certainly had an effect on Mayangna society and land use practices. Just as the items bartered to the Miskitus caused the Mayangnas to collect a surplus of natural resources from the forest, the goods that came back into Mayangna communities expedited the collection process. In other words, some of the European manufactured goods that the Mayangnas acquired made it easier and quicker to harvest forest resources. Undoubtedly, some goods did not directly influence how the Mayangnas caught fish, felled trees, or otherwise interacted with their surroundings—like iron pots, cutlery, seafood, salt, or clothing. Many of these articles may have been primarily ornamental objects or status symbols—such as beads, sea shells, or cloth. Other goods, however, did transform the manner in which the Mayangnas utilized natural resources; these tools included fishhooks, flints and steel for building fires, files to make arrowheads, axes, adzes, machetes, and guns.

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97Bell, *Tangweera*, 266.
Even though the travelers' accounts describe a system of trade in eastern Nicaragua, critical aspects of the story have been left out: How ubiquitous were these goods? Did all the Mayangnas trade? How frequently? What percentage of the Mayangna population had a machete, a cooking pot, a rifle? Said another way, How thoroughly were the Mayangnas incorporated into the market economy at the end of the colonial era? These questions are difficult to gauge; qualitative evidence is virtually absent. Because very few travelers had any contact with the Mayangnas, it could be assumed that the Indians did not make frequent trips to the coast. Even Charles N. Bell, who lived on the Atlantic Coast for more than a decade, makes very few references to the Indians of the interior. From Wickham's testimony, it appears that Mayangna households were not well-equipped with goods from Europe. He exclaims that some families had "one or two wretched old guns, obtained from the traders in exchange for their canoes, india-rubber, and other articles. . . ." Interestingly, he observed that the Mayangnas were still using "earthenware pots of their own making." Although Wickham mentions the Mayangnas' guns, Bell recalls that even a headman who came down river in the mid-1800s did not have a rifle, only bows and arrows.

Reports like these suggest that Mayangna trade with outsiders was probably not extensive—that occasional commerce between the Mayangnas and the Miskitus did exist, but not on a regular basis. Most likely, then, the Mayangnas had not developed a dependency on European goods, and they probably utilized foreign products only when they were readily accessible. Consequently, in the early- to mid-nineteenth century, the Mayangnas remained at a very low level of incorporation. On Thomas Hall's continuum, they had probably just left the "external arena" and had barely entered the "contact periphery" of the market economy, where limited or occasional trade occurs. Even so,
some Mayangnas did obtain European manufactured goods, and with the influx of these goods, change followed.

The Mayangnas’ utilization of forest products was one area of change. Many of the trade items brought to the coast from the interior—canoes, baskets, bark cloth, etc.—were constructed from trees, primarily mahogany and cedar. As Mayangna-Miskitu and Miskitu-English trade increased, so did the cutting of trees. Demand for inland trees was also heightened by the growing number of people living on the coast. As Africans and Europeans were integrated into Miskitu communities, the population rose throughout the colonial period. With a larger population in the littoral zone, trees in the vicinity were increasingly depleted. To meet the coastal Miskitus’ expanding need for canoes and other wood products, they turned toward the interior. They relied on the Mayangnas to cut trees and furnish the Miskitus with goods from the inland forest.

Recognizing the impact that canoe construction had on the forest, Charles N. Bell commented in the mid-1800s that “large trees, fit for making canoes, were now only to be found in the heart of the bush, where the poor Indians could not drag them out.” Unfortunately, Bell does not make it clear where the “heart of the bush” was. How far inland? Since Bell rarely ventured very far into the interior, his comment about the lack of large trees probably refers to the river banks near the coast. As a result, Bell’s observation is perhaps more indicative of Miskitu timber extraction than that of the Mayangnas. Nonetheless, his comment illustrates that by the nineteenth century, coastal residents and English merchants had to obtain wood products from the Mayangnas who lived farther inland than the Miskitus.

Although population growth and increased trade resulted in tree shortages in the Mosquitia, the cutting of trees did not begin with the arrival of the English colonists in the seventeenth century. In fact, before the English came, the Indians may have already caused tree shortages in certain areas. What had changed by the nineteenth century was that now

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104 Bell, *Tangweera*, 125-126.
the Europeans wanted wood products, both for use in the colonies and to ship back to Europe. Recall also that the Miskitu population had continually grown during the colonial period. With more people in the Mosquitia, demand for Mayangna goods had escalated. Thus, the Mayangnas were likely trading more frequently and producing more goods in the early nineteenth century than they had in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries.

Despite the increased commerce, however, even in the 1800s, the Mayangnas often chose isolation over trade. It is dangerous to assume that as the potential for trade grew, the Mayangnas increased their amount of trade at the same rate. They did increase trade, but slowly. After all, insularity combined with occasional trade shaped the Mayangnas’ colonial experience.

Even a slight growth in trade put pressure on forest resources in the interior of eastern Nicaragua. And the Mayangnas’ increased level of incorporation into the market triggered a gradual transformation of subsistence strategies. During the colonial period, the Mayangnas started to shift from an emphasis on hunting and fishing toward a more agriculturally based subsistence method. At the outset of the nineteenth century, they were only in the first stages of this change; it was probably not until the middle of the twentieth century that crops provided the majority of the Indians’ caloric intake. Nevertheless, when Bell lived on the Atlantic Coast in the mid-1800s, he pointed out that the Mayangnas utilized all three tactics for food production: hunting, fishing, and agriculture. Of these methods, Bell mentions most frequently the Mayangnas’ ability to hunt and secure wild game for food. In fact, Bell was awestruck with "the skill they display in finding their way through the pathless woods. . . . They pursue their game through dense tangled thickets with the sagacity of the bloodhound; they follow the track of animals which to other men is quite imperceptible; and amid the confusion of cries and sounds in the forest the right one is noticed at once, however faint and distant."105

105Bell, "Remarks on the Mosquito Territory," 257.
Whatever tinge of noble savagery or exaggeration is portrayed here, Bell successfully demonstrates that the Mayangnas did hunt frequently and with skill. In addition to hunting, Bell also recalls that "the poor Indian in the interior hooks a scanty meal for his family of small river-fish by much patience and toil. . . ." Like many other British travelers in the Mosquitia, Bell’s writings contain numerous references to fishing and, more often, to hunting. Very little is mentioned about farming or crops. The implication, therefore, is that the Mayangnas engaged more in hunting and fishing than in agriculture.

While the Mayangnas probably consumed more meat and fish than fruits or vegetables, the list of goods traded to the Miskitus reveals that farming was done by the Mayangnas. The crops traded to the Miskitus supplemented the coastal Indians' diet. Just as the rifle may have helped Mayangna hunters increase their kills, the machete may have made farming easier than it had been when a digging stick was used. The availability of new technology does not automatically mean it was used by the Mayangnas, but since it is one of their most essential tools today, it affected Mayangna life and their subsistence patterns at some point in the past. Indeed, as Luis Hurtado de Mendoza explains, “The Mayangna of the Uli Was River divide the history of their people into two periods. The first is the ‘time before machetes,’ and the second corresponds to more recent times, principally the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.” Machetes, it seems, facilitated the production of crops and probably played a role in the Mayangnas’ transformation toward a more agriculturally-based subsistence economy.

One of the only firsthand reports of early Mayangna farming came from Bell in the middle of the nineteenth century. He explained that the Mayangnas "raise quantities of

106Ibid., 261.
107Most of the travelers’ accounts contain more references to hunting than farming. I recognize that stories about the Mayangnas’ skill with a digging stick or their ability to track gourds through a milpa might not sell as many books as would adventures about hound-like savages on the heels of an angry peccary. On the other hand, after reading Bells’ writings thoroughly, I believe that he did not overlook farming; rather, he just did not see it as frequently.
plantains, bananas, cassava, maize, and sugar-cane.” Echoing Bell more than one hundred years later, a Mayangna elder wrote that in the past his people grew bananas, yucca, corn, sugarcane, and cacao. Interestingly, plantains, bananas, and sugarcane are all exotic species that were introduced into Central America after the arrival of Europeans. The Mayangnas’ use of exotic species signifies that they were utilizing goods from Europe in their own communities. It also shows that, as a result of trade, their

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109 Bell, *Tangweera*, 130.
111 Kirchhoff provides a list of native and exotic crops in Central America, many used by the Mayangnas. Native species: sweet manioc, bitter manioc, maize, pejivalle palm, sweet potato, gourd, pumpkin, squash, chayote, tomato, bean (red and black), pineapple, tobacco, cotton, achiote, cacao, papaste, papaya, avocado, guava chirimoya, zapote, coconut usi, ficus, yam, opuntia, and peanuts. Exotic species: rice, sugar cane,
land use practices had changed. Even so, agriculture had not yet become the important food source that it would become in the twentieth century.

Domestic stock was not common in the mid-1800s, either. According to Bell, the Mayangnas preferred hunting and fishing "to the surer method of raising stock, which they never can be induced to do except a few fowls, which they seem to keep more for the look of the thing than anything else, as they very seldom eat them."\(^{112}\) What the nineteenth century records suggest is not that agriculture or domesticated animals had replaced hunting and fishing. Rather, they indicate that by the end of the colonial era, the Mayangnas had initiated a shift toward a more equal distribution of all three subsistence strategies. In the 1800s, crops were providing a greater share of their sustenance than they had before contact. Nevertheless, when the colonial era ended, the Mayangnas still relied on hunting and fishing for the majority of their food.

**Conclusions**

Change in Mayangna society during the colonial period resulted from a variety of factors. Two of the most significant have been described here at length. First, in order to evade both European colonists and Miskitu slavers, the Mayangnas migrated inland toward the most remote sections of Nicaragua. Second, despite their isolation, they engaged in limited trade, trade that was often carried out on their own terms. Both of these patterns, occurring at the same time, played a significant role in how the Mayangnas became participants in the European market economy. Participation in the market usually stimulates change in indigenous societies, sometimes on a grand scale, sometimes on a limited scale. Of course other forces can, and do, cause change. But because trade can potentially trigger

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\(^{112}\)Bell, "Remarks on the Mosquito Territory," 257.
drastic change among Indian peoples, it has been an integral part of this colonial history of the Mayangnas.

The Mayangnas’ path toward incorporation into the European economy began in the seventeenth century when the English first penetrated the Mosquitia. Throughout the 1600s and 1700s, trade in the region increased, but not between the English and the Mayangnas. Instead, trade expanded between the Europeans and the Miskitu Indians who lived on the coast. While the Miskitus forged an alliance with the English, the Mayangnas skirted contact and migrated away from the coast, pushed by Miskitu slavers who preyed upon the Mayangnas. Despite the ensuing Mayangna isolation and fear of slave raids, trade was carried out. But now the Miskitus acted as intermediaries between the Mayangnas and the English.

Even with the reliance on the Miskitus, the Mayangnas still acquired European goods on a limited scale. This Mayangna-Miskitu-English trade network represents the Mayangnas’ initial stages of incorporation into the European market. By the early nineteenth century, however, the Mayangnas were only slightly attached to the market economy and had not passed the “contact periphery” on Hall’s continuum of market incorporation. Consequently, the Mayangnas had not become so entrenched in the market that they could not live without it. At the end of the colonial period, the Mayangnas could have survived without any market interaction.

The Mayangnas’ limited trade did, nonetheless, trigger change. By extracting more mahogany and cedar for canoes, cutting more tuno trees for bark cloth, hunting more animals for their hides, and gathering more plants and roots for the market, the Mayangnas were harvesting forest resources for trade. The use of new technologies, especially guns and machetes, were also altering hunting and farming techniques. Introduced species, which always have an affect on ecosystems, were now being grown for food and for trade. And while it is difficult to link the cause directly to trade, by the early 1800s, agriculture
was providing a greater percentage of the Mayangnas’ food than it had at contact. Indeed, commerce was transforming Mayangna land use practices.

But trade was not an essential element of Mayangna life. Interestingly, the Mayangnas had made a choice about their degree of market articulation. They often chose geographic isolation rather than the accumulation of European manufactured goods. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the Mayangnas still did not wear European clothing, which the Miskitus had already adopted.\(^{113}\) In addition to repelling European customs, the Mayangnas tried to avoid European contact in general. They continued speaking their own language, and they did not marry outsiders.\(^{114}\) Instead, they chose to keep their communities intact.

These choices represent the principal strategies employed by the Mayangnas to resist both contact with the English and the infiltration of the market. By retreating to the interior of the country rather than remaining on the coast to trade, and by preserving their ability to feed themselves, the Mayangnas challenged the British utopia of trade in eastern Nicaragua, trade not just of natural resources, but also of human slaves. Because of both their desire to live in remote places and by virtue of the geographical isolation itself, at the conclusion of the colonial era, the Mayangnas remained at a low level of incorporation into the European market economy. As a result, the market had not caused profound changes in Mayangna society.

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\(^{113}\) According to Bell, the Mayangnas wore "thick cotton cloth of their own weaving" instead of European clothing. See Bell, *Tangweera*, 158.

Chapter 5

THE NEW NEWCOMERS:
TAPPERS, LOGGERS, MINERS, AND MISSIONARIES

During the first two hundred years that Europeans traded on Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast, the Mayangna Indians pursued isolation more often than trade. They reacted to the conquest by retreating toward the interior of eastern Nicaragua. Situated in remote areas, they usually stayed home rather than traveling to the Caribbean coast to barter natural resources and crafts for European manufactured goods. In the event that they did want to trade, they made the trip to the sea. There, they found Miskitu Indians who were willing to make deals. But after more than two hundred years of slowly accumulating European goods, the Mayangnas were still not trading on a regular basis. Trade was only sporadic. As a result, in the early 1800s, the Mayangnas were in no way dependent on the market economy.

Whatever isolation the Mayangnas had achieved in the colonial era waned considerably after the middle of the nineteenth century. By the early 1800s, many European travelers to eastern Nicaragua had voiced their awe over the abundance of natural resources in the region. Some were inspired by the timber, others by sarsaparilla, tortoiseshell, or rubber.¹ Many sent word back to England, lamenting like Patrick Walker about "how little has as yet been done to develop the resources of this country," or exclaiming like Robert Hodgson about how "the duties on the Sarsaparilla and

¹ Orlando Roberts, Narrative of Voyages and Excursions on the East Coast and in the Interior of Central America; Describing a Journey up the River San Juan, and Passage Across the Lake of Nicaragua to the City of Leon, a facsimile of the 1827 edition, with an introduction by Hugh Craggs (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1965), 120; George Henderson, An Account of the British Settlement of Honduras; Being a view of its Commercial and Agricultural Resources, Soil, Climate, Natural History, etc. To which are added, Sketches of the Manners and Customs of the Mosquito Indians, Preceded by the Journal of a Voyage to the Mosquito Shore, 2nd ed. (London: R. Baldwin, Paternoster Row, 1811), 213.
Tortoiseshell alone would near £5,000 a year to the Revenue.2 No matter which natural resource sparked their fancy, most all of them were likely driven by the same sentiment, which Thomas Young captures:

Without the skill and perseverance of the white man, the natural resources of this fine country will never be brought to light, whilst with labour properly directed, many valuable articles, such as mahogany, cedar, caoutchouc, cacao, pimento, hides, sarsaparilla, tortoiseshell, medicinal balsams, gums, and other commodities would be produced. 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.3

Waste no more. His plea was heard in Europe and North America. Foreign companies and individual entrepreneurs soon arrived in eastern Nicaragua, and the systematic extraction of natural resources was underway. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Nicaraguan government adhered to the same pro-development path that many Latin American nations pursued. Consequently, multi-national corporations swept into the country. As the companies flowed in, resources flowed out. The largest extractive industries to reach the interior, where the Mayangnas lived, were rubber, timber, and gold mining.

Accompanying these industries into the interior were opportunities for the Mayangnas to participate in the market economy. The Mayangnas could collect rubber and sell it to local contractors or processing plants; with their earnings they could buy manufactured goods. Mahogany camps made daily wage labor a possibility. If not

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engaged in daily work, Mayangnas could guide prospectors to timber stands. Gold mines were built near Mayangna villages; the mines offered employment possibilities for the

Figure 8: Rivers of Life, Avenue to the Interior—It was the expansive river system in eastern Nicaragua that allowed colonists, buccaneers, Miskitu slave raiders, and after the nineteenth century, resource extractors to penetrate the remote areas where the Mayangnas lived. Today, rivers are still the primary transportation routes that Mayangnas use.
Mayangnas. Even more important, though, were the mining communities: stores stocked foreign goods and mining personnel bought the Mayangnas' goods. Mayangnas did not have to venture far to participate in the market economy.

It was not only the natural resources that fueled interest in the region. By the 1850s, both the United States and Great Britain wanted to construct an inter-oceanic canal in Nicaragua. Britain had recently (1843) made the Mosquitia a British protectorate, thereby intensifying their focus on the region. After the California Gold Rush in 1848, the US wanted a water route to link its two coasts. Both nations, therefore, sought to establish a strong position in Nicaragua, especially on the Atlantic Coast. Natural resources and foreign politics were making eastern Nicaragua the focus of international attention.

In addition to foreign companies and governments, the market was brought to the Mayangnas by Moravian missionaries. Christian missionaries arrived late in the Mosquitia. While Catholics proselytized western Nicaragua in the sixteenth century, they never went to eastern Nicaragua. Moravians were the first to proselytize the Atlantic Coast. Arriving in Mayangna communities in the early 1900s, the Moravians were committed to conversion as well as economic "improvement." Thus, in their efforts to "civilize" the Mayangnas, they tried to instill a capitalist work ethic and a cash-oriented economy. By the middle of the twentieth century, Mayangnas could not avoid the market economy entirely.

With the influx of multi-national corporations and foreign diplomats, Mayangna communities were increasingly attached to the market economy. No longer were European goods to be obtained only through Miskitu trade intermediaries. No longer were Europeans, North Americans, and Nicaraguan mestizos absent from Nicaragua's interior where the Mayangnas lived. The Mayangnas didn't have to go to the coast to find the market; nor did they have to rely on Miskitu intermediaries. Rubber, timber, and mining companies made trade easier for the Mayangnas. The industries also made contact with outsiders much more common than it had been for the Mayangnas. Further, the Moravian

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Mission's attempts to make Mayangna communities economically prosperous brought market ideals into Mayangna homes. This period, then, from roughly 1850 to the present, made isolation difficult for the Mayangnas. They continually interacted with foreigners, and they were hit with a barrage of market forces. For the first time, the global economy had come to them. How did they react?

**Rubber Tappers**

Interest in eastern Nicaragua's natural resources was not new in the nineteenth century. The intrusion of foreign companies, however, was new. Among the first extractive economies to develop in the region was rubber. Though rubber extraction was not a new industry in eastern Nicaragua, the influx of rubber and chicle collectors took off in the nineteenth century. By the mid-1800s, rubber tapping had reached the interior where the Mayangnas lived. For the first time, the Mayangnas saw non-Indians traveling through the interior on a regular basis. The increased contact with foreigners provided opportunities for direct Mayangna participation in the market economy. Whether they collected and sold rubber or not, the mere presence of *mestizos*, North Americans, and Europeans meant that commercial relations could be carried out near Mayangna villages, not just on the coast. Both the buying and the selling of goods was potentially much easier for the Mayangnas once rubber tappers infiltrated the interior of the Mosquitia. In other words, growth in rubber collection brought the market to the Mayangnas.

While rubber tapping was not a long-lasting industry for many of the companies who came, the rubber business was a persistent component of Mayangna life until the 1970s. In fact, it was one of the first as well as the longest-lasting channels of Mayangna integration into the market economy. Derek Smith suggests that in the Bocay region "the most overt connection that the Sumu have had with the international economy may have
Mayangna participation in the rubber trade may have been overt and consistent, but it was never profound. In other words, the Mayangnas tapped trees and sold rubber, but they never became dependent on the wages earned from the rubber industry. Interestingly, they continued the same pattern that had emerged from the colonial era: they participated in the rubber industry, but they kept it to a limited scale. Their colonial response to the conquest—to flee—stuck with them: they continued to favor isolation over steady market relations. At the same time, after more than a century of tapping trees, the Mayangnas had changed and heightened their use of rubber trees. As a result, even the Mayangnas' limited participation in the rubber industry was enough to attach them more firmly to the market periphery and to shift their land use practices.

When rubber tapping came to eastern Nicaragua, it did not begin in the interior. The initial bleeders worked on the Atlantic coast. Over time, and as reckless tappers depleted the rubber trees near the coast, the industry crept inland. By 1860, rubber tappers were pushing swiftly up the Coco River where they penetrated Mayanga territory. After the turn of the twentieth century, rubber exports from Nicaragua ebbed as low rubber prices in the British and Dutch East Indies replaced Nicaragua's crop. According to both Conzemius and Reverend George Heath, the export of rubber from the Mosquitia had virtually ceased by 1912 or 1913. Competition was too keen. Rubber tapping, however, was not finished in the Mosquitia. Companies reappeared and local processing plants were set up in the region. In all three of the principal Mayangna territories—the Bocay River, the Waspuk River, and Sikilta—the collection of rubber continued until the Sandinista Revolution in 1979.

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In the Bocay region, rubber collection had already been established when Mervyn G. Palmer ventured into the region around the turn of the twentieth century. Describing what he found in Bocay, he called the area "a veritable metropolis for these people"; the village he saw consisted of about 40 houses. There was an abundant supply of rubber when the foreign extractors arrived. Thus, the foreigners exploited what they found. When Palmer arrived, he alluded to the fact that rubber was in danger of being overharvested. He observed that the "cutting of rubber is remarkably well controlled. It is prohibited to cut down the rubber trees, as is done in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru." While Palmer is probably referring to Nicaraguan laws and to mestizo tappers, his comments confirm that by 1900, Bocay had seen a significant amount of rubber collection. In fact, he noted that the Mayangnas had acquired climbing irons and rope to aid in the collection of rubber. With the irons on their legs and the rope over their shoulders, he explains, "they climb up to the highest possible part of the main [tree] trunk, and there make the slanting grooves down which the latex runs."

Although the initial rubber extractors who had appeared in Bocay and other areas vanished in 1912, companies later returned to the region. In Bocay, several companies had been set up by 1940, and one in particular brought money into the area for the first time. These were not the only companies that had returned to Nicaragua's inter. In the middle of the twentieth century, J.J. Parsons noted that approximately 2,000 people were involved with the rubber trade in the San Carlos region on the Coco River, a Miskitu community near the mouth of the Bocay River. These weren't all Miskitu or Mayangna Indians, but mestizos, too. Whatever the case, the area was exposed to extensive rubber tapping.

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10Palmer, *Through Unknown Nicaragua*, 63-64.
11Ibid.
1952, about 700,000 pounds of latex from the tuno tree was exported from San Carlos, down the Coco River, and on to Chicago.\textsuperscript{14}

In addition to the local companies in Bocay, the Wrigley company had set up a base at Waspam, where the Waspuk River joins the Coco River.\textsuperscript{15} This processing plant at Waspam facilitated the gathering of rubber on the Waspuk River for more than fifty years, finally closing shop because of the Sandinista Revolution in the early 1980s.\textsuperscript{16} Rubber collectors also penetrated the Sikilta territory in the middle of this century. From 1938 to 1946 a rubber company operated with its official headquarters in Siuna. They established a receiving station in Sikilta where rubber was brought from Saslaya, Bocay, Musawas, and Uli. Although the company left in the mid-1940s, individual \textit{mestizos} latched on to the business and maintained some form of rubber collection until the early 1980s when it vanished entirely due to the war.\textsuperscript{17}

For the Mayangna Indians, rubber tapping provided a new avenue into market relations. The arrival of the rubber industry gave them the opportunity to work for wages, purchase manufactured goods, and sell their own crafts and natural resources to foreigners who were increasingly entering Mayangna communities. Essentially, with the influx of foreign and \textit{mestizo} rubber tappers, the market came to the Mayangnas. Gone were the days of going to the Caribbean coast to see Europeans and trade for their goods. Once the market arrived, Mayangnas participated in it, but they did not thrust themselves into the industry haphazardly. They remained somewhat detached by working independently through local contractors. Sometimes they took resin to the plant itself, but usually they waited for the contractor to come buy it in Mayangna villages.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{15}Manejo de Recursos Naturales en la Reserva BOSAWAS de Nicaragua, "Ampat Maintalnin Kidika—Plan de Manejo Territorial," 3.30.
\textsuperscript{18}Patrón G., "Una Historia Oral de Los Mayangnas ," 11-12.
Timoteo Patrón explains that the utilization of contractors carried both disadvantages and advantages for the Mayangnas. On the one hand, contractors controlled the local rubber market and, upon arriving in a Mayangna village, could set the price they paid for the rubber. Occasionally, they extended credit to the Mayangnas, which only served to strengthen the contractors' position over the Mayangnas. On the other hand, transporting the rubber to a processing facility was difficult and time consuming; even worse, rubber plants did not necessarily pay a higher price for the resin. Credit never became the problem that it did for many indigenous groups, whereby European lenders kept the Indians in debt and dependent. Perhaps it was not problematic for the Mayangnas because they did not give up their ability to feed themselves; they did not rely on the money they earned from rubber to buy their sustenance.

The specific extent of Mayangna participation in the rubber industry is, unfortunately, impossible to uncover. Both the written record and oral history indicate that the Mayangnas did collect rubber, but the amounts or the frequency are less well-known. According to Jenkins, the sale of resin from the tuno tree, which was made into chicle, was an important form of income for Mayangna families. But oral accounts indicate that prior to the Sandinista Revolution, many Mayangnas collected and sold rubber only sporadically. For other Mayangnas, like those who lived along the Waspuk River, Timoteo Patrón believes that the tuno trade was part of life for most families. He explains that "almost all the Mayangna worked [in the tuno trade], from adults, to adolescents, to women, to children." Women and children may have worked in the camps making food, carrying water, or guarding the collected latex. Men and adolescents worked in the forest

21 Jenkins, "Breve Nota Sobre los Grupos Indígenas," 143.
gathering more rubber. The dangerous collection process cost lives on occasion or injured the tappers who got resin in their eyes.24

Whether they gathered latex sporadically or regularly, the sale of rubber became one of the Mayangnas' principal means of income in the twentieth century. According to Bonanza's Moravian pastor in the 1950s, Kenneth Nowack, selling rubber and "seasonable produce" was a reliable source of income for the Mayangnas.25 Also in the 1950s, Borys Malkin pointed out that most of the Mayangnas' cash in the Musawas community came from collecting chicle. Malkin claims that the Mayangnas preferred rubber tapping to working in Bonanza's gold mines because it "gives them more initiative and is less subject to routine."26 Nowack recalls that the Indians were still gathering chicle when he left the area in the early 1960s. Even then, most of the gathering was done under an agreement whereby outside contractors hired the Mayangnas.27

The decades of the rubber industry's presence in the Mosquitia produced change for the Mayangnas. Tapping in the region had occurred before European extractors arrived in the nineteenth century. Actually, the resin or gum from various trees had been used by the Mayangnas for centuries. From these trees and shrubs, the Mayangnas used the resin to make black and red paints. Sometimes the paints were used for ornamental purposes, but more often the black and red pigments were used as a medicine—for insect wounds, to protect them from the tropical sun, or even to help keep warm. Conzemius reports that the red pigment came from shrubs and small trees, called annatto and faroah in the British colonies. The black pigment, on the other hand, was the melted gum from rubber and tuno trees.28 As the rubber industry penetrated Nicaragua's interior, the rubber was not only tapped for black pigment, but it was also sold to local contractors or to the processing

24Ibid.
28Conzemius, Ethnographical Survey, 24-25.
plant. Consequently, the market created a new demand for rubber and, more importantly, put a price tag on it.

The harvesting of rubber for the market also intensified its collection and put pressure on the rubber trees. When the industry began in 1860 rubber (or chicle) bleeders tapped trees that were four and five feet in diameter. The first cuts on those immense trees yielded twenty gallons of milk—as much as two pounds of rubber. Conscientious tapping meant that the tree would recuperate quickly and could be tapped the following year. Unscrupulous tapping, however, meant that the tree only produced once. These tappers simply felled the tree "in order to facilitate work."29 As the industry grew, the number of tappers increased and pushed farther inland toward Mayangna communities. The result, Conzemius laments, was that by the 1920s, even the trees that were three feet in diameter had disappeared.30

While Conzemius's descriptions may be too early to apply to the remote forests where the Mayangnas lived, it was not long after Conzemius left before the Mayangnas encountered a similar scenario. Jenkins points out that the collection of rubber was an arduous, time-consuming task for the Mayangnas. In fact, the Mayangna tappers needed to travel into the mountains for a few days in order to bring back resin from the rubber trees.31 In the early 1960s, Nowack confirms, the Mayangnas embarked on three- to four-day journeys in order to find tuno trees fit for tapping.32 Resources had been depleted. While the market may not have been the only cause of the depletion of rubber trees, the market had driven some Mayangnas to collect rubber for the sole purpose of selling it, something that had not occurred before the nineteenth century. By the 1990s the practice had disappeared. The legacy of rubber collection, however, was evident: it created a definitive market-induced transformation of land use practices among the Mayangnas.

29Ibid., 47.
30Ibid.
31Jenkins, "Breve Nota Sobre los Grupos Indígenas," 143.
32Nowack, telephone interview.
Many Mayangnas did participate in the rubber industry, but it was only sporadically. When they did participate, they did not give up their subsistence strategies or engage in steady wage labor. Selling rubber was something that they did in addition to growing their own food, not in place of growing their food. As a result, they never developed a dependency on the rubber industry, even when they were in debt to local contractors. Through much of the twentieth century, Mayangnas have collected and sold rubber, but, as Smith points out, "They are fond of freedom; they never work for a salary." They did not labor for rubber contractors. Compared to the Miskitu Indians, Conzemius explains that the Mayangnas were quite independent: "Sumu, on the other hand, are more timid and less enterprising. They are unwilling to leave their wives and children for a length of time in order to work for the benefit of the white men. Besides, even to this day, their wants are few, and they can easily do without practically any article of foreign manufacture." Consequently, the Mayangnas could collect rubber and sell it to the contractors at their own pace, on their own terms. Essentially, just like in the colonial era, they were determining their own degree of participation in the rubber industry and in the market economy.

This is not to say that they didn't tap trees and sell rubber. They did. And their rubber collection increasingly diminished the supply of rubber trees in the forest. But unlike the Miskitu Indians on the coast who left their communities for months to work for British companies, and unlike North American Indians who had to sell animal pelts in order to feed and clothe themselves, the Mayangnas retained their homes, their isolated communities, and their subsistence way of life. Compared to other groups, then, the Mayangnas degree of incorporation remained minimal. Earning money from the rubber

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34 Ibid.
35 Conzemius, Ethnographical Survey, 40.
36 For a discussion of Miskitu labor away from their home communities, see Mary Helms, "Matrilocality, Social Solidarity, and Culture Contact: Three Case Histories," Southwestern Journal of Anthropology 26 (1970): 197-212.
trade was not the Mayangnas' primary goal. Instead of collecting rubber all the time, they continued planting crops, hunting, and fishing. They put their geographic isolation and their self-sufficient system of food production ahead of increased market interaction.

The Quest for Precious Timber

In addition to rubber, the quest for precious woods brought foreign companies into the Mosquitia in the nineteenth century. With timber companies came increased opportunities for Mayangna interaction with the global market. Like the rubber industry, logging made it possible for the Mayangnas to work in lumber camps and/or to trade with outsiders who came to their communities. The timber industry, however, did not attract Mayangnas as much as rubber had. Logging did, nonetheless, increase the Mayangnas' contact with foreigners, thereby boosting the Mayangnas' level of market integration. Thus, even without Mayangna labor directly in the logging camps, the timber industry still linked Mayangnas to the global market economy.

Eastern Nicaragua has always had precious woods. But it was not until the nineteenth century that international logging companies systematically began to extract mahogany and other trees. It was British companies that first entered the Mosquitia for the timber. Traders and diplomats in the region sent word back to England of canoes "above thirty-five feet long, about five feet deep, and nearly six feet broad," carved out of a single tree!37 Roberts, who was associated with the British Central American Land Company in 1839, reported that the canoes were "proof of the immense timber which grows in their [Mayangnas'] country; and, of the valuable trade that might be carried on with them..."38 George Henderson, too, exclaimed that "In this country there is also plenty of

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37 Both Roberts and Bell noted these gigantic canoes on the Atlantic Coast. Here, Roberts is quoted from Narrative of Voyages, 120.
38 Roberts, Narrative of Voyages, 120.
mahogany, and many other kinds of wood, which might probably meet the purposes of ornamental use extremely well."

Roberts and Henderson were heard. English and other foreign entrepreneurs soon swarmed into the Mosquitia. With Britain's new authority in the region (the Mosquitia had become a British protectorate in 1843), a logging bill was passed in 1846 to control cutting and preserve the remaining timber supply for the English. Partly because timber near the coast was disappearing, and partly to secure the remaining timber supply for export to England, the bill proscribed the cutting of mahogany and cedar throughout the kingdom, except for the purpose of making a "reasonable number" of canoes or pitpans and for paddles. Thereafter, the focus of timber exports in the Mosquitia went from logwood, which was a raw material used for dyes, to mahogany. Even though logging for mahogany "required considerable long-term investment," by the end of the nineteenth century, many companies had come from Europe and had penetrated the interior of eastern Nicaragua where the Mayangnas lived.

It was these international logging companies, combined with their lumber camps, that brought the timber industry to Mayangna communities. Because the waterways offered the best access to the interior, the banks of the region's rivers were logged first by the companies. The Bragman's Bluff Lumber Company, for example, began logging along the Wawa and Coco Rivers near the turn of the twentieth century. In 1894 the George Emery Company of Boston arrived in the area to log cedar and mahogany. In addition to logging operations on the Coco and Wawa Rivers, E. Brautigam & Company and Silverstein & Kelting (which later became the Nicaraguan Commercial and Logging Company) were logging along the Prinzapolka River at the end of the nineteenth century.

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39 Henderson, An Account of the British Settlement of Honduras, 213.
43 Ibid., 42.
Logging operations continued into the twentieth century. When Karl Mueller approached Cape Gracias a Dios in the 1920s he recalled vividly "the smoke-stack of the saw-mill, and the red, sheet-metal roofs of the trading establishments of various nationalities." Mueller points out that Gracias a Dios was "of considerable importance," especially when logging was in full swing on the upper Coco River. According to Major-General Edson, who was commander of the U.S. Marine Corps' Coco Patrol in the late 1920s, more than 20,000 mahogany logs were shipped out of Gracias a Dios in 1927.

Indeed, the mouth of the Coco River was both an important port for exporting timber and the principal avenue into the forested interior of the Mosquitia. In the first decades of the twentieth century, George Heath traveled through much of the Coco watershed on the Nicaraguan and Honduran sides of the river. His writings contain numerous reports of lumber camps far into the interior. Major-General Edson also found mahogany camps on the Coco River in the last years of the 1920s. One of the principal lumbermen in the interior was Benny Müller. His logging operation at Sawa was "where the annual mahogany run was boomed and sorted according to ownership." Apparently, there were many mahogany companies in the interior. Müller himself had been in Nicaragua since 1895; Edson found him to be "invaluable," both for his knowledge of the terrain and for his understanding of the inhabitants of the Coco River corridor.

When General Sandino gained control of the mahogany country in 1928, timber exports dropped precipitously. Logging operations in the interior, however, did not cease for long. Because of the close relationship between the Somoza regime and United

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47Heath, "By-paths in Honduras," 172-173.
49Edson pointed out that in 1928, "less [sic] than eighteen hundred logs were exported" from Gracias a Dios. He attributed the drop to Sandino who, in that same year, usurped power over the mahogany business in northeastern Nicaragua. See Edson, "The Rio Coco Patrol," 23.
States business interests, U.S. logging companies continued to enter eastern Nicaragua in the 1940s and 1950s. In Wasakin, for instance, a logging company was allowed to move into the territory and take out as much of the precious timber as they wanted. According to Robinson, the Mayangna community tried to fight back, but was unsuccessful because the Nicaraguan government was sympathetic to the company.\textsuperscript{50} Near Sikilta, a logging company arrived in 1945 and extracted mahogany from the Cerro Caliche area for roughly ten years.\textsuperscript{51} The logging continues to this day. Now, in the late 1990s, much of the mahogany cutting is done illegally in the BOSAWAS Reserve. Outside of the reserve, the timber stands have been diminished. Logging in those areas sometimes threatens Mayangna communities, like Awas Tingni. Members of the Awas Tingni community, supported by a legal team from the World Wildlife Fund, have been trying to stave off a Korean lumber company that wants the Mayangnas' mahogany and other precious woods.\textsuperscript{52} Unlike the rubber industry that disappeared in the 1980s, logging is still taking place in the vicinity of Mayangna villages. At the same time, throughout the last century, the Mayangnas have been much less involved with timber companies than they were with rubber collectors.

Despite being more aloof from timber than from rubber, the lumber industry has influenced Mayangna society. The various firsthand reports, especially those from Heath and Edson, indicate that the mahogany industry had reached the Mayangna territory by the 1920s. Because the camps were situated in close proximity to Mayangna communities, loggers offered labor opportunities to the Mayangnas. Also, like the rubber contractors and processing plants, mahogany camps made trade between foreigners and Indian residents much easier. Whether the Mayangnas were trading mahogany or working in the camps at

\textsuperscript{50}Murphy Almendarez Robinson, "Los Sumus: Movimientos y Luchas (Historia Contemporanea de las Organizaciones Sumus)," n.d., Documents Collection, CIDCA, Managua, Nicaragua, 14.
\textsuperscript{51}Peralta and Indalicio, Sikilta: Historia y Situación Actual, 3.32.
\textsuperscript{52}For a thorough discussion of the Awas Tingni case, including an analysis of the negotiations among the Mayangnas, the Nicaraguan government, and the legal team, see S. James Anaya and S. Todd Crider, "Indigenous Peoples, the Environment, and Commercial Forestry in Developing Countries: The Case of Awas Tingni, Nicaragua," Human Rights Quarterly 18 (1996): 345-367.
that point remains elusive. Evidence does not reveal much Mayangna interaction with the camps. What is important, then, is that the foreign and mestizo employees in these camps brought the market economy to the Mayangnas. By bringing manufactured goods and providing a commercial center in the interior, far from the coast, mahogany camps and loggers began to replace the Miskitu Indians as trade intermediaries. No longer did the Mayangnas depend upon the Miskitus; Mayangnas could interact with and participate directly in the global economy. Increased incorporation into the market caused change in and around Mayangna communities. Whereas the collection of latex reconfigured the Mayangnas' relationship with tuno and rubber trees, logging operations did not inspire the Mayangnas to harvest mahogany trees. The Mayangnas rejection of logging could be attributed to an ecological-conservationist principle or to a lack of technology, which would have rendered logging too time consuming. More likely, their aversion to foreigners kept Mayangnas out of the lumber camps.

Since the Mayangnas did not harvest timber, it was foreign logging companies that triggered ecological change in the region. Very early in the mahogany trade, the Coco River and the port at Gracias a Dios were filling with silt—caused by timber extraction from the surrounding hillsides and from floating mahogany on the river. In the San Pio area, Young commented that, "the quantity of loose soil and trunks of trees brought from the interior by its current, had diminished the depth of water in the vicinity of San Pio so materially, that in a few years the bay would be filled up altogether, and ships would have to ride outside, and consequently be deprived of shelter." In the Bocay area, the number of cattle increased during the logging years. Karl Sapper, who traveled in the region before the turn of the twentieth century, found cattle. Although he does not specify whether the cattle were actually in Mayangna communities, it is notable that the domesticated stock was in the area.

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53According to Young, the siltation in the Coco River was first noted by Don Jose del Rio in 1793. Young also mentioned that in 1839, the Coco had changed course and had become a large river—with much silt in the bed—instead of a stream. See Young, Narrative of a Residence, 14.

54Ibid.
Interestingly, he explains that cows were sometimes used to pay fines. For example, a person who committed adultery was, by law, required to pay for the offense with "one or two cows."\textsuperscript{55} Heath also mentions that cattle roamed the mahogany camps in the interior during the first years of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{56}

Logging camps brought new technology and manufactured goods to the region, but the lumbermen did not infect the Mayangnas with a sound comprehension of money and income. In the late 1800s Palmer observed that money was virtually absent in Bocay; goods were always acquired through barter.\textsuperscript{57} The Mayangnas were still not accustomed to using money in the 1920s. Edson remarked that "their knowledge of money consisted of the dime (a ten cent piece), shilling (a quarter) and dollar. Any piece of paper money was a dollar which meant that only dollar bills were really suitable for financial transactions. Like all primitive peoples, a leaf of tobacco, a little sugar or salt, a cake of soap, or any similar article would purchase more and was more acceptable to them than its equivalent in coin."\textsuperscript{58} If they did not use money, it seems unlikely that Mayangnas worked for wages in the 1920s. Even by the 1950s, neither the rubber nor the mahogany trade had penetrated Mayangna life to the extent that they gave up subsistence for a wage.

The principal change that came from the arrival of mahogany companies in the interior of the Mosquitia was that it drew foreigners and mestizos into Mayangna territory. The timber industry gave Mayangnas the chance to work for wages in the logging camps. Yet they opted for daily work on their own agricultural plots interspersed with periodic trips into the forest to hunt peccary and other wild animals. The timber industry gave Mayangnas the chance to sell mahogany and cedar logs to logging companies. They chose not to. And the timber industry gave the Mayangnas the chance to trade with lumbermen who increasingly traveled to the Bocay, Waspuk, and Uli Rivers. This the Mayangnas did,

\textsuperscript{56}Heath, "By-paths in Honduras," 172.
\textsuperscript{57}Palmer, Through Unknown Nicaragua, 65.
\textsuperscript{58}Edson, "The Rio Coco Patrol," 41.
but not to a significant degree. In fact, specific accounts of Mayangnas bartering in the logging camps have not been unearthed. Clearly, though, with timber workers and mahogany camps on the same rivers where the Mayangnas lived, manufactured goods were more accessible than they had been in the colonial era when commercial transactions were carried out on the coast. Consequently, the influx of foreigners and mestizos from the timber business caused the Mayangnas' reliance on Miskitu intermediaries to wane. The Mayangnas could now participate in the market more often and on their own volition. Like the rubber industry had done in the nineteenth century, then, timber companies brought the global market to the Mayangnas.

The Market Comes to Stay: Gold Mining in Las Minas

On the heels of rubber tappers and loggers, gold miners flocked to the Mosquitia in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Ronas Dolores Green, a Mayangna Indian himself, reports that foreigners first noticed gold in the village of Wasakín, located near present-day Bonanza (the region later became known as the Las Minas or Pis Pis district). As Dolores Green explains, a gringo named Johnny Shols had come to Wasakín in the late 1880s hoping to trade with the Mayangnas. He brought for the Mayangnas clothing, salt, soap, machetes, fabric, and other products. In return, he wanted "tiger skins, wood, and other natural resources." What he found in Wasakín was much grander than he ever would have bargained for: gold! Shols left the community with a few of the "brilliant yellow pebbles," but he wasn't gone for long. He returned with more gringos, and they searched for the source of the gold on Mount Wisihbin. Even the Mayangnas—who

60 Estimates of the year that the Mayangnas first traded the gold to rubber tappers in the region vary slightly. The estimates do, however, reveal that it was rubber gatherers who initially acquired the gold from the Indians and then leaked their discovery to other mestizos and foreigners. Claudia Garcia, for example, claims that the Mayangnas first traded the gold in 1889; for her discussion, see Garcia, "La Mosquitia en
received fabric and other goods in exchange for the precious stones—began looking for gold.61

News of the gold traveled fast. Loquacious rubber tappers emerging from the interior on the Coco River blurted the story to anyone who would listen in Cape Gracias a Dios.62 It wasn't long before gold-seekers descended upon the Pis Pis district. A zealous rubber collector named José Aramburo incorporated the first mine in 1896-97; the company became known as the La Luz and Los Angeles Mining Company.63 Throughout the 1890s small mines, operating above ground only, continued to appear in Las Minas, the larger of which were in Siuna, Rosita, and later in Bonanza.64 Management of the mines, however, were not left to local individuals for long. In 1905 Aramburo's 1896 mine was purchased and incorporated by a group of investors from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.65 In 1916 the Siuna mine was, once again, bought out by a U.S. mining company.

Even in the hands of these multi-national mining corporations, the Siuna mine was not operating on a large scale until the 1930s. In the 1930s, two events jumpstarted the Las Minas district: (1) the region was finally linked by air to the exterior world, and (2) Somoza took power and offered U.S. companies fantastic contracts. Before airstrips were built in Siuna, Bonanza, and Rosita in the 1930s, access to the region was arduous at best, disastrous at worst. As James Parsons grumbled, the trip to the mining district could take as much as a month from New Orleans.66 From the Caribbean coast, steamship service was available on the Coco River as far as the Waspuk River. From there, Parsons

Archivos Suecos," 23. James J. Parsons, on the other hand, suggests that the "mines were discovered in 1889-90 by castilla rubber collectors moving up the navigable rivers from the Miskito Coast"; for his discussion, see James J. Parsons, "Gold Mining in the Nicaraguan Rain Forest," Yearbook of the Association of Pacific Coast Geographers 17 (1955): 51.
61Ronas Dolores Green, "Las Minas: Riqueza para Algunos," 34, 42.
64Adams, "Life Giving, Life Threatening," 58; Garcia, "La Mosquitia en Archivos Suecos," 23.
66Parsons, "Gold Mining in the Nicaraguan Rain Forest," 52.
explains, it was a four- to five-day journey in a pitpan to the mining region—no easy
trip. Hawxhurst, who also visited the region in the 1910s, complained that, to avoid
traveling by land through dense forest, the tiniest streams carried travelers and goods to the
Las Minas district. Noting the route to Siuna on the Prinzapolka River, Hawxhurst recalls:

At all times the channel is blocked in places by tangled masses of stranded
trees, logs, and brushwood, through which an open passageway is
maintained with difficulty. The cost of moving freight up-river, a distance
of 165 miles, is from 5 to 6c. per pound. In no other country in the world
would such a stream be utilized for purposes of transportation, and its use
here would be impossible but for the exceptional skill and hardihood of the
Indian boatmen.

In this context, it becomes clear why the construction of airstrips invigorated mining
operations. Airplanes were critical not only because they facilitated the shipping of
equipment, materials, and personnel to Las Minas, but also because airplanes could more
effectively export the gold from Nicaragua.

In addition to the airstrips, Somoza's sympathy for U.S. corporations played a role
in the expansion of the Atlantic Coast mining industry. After signing a generous thirty-year
contract with Somoza—one that assured unrestricted exports and no tax hikes for the
duration of the contract—Ventures, Inc. (a subsidiary of the Canadian company,
Falconbridge) bought the Siuna mine in 1936. At that point, the mine changed from the La
Luz and Los Angeles Mine to the La Luz Company. In 1940, the mine was working
around the clock, with three-shift operations and 1200 employees. Mining had taken on
new proportions in the Pis Pis district. Also bolstering mining operations in 1936, the
Nicaraguan Mining Company in Bonanza sold their mine to the partnership of Honduras
Rosario and the Neptune Gold Mining Company (a subsidiary of American Smelting and
Refining Company—ASARCO). By the 1950s, the mining district—now linked firmly

67 Ibid., 53.
69 Adams, "Life Giving, Life Threatening," 58.
70 Dolores Green, "Las Minas," 42.
by air to the rest of the world—was under the direction of two major multi-national companies.\textsuperscript{71}

At the same time the mines grew and gained international recognition, so too grew the impact of the mines on the local Indians. Before mining it had been the rubber industry that brought local contractors and a few small processing plants to the Mayangnas' back door. Timber companies followed. Logging near Mayangna communities and mahogany camps along the region's rivers had further eroded the Mayangnas' isolation in Nicaragua's interior. But with the establishment of multi-national mining companies in the Pis Pis district, Mayangna insularity was threatened much more than it had been previously.

Figure 9: Airstrip in the Las Minas Region—After the construction of airstrips in Las Minas in the 1930s, mining company stores were supplied and financed by North American companies. By the mid-twentieth century Mayangnas could do the bulk of their commerce in the company stores within each mining town, thanks to the airstrips.

\textsuperscript{71}Parsons, "Gold Mining in the Nicaraguan Rain Forest," 51.
Rubber collectors and loggers had been largely nomadic. Projects were small and their tenure short. Not so for the mines. Mining employed thousands, it took significant long-term investment, and was potentially much more lucrative for the company owners. This wasn't a transitory industry, as were rubber and timber. For the first time in the interior of eastern Nicaragua, a large, foreign industry had rooted itself. Not surprisingly, as the mines became a seemingly permanent fixture on the landscape, profound and enduring change resulted for Indian residents and local mestizos alike.

Many of the changes were ushered in on the back of the market economy, which became both more conspicuous and more accessible once the mines were established in the late 1800s. For the Mayangnas, the mines generated potential market interaction on two fronts: (1) new, consistent wage labor opportunities arose, and (2) it created a new arena for buying and selling goods. Although the Miskitu Indians flocked to the mines for work, the Mayangnas did not readily embrace wage labor. Prior to the 1930s, before airplanes linked the Pis Pis district to the exterior world, some Mayangnas worked as boatmen, transporting goods on the hazardous rivers and streams that connected the mining towns to the Caribbean coast.72 Besides river work, a portion of the Mayangnas labored directly in the mines. Generally, though, the Mayangnas limited their work stints to just a couple years, or less, and after the work, they all returned to their communities to resume subsistence farming.73

Labor demands in Siuna, Rosita, and Bonanza brought people from afar to work in the mines. Ironically, those who lived closest to the mines, the Mayangnas, were employed less than any other ethnic group in Nicaragua. According to Bernard Nietschmann, the mines propelled the Mayangnas to remain in their communities, away from the mining centers. Conversely, the Miskitu Indians were drawn to the mines.74

73Anonymous interview by author, 3 January 1998, Nicaragua.
Since the colonial era, the Miskitus had been working for English companies, sometimes traveling as far as Belize or Honduras for these jobs. As a result, by the turn of the twentieth century, many of them relied on wage labor to sustain their families. At the very least, Miskitus were accustomed to wage labor. The mines helped fulfill the Miskitus' desire to work. And when the banana industry on the Mosquito coast declined in the 1930s, it correlated perfectly with the expansion of the mines in the Pis Pis district.

The new jobs in the mines were filled quickly by transplanted Miskitus and Creoles from the coast. Most of these relocated Miskitu Indians were given unskilled jobs in the mine pits. Together with mestizos, they constituted the bulk of the unskilled labor force. English-speaking Creoles, on the other hand, worked with the educated mestizos as skilled laborers. Of course, upper management positions were filled by North Americans. For the communities of Siuna, Rosita, and Bonanza, jobs in the mines were essential. In the 1950s, James Parsons proclaimed that the "mines provide the principal economic support" for the Miskitu and Creole people of the Atlantic Coast. As Parsons saw the situation:

When the mines are closed down, as they one day will be, Bonanza and Siuna will be invaded and overgrown by a tangle of lush tropical forest almost overnight. Then will come a major social and economic readjustment... It will, however, be but one more chapter in the economic history of the Miskito Coast which in turn has been supported by export economies based on green turtles, sarsaparilla, mahogany, rubber, bananas, pine lumber and, now, gold.76

Parsons may not have been far from the truth. Siuna suffered a blow when the dam that generated power for the mine burst in 1968. Even worse, when war broke out in the early 1980s, the mine shut down permanently. Nearly twenty years later, unemployment in the region remains well above 50 percent. To a significant degree, mining was the pillar of the region's economy.

75 Adams, "Life Giving, Life Threatening," 59.
76 Parsons, "Gold Mining in the Nicaraguan Rain Forest," 55.
Figure 10: *Defunct, Overgrown Mine*—Parsons predicted that the mines would become "a tangle of lush tropical forest almost overnight." This image of the Siuna mine today suggests that his prediction may not have been far from the truth. Mines once powered the economy of the Las Minas region. Today, the area's economy continues to adjust to life without the mining companies.

Whatever the mines' importance for *mestizos*, Creoles, and Miskitus, the industry did not figure so predominantly into the lives of Mayangna Indians. A portion of the Mayangna population did work—in some capacity and for short periods of time—but the Mayangnas never developed the dependency on the mines that other Atlantic Coast residents did.

During the initial decades of mining on the Atlantic Coast, in the late 1800s and early 1900s, some of the Mayangnas living on the Prinzapolka and Waspuk Rivers worked as river guides. Hawxhurst has explained how the treacherous journey to the mining district was possible only because of "the exceptional skill and hardihood of the Indian boatmen."\(^{77}\) Both Mayangna and Miskitu guides operated the barges and canoes that

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hauled freight to the Pis Pis district. Women were also part of these journeys between the mines and the coast. During trips lasting upwards of nine days, women served as cooks for the entire group of guides and passengers.78 Transporting equipment and machinery on the rivers, as well as cooking for the travelers, were the Mayangnas' most common forms of employment in the mining industry.79 When they did work at the mines, their work took many forms. Occasionally Mayangnas worked directly in the pits, digging for gold. More often, they collected firewood or carried gold to the rivers.80 Records from the La Luz Mining Company reveal that the company hired women between 1916 and 1928 to haul gold. Sometimes each woman was required to carry as much as 80 pounds at a time.81 These positions at the mine, and the river work to a much larger extent, were more ephemeral than the jobs that were in the mines themselves.

Not only were the jobs less stable, but only a small portion of the Mayangnas went to work, and those who did go didn't stay long. Instead, they worked sporadically and usually for no more than a couple years. Conzemius reports that when he was in the region in the 1920s just a few Mayangnas were employed in the Pis Pis gold mines.82 Kenneth Nowack, a Moravian pastor in Bonanza during the 1950s, recalls that the Mayangnas he saw working in the mines stayed for only a month or two.83 A Mayangna, José, who grew up in the 1930s and 1940s near the mining district, explained that a handful of men in his community sought jobs in the mines. But, in a village of more than one hundred people, he could only remember about five or six Mayangnas ever going to the nearby mine. Those who went were back within two years. Mayangnas were afraid of the mines,

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79Admas, "Life Giving, Life Threatening," 102.
82Conzemius, Ethnographical Survey, 24.
83Nowack, telephone interview.
José confessed, because people died there. Many Mayangnas shared José's sentiment. They believed that the hazards associated with work in the mines were not worth leaving their remote communities along the river.

Generally, short-term, infrequent work in the mines was the norm for Mayangnas. Thus, as long as the mines operated in the Pis Pis district (from the 1890s to the 1980s), the Mayangna Indians never embraced wage labor as a viable way of life over the long term. Perhaps Armando Rojas Smith summarizes the Mayangnas' position best: the Mayangnas, he writes,

are fond of freedom, they never work for a salary, they live by agriculture, hunting, fishing, and the collection of rubber. It is important to point out that the majority of the population lives in the region of Las Minas—Bonanza, Rosita, and Siuna; however, the workers in the mines are Miskitos and there are almost no Sumus.

Surely, with the mines in close proximity, the Mayangnas could have replaced their subsistence lifestyle in the forest with wage labor in the mines. They didn't. Of the Siuna mine's 376 employees in 1980, not a single Mayangna was on the payroll. Essentially, the Mayangnas proved, once again, that the "lure" of the market could be resisted and that they were unwilling to abandon completely their isolation and their non-capitalist economy.

If not through wage labor, the mines still brought the market economy to the Mayangnas. In the same way that rubber and timber had increased the Mayangnas' contact with market forces, the mining industry brought foreigners and mestizos closer to Mayangna communities. With the newcomers came the ensuing social and environmental change that so often accompanies the market. This time, though, as the mining industry arrived at the Mayangnas' front door, change occurred on a grander scale than it had with either rubber or timber. The thousands of people who came to work in the mines gnawed

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84Anonymous interview by author, 3 January 1998, Mayangna community, Nicaragua.
86Adams, "Life Giving, Life Threatening," 60.
at the Mayangnas' isolation. More significantly, mining companies constructed company stores in Siuna, Rosita, and Bonanza.

These company stores—all fabricated, furnished, and funded by North American mining corporations—were only a short walk or a quick canoe ride away from Mayangna communities. Before the mining companies arrived on the Atlantic Coast, trade was more difficult and less frequent. Previously, the Mayangnas relied upon Miskitu intermediaries or, after the middle of the nineteenth century, upon rubber and timber entrepreneurs who happened into a Mayangna community. For reliable trade, the Mayangnas had to travel to the Caribbean coast, a journey that frequently took more than a week. With mining company stores, however, manufactured goods could be had easily. In the span of one day, a Mayangna could leave his village, travel to a well-stocked company store, and return home in time for dinner. Indeed, mines facilitated the Mayangnas' ability to trade.

Company stores enhanced Mayangna trade because they were both a place to buy goods and a place to sell them. Company stores were an important trade arena right from the start, but after the passage of a Labor Code in 1946 the mining communities became even more important for local commerce. The 1946 code stipulated that mining companies had to provide free housing, water, electricity, schools, basic foods at a subsidized price, and medical facilities for the surrounding community.\(^{87}\) The code affected the Mayangnas not because they lived in the mining towns and received these services, but because it brought low-priced goods into the region and provided a market for the Mayangnas' goods.

Throughout the twentieth century, Mayangnas emerged from the forest with goods to barter or sell in the mining district. Most often, they brought items that they either grew, raised, or caught for themselves. When they had leftovers, they took them to market. Among these "excess" goods were fruits and vegetables, cacao, rice, eggs, peccary and

\(^{87}\)Ibid., 64-65.
deer meat from the hunt, and an occasional pig. Not everything they took to market, however, was surplus. Some of the goods were produced or collected solely for the market. Conzemius explains that pigs and fowl were rarely eaten, but were "commonly sold to strangers." Nowack recalls that people who worked in the gold mines bought from the Mayangnas iguanas and monkeys for pets. Borys Malkin, a herpetologist who

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Figure 11: Marketplace for Commerce—Nicaraguan (non-Indian) towns are the avenues through which the Mayangnas participate in the market economy. This street in Siuna is representative of these markets in the mining district.

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89Conzemius, Ethnographical Survey, 88.
90Nowack, telephone interview.
studied and lived in Mayangna communities in the 1950s, confirmed that some Mayangnas collected other animals to sell, too. Crocodile and snake skins, for example, were procured specifically for the market. The Mayangnas regarded the flesh of both animals as unsuitable for human consumption—crocodile because "to us it stinks," snake because its blood and flesh were believed to be toxic. Since these animals were not utilized by the Mayangnas, evidently they were collecting them for commerce. Thus, the market was shaping the Mayangnas' relationship with their environment. The market also commodified natural resources in the forest environment.

Importing goods into Mayangna communities effected change as much as did producing goods for export. With an abundance of inexpensive, accessible goods in the company stores, the Mayangnas acquired an increasing number of foreign materials, including food products and seeds that gradually altered the Mayangnas' diet and subsistence strategies. One Mayanga remembers that when the company stores operated in the Pis Pis district, he (and other Mayangnas) could get carrots, tomatoes, potatoes, onions, cabbage, watermelons, etc.. Beans became one of the most important crops brought to the Mayangnas with the mines. In the 1920s, Conzemius noticed that beans were used hardly at all in Mayangna villages. By the late 1940s, Kirchhoff pointed out that agricultural plots of maize and beans were common among the Mayangnas. Beans are just an example. Crops in general were becoming increasingly important as a food source. The accessibility of seeds in the mining company stores, combined with the demand for fruits and vegetables in the mining communities, meant that Mayangnas were more likely to farm than they had been before the mines (and the market) had arrived in Las Minas.

92 Anonymous interview by author, 3 January 1998, Mayangna community, Nicaragua.
93 Conzemius, Ethnographical Survey, 63.
The transformation for the Mayangnas as a whole was, nonetheless, relatively slight compared to other indigenous groups in the Americas. The Mayangnas were participating in the market economy occasionally, and the market was affecting their land use practices. But their market interaction did not trigger a wholesale loss of their extant social, cultural, and economic customs. Even by the mid-twentieth century, the Mayangnas were only slightly attached to the market core. Thomas Hall has explained that the more a group is tied to the market core, the more profound are the changes that follow. Market incorporation for the Mayangnas, consequently, was causing change, not a complete metamorphosis.

Many Mayangnas never even went to the mining towns. Others only went occasionally. When they did go, as Jorge Jenkins Molieri has pointed out, they only bought a few items, such as salt, sugar, flour, and clothing. Additionally, they obtained machetes, soap, footwear, matches, and other basic manufactured goods. Mayangnas could buy or barter for these products in the company stores. But frequent trips to the mines' stores were not necessary. They only made infrequent journeys into town. Revealing one Mayangnas' inexperience in Bonanza, Kenneth Nowack recounts how a Mayangna man leapt from a moving pickup truck when he came around a bend and saw that he was approaching Bonanza. Although he lived in Musawas, a day's trip from Bonanza, he was not accustomed to the bustle of a mining community. A few stitches and some bandages helped him recover physically, but his anxiety over the mining settlements probably did not abate.

Despite Mayangnas' aversion to the mining towns, mining personnel and company stores still instigated a change for Indian trade: the Mayangnas no longer relied on Miskitu intermediaries or traveled to the coast for manufactured goods. Where the Miskitus once stood now stood a local store. The influx of North American products into these company

95Jenkins Molieri, "Breve Nota Sobre los Grupos Indígenas," 142-143.
97Nowack, telephone interview.
stores also made them more accessible to the Mayangnas. More and more, travelers to the mining district were passing near Mayangna communities. The travelers both heightened the Indians' contact with outsiders and expanded potential market interaction for the Mayangnas. The Bocay region, while not in the mining district, was experiencing a similar phenomenon. Burgeoning mestizo settlements were creeping closer to the Mayangna villages, thereby enhancing opportunities for trade. Trade on the Atlantic Coast had changed.

**Moravian Missionaries and Capitalist Values**

The foreign industries that entered the Mosquitia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—rubber, timber, and mining—presented clear ways for the Mayangnas to participate in capitalist-driven economies and increase their level of incorporation into the global market economy. There was another, perhaps less obvious, force in the twentieth century that also pushed them toward increased market interaction: the Moravian church. Surprisingly, the Moravians were the first Christians to proselytize the Mayangnas; the seemingly ubiquitous Catholic missionaries never made it to northeastern Nicaragua. When the Moravians arrived in Mayangna communities, they brought an alternative worldview, not just spiritually, but economically, too. Viewing the Mayangnas as poor and backward, one of the Moravians' principal goals—beyond conversion of course—was to eliminate poverty. J. Taylor Hamilton summed up the Moravian position in 1924:

I plead earnestly that we attempt something to save the village life of the Indians. . . . Now is the time, and perhaps the last possible time, for us to attempt the economic rescue of the Indians. If we fail, these sons of the forest will simply become the industrial helots of an alien civilization which is sure to pour in upon the Indian country before long. If we succeed in
establishing hand-industries, particularly weaving, might not our experience be of use to other missionfields. . .

For several decades after the Moravians reached Mayangna communities in the 1910s and 1920s, missionaries promoted economic change in Indian villages.

The desire to "civilize the heathen" brought the Moravian doctrine and the market economy directly to Mayangna households. The market, and the Mayangnas' ensuing affiliations with market forces, came in a variety of ways. What the Moravian Mission in Nicaragua promoted were the following: (1) a change in Mayangna customs, including new clothing, houses, crafts, housewares, education, etc.; (2) the development of big business on the Atlantic Coast, and the Mayangnas' acceptance of it; (3) wage labor or other money-making endeavors for the Mayangnas; and (4) the production of fruit and vegetable crops, as well as the raising of domesticated animals (stock). As Moravian missionaries and pastors spent more time in Mayangna communities, so too were these goals stressed upon the Mayangnas. Rubber, timber, and mining had brought the market to the Mayangnas' doorstep. Now, with the Moravians, the market passed through the door and into Mayangna houses.

Moravian missionaries first arrived in Mayangna communities in the 1910s and 1920s. At that point, however, they were not newcomers to the Atlantic Coast. In fact, Moravians had first sent a German exploratory commission to Nicaragua in 1847. The next year, on March 14, 1848, they set up an office in Bluefields, which thereafter became the Moravian headquarters for Nicaragua. The Mission spread from Bluefields, moving slowly to the north along the Caribbean Coast.

Nicaragua was not the only country to host Protestant missionaries in the late nineteenth century. As a backlash to the foundations of the Catholic Church in Guatemala, for instance, the state supported Protestant evangelicals. Additionally, the state encouraged Protestantism because missionaries promoted progress. Linda Green summarizes Guatemala's anti-Catholic, pro-development situation in the 1870s: "Export agriculture based on large-scale coffee production was the economic cornerstone of Guatemala's entry into modernity. Protestantism was the theological justification for the imposition of conditions necessary for 'progress' to flourish."\(^{101}\)

The Moravians' work in Nicaragua could have been connected to the Protestants' appearance in Guatemala. On the other hand, eastern Nicaragua was not Catholic when Moravians arrived; the Indian residents had not been proselytized by any Christians before the Moravians. The state may have encouraged Moravian missionaries, but it should be borne in mind that throughout the nineteenth century, politics on the Atlantic Coast were tied to London more than to Managua. If the Moravians were affiliated with a development scheme in Nicaragua, they arrived on the Atlantic Coast much earlier than in Guatemala. These questions do not rule out the fact that Protestant missionaries in the Mosquitia may have been part of a broader evangelical processes in Central America.

More than half a century after the Moravians landed at Bluefields, they reached the first Mayangna communities. Not surprisingly, the first Mayangna villages the missionaries found were on or near the Coco River. During the years 1906-1908, missionaries Guido Grossmann and Benjamin Garth ventured through much of the Mayangnas' territory, visiting both the Bocay and the Pis Pis regions. Mission work ceased in 1909 and was not revitalized until 1916, when North Americans began directing the Mission.\(^{102}\) With new vigor in the Moravian Mission, missionaries spent the next few decades establishing congregations in Mayangnas communities. By the time Sikilta's

\(^{102}\)Wilson, "Obra Morava en Nicaragua," 213, 220.
Moravian church was constructed in 1948, virtually the entire Atlantic Coast had been evangelized by Moravian missionaries.\textsuperscript{103}

Figure 12: *Moravian Church*—Moravians were the first Christian missionaries to arrive in Mayangna communities. They arrived in the early twentieth century. Over time, Moravian churches became the center of village life.

Work for the Moravians was not only building churches and sharing the bible. It also involved the "improvement" of Mayangna living standards. "The example of the missionary family living in their midst," explains Karl Mueller, "did much to introduce new ideas."\textsuperscript{104} Among Mueller's "ideas" for Mayangna homes were knives, spoons, plates, cups, saucers, tables, benches, and floors for the houses. Other missionaries focused on different changes, like increased medical aid, education, or children's programs.\textsuperscript{105}

\textsuperscript{103}For the discussion of Sikilta's first church and its pastor, see Peralta and Indalicio, *Sikilta: Historia y Situación Actual*, 7. Missionary activity is cited from Wilson, "Obra Morava en Nicaragua," 236, 242, 262.

\textsuperscript{104}Mueller, *Among Creoles, Miskitos, and Sumos*, 38.

\textsuperscript{105}Wilson, "Obra Morava en Nicaragua," 220.
Overall, though, as a missionary pointed out in 1924, "the crux of the situation [sic] is the clothing problem."\textsuperscript{106} To ameliorate the clothing situation, the congregation in Musawas set up a sewing class in the late 1920s, which about 20 women attended. According to Guido Grossman, "The aim of this class is: not only to teach them sewing, but also to show them how to clothe themselves more decently than they were doing."\textsuperscript{107}

The Moravians' advocacy for these changes in Mayangna society was not an overt promotion of market interaction. The changes did, however, require the Mayangnas to purchase or barter for goods that they had not previously used. By the late 1940s, Kirchhoff observed that while bark cloth was the traditional clothing, it had been replaced by cotton. Acquiring the cotton clothing was usually done "by trade."\textsuperscript{108} Consequently, the Mayangnas needed to make money for clothes and to participate in the market.

Money could be made in two ways: either by selling commodities or by selling their labor. Missionaries urged the Mayangnas to do both. Frederick Wolff's comments in the 1927 annual report of the Mission in Nicaragua captures the Moravians' position: "As the great aim of all the Mission Societies as well as that of our Moravian Mission Board is the final independence of our native churches, the improvement of the economic condition of the people is of no small importance to us, for only then can we withdraw, and be free for other work, when our members are able to support themselves and the work financially."\textsuperscript{109} Inspired by good intentions, Moravians were attempting to overhaul the Mayangnas existing economy.

The Moravian Mission generally supported big business and promoted wage labor in the Indian communities. The annual reports frequently describe the health of local industries, like bananas, timber, or mining. Without successful businesses, the Mission

\textsuperscript{106} Hamilton, "The Mission in Nicaragua, 1924," 84.
believed, Indians were in trouble. They needed to earn a wage.110 "[T]hanks to the work of Minor Keith, founder of the United Fruit Company," wrote Wilson, foreign companies "improved" the economy of the region.111 For the Miskitus and Creoles, the foreign corporations did provide jobs. Not so for the Mayangnas. They rarely worked for a wage. Yet they were bombarded with the pro-business, pro-employment sentiment of the Moravian Mission. When Mayangnas failed to take jobs, one missionary suggested, "Would it not be best to teach them Spanish, or possibly English? Spanish would seem to us to be more natural, as it is the language of the country. Yet to know English is an avenue to employment" (my emphasis).112 Moravian missionaries were convinced that Mayangnas should work for wages.

When wage labor wasn't a viable option, Moravians encouraged the Mayangnas to earn money from the sale of locally-produced goods. The items they urged the Mayangnas to sell or trade took many forms, from forest products, to crops, to domesticated animals, to crafts and hand industries. Making these goods required the Mayangnas to learn trades, or learn to farm. The Moravians were energetic teachers. Hamilton, for example, explained that "...no Indian community has a sawmill; and very few Indians can make furniture. But these arts, like the use of the plough, might be taught to them."113

In addition to the crafts or trades that the Moravians taught, they also advocated the production of fruits and vegetables for the market. Nowack claims that he tried to get Mayangnas to grow apples, both for eating and for selling.114 As for agriculture, Hamilton observed that "The Indian has always hunted, fished, and raised crops . . . [but]
there is no such thing as methodical agriculture or stockraising."\(^{115}\) Part of his goal, then, was to train Mayangnas to be agriculturists. Frederick Wolff was another missionary who wanted Indians to farm. Wolff asks "But why is it that our people do not make more use of their soil? Why is it then that not all cultivate, and that those who do cannot get enough returns for their own domestic use?"\(^{116}\) Rice was his answer. The Indians could grow rice, sell it, and become much "better off" economically. He envisioned year-round planting and harvesting with machines.

Economic self-sufficiency brought with it the effects of the market economy and the transformation of land use practices among Mayangnas. Though never embraced fully by the Mayangnas, wage labor was pushed at them. Local money-earning projects were adopted, and the finished materials were sold in local markets. Inspired by the Moravians, the Mayangnas were extracting more timber and forest products for commerce than they had before the missionaries' arrival. Since the Moravians also promoted farming, Mayangnas steadily increased the amount of crops and fruit trees they grew. This farming produced food for their own consumption as well as food for sale in the mining towns. Moravian missionaries had explicitly advocated increased market interaction for the Mayangnas. It was this push for heightened market participation, combined with the Moravians' promotion of crops that was, in part, responsible for the Mayangnas' shift from a sustenance based primarily on hunting and fishing to one based principally on agriculture and occasional hunting and fishing.

In retrospect, it is difficult to gauge the success or failure of Moravian goals. The Mayangnas are certainly more incorporated today than they were when the Moravians arrived. Yet the Mayangnas remained in isolated communities, and they did not accept completely the Moravian ideology.\(^{117}\) And Moravian missionaries were not the only

\(^{117}\) Patron claims that the Mayangnas have maintained many of their traditional beliefs, and that sometimes they kept them in secret from the missionaries. For example, he explains that the Mayangnas believe animals, plants, rivers, mountains, etc. have "owners." Patron suggests that the belief in these "owners" did not disappear after missionaries proselytized the Mayangnas. See Patron, "Una Historia Oral," 15.
impetus for change. The rubber, timber, and mining industries figure into the equation. Other forces, too—like the loss of hunting grounds to mestizo towns, the contamination of rivers by gold mines, the switch to more stationary settlements (also encouraged by the Moravians), a rise in the population, and the availability of new crops (for instance, beans)—brought change to the Mayangnas. Whatever the extent of the Moravians' influence, I would not classify the Mayangnas as the industrial helots that the missionary Hamilton predicted 75 years ago.

Conclusions

What I have described thus far are the major forces that have drawn the Mayangna Indians into the market economy. Rubber tappers, loggers, miners, and Moravians have all influenced the Mayangnas' degree of incorporation into the economy and the ensuing changes that can result from market participation. But after more than three hundred years of economic incorporation, the Mayangnas remain only slightly attached to the market. They exist somewhere between Hall’s contact periphery and marginal periphery. The market core certainly does have an impact on the Mayangnas, and they do engage in regular trade, or market interaction.

Today the Mayangnas rely on certain manufactured goods, such as cotton clothing, machetes, cookwares, matches, 22-caliber rifles, etc.. They sell extra crops, livestock, and a portion of the meat they get from the hunt. Occasionally they even capture a live monkey, macaw, or tiger and take it to market. When possible, they pan for gold in the streams and get money or goods in exchange for the precious stones they collect. Clearly, the Mayangnas are involved in the marketplace and their relationship with the natural world is different from that of their nineteenth-century ancestors.

118 Peralta and Indalicio, Sikilta: Historia y Situación Actual, 56.
One of the most dramatic ways that the Mayangnas have changed during the last three centuries is in their subsistence strategies. At contact, their sustenance came predominantly from hunting and fishing. Agriculture and the gathering of edible plants and fruits supplemented their diet, but meat and fish were the most important foods.

Throughout the colonial period, though, and especially in the last 150 years, the Mayangnas have spent more and more time growing food. With increased access to seeds and crops through the market economy, and with the introduction of exotic fruit and vegetable species, agriculture became more common among the Mayangnas. Later, by the twentieth century, hunting grounds were disappearing to mestizo settlements. As both the

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Indian and non-Indian populations in northeastern Nicaragua grew, animals and fish became more difficult to find. The community of Sikilta, for example, used to hunt peccary where the mining town of Siuna now stands. Other factors besides the market obviously contributed to the Mayangnas' shift from a hunting and fishing emphasis to an agriculture emphasis. At the same time, increased market interaction by the Mayangnas facilitated the transition.

But the transformation of Mayangna society, culture, and human-land relations have been relatively minor compared to those of other indigenous groups, especially their Miskitu neighbors who have become much more intimately linked to the market. Incorporation has not made the Mayangnas dependent. As Kristin Ruppel argues, "their dependence on (and therefore trust in) the market economy is, at this point, at a very low level."\(^{120}\) It appears, then, that the Mayangna Indians have taken a different path than have most Indian peoples. Richard White's *Roots of Dependency*, and countless other examples, delineate the common declensionist story of the Indians' plight.\(^{121}\) But the Mayangnas are among the few indigenous groups who have actively repelled market forces.

By living in remote areas—and by rigorously pursuing that isolation from outsiders—the Mayangnas have felt market forces less than have other Indians. The Mayangnas have largely avoided credit, or when they acquired a debt with rubber contractors, they did not lose their ability or willingness to subsist on the land and grow all of their own food.\(^{122}\) Though many Mayangnas did work in the mines in Rosita,

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\(^{122}\) Asociación para el Desarrollo y Progreso de Comunidades Indígenas Sumo y Miskitu de Jinotega, et al, *Mayangna Sauni Bu: Censo y Estudio Socio-económico, Junio-Agosto 1995*, manuscript in author's possession. According to this study (p. 13), 94% of men work as agriculturalists, while 100% of women work in the home. Thus, there is virtually no wage labor. Baudilio Miguel Lino, Mollins Erans, and Fidencio Davis, comps, *Mayangna Sauni As: Tradición Oral de la Historia y Estudio Socioeconómico de las Comunidades Mayangna de la Cuenca del Waspuk* (Arlington, VA: The Nature Conservancy, 1997). In this study, it is revealed that as far as credit is concerned, "we don't find anybody who uses credit" (p. 54).
Bonanza, and Siuna, they usually limited their time as a wage laborer to a year or two, thereafter returning to their communities and their subsistence lifestyle. Today only a tiny portion of the Mayangnas are engaged in wage labor, showing that their subsistence way of life and their cultural cohesion are more important than earning a steady wage. Said another way, the Mayangnas do not regularly sell themselves for money. Their aversion to wage labor, however, is only possible because they can feed themselves without earning money and without the market. Another indication of their distance from the market core is the prevalence of usufruct rights to the land. Recent socio-economic reports reveal that communal ownership of the land and reciprocity among community members is not a bygone practice. Though the manner of reciprocal sharing has changed over time, the fact remains that they are not driven wholly by the desire to accumulate wealth on an individual basis.

Evidently, the Mayangnas are still resisting the capitalist market. Moreover, their worldviews and social organizations do not represent capitalist tendencies. In Marxist language, they view "use-value" as more important than "exchange-value." In other words, the Mayangnas do not see the acquisition of wealth as an end in itself. Instead, they participate in the market to satisfy immediate wants and acquire basic necessities. It is difficult to say, of course, but if the market somehow vanished from northeastern Nicaragua tomorrow, it appears that the Mayangnas could keep living. It would be tough without machetes and clothing, and they would lose gasoline for their outboard motors, candles for their homes, and salt for their food. But they would still be capable of

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123Borys Malkin recognized that Mayangnas did not hunt more than six of the 37 local amphibian and reptile species because they "can fall back upon their agriculture and also upon the forest which is inhabited by a large number of edible animals." For his discussion, see Malkin, "Sumu Ethnozoology," 166-167.

124The socio-economic studies for the three Mayangna territories in the BOSAWAS Reserve are as follows: Peralta and Indalicio, Sikilta: Historia y Situación Actual; Lino, Erans, and Davis, Mayangna Sauní As; Francisco Zolano, comp., Mayangna Sauni Bu: Documentación del Reclamo Histórico de las Comunidades Mayangna de la Cuenca del Río Bocay (Arlington, VA: The Nature Conservancy, 1997).

125This framework which outlines debt, game depletion, wage labor, subsistence, and reciprocity is based on Richard White's explanation of the process of dependency. For the complete analysis, see White, Roots of Dependency, chapter 5.

supplying their own food and shelter without any market interaction. Indeed, the Mayangnas are changing, but they remain non-capitalist and only slightly incorporated.
In January of 1998 I spent some time in a Mayangna community inside the BOSAWAS Nature Reserve. During a conversation with one of the men, Miguel, I asked if he took excess crops or other goods to the markets in the Las Minas area. He said he did on occasion—rice, plantains, beans. "How often do you make the trip to market?" I inquired.

"Maybe once a month," Miguel told me.

"Could you go more often? Grow more crops? Take a greater quantity? Make more money?" I eventually got around to asking.

"I suppose" he laughed "but I cannot work all day and night. Besides, I have what I need."

Knowing that it can be difficult to transport goods to town, especially in the dry season when the canoes bottom-out on the exposed rocks in the river, and knowing that it often takes two days for the journey, I asked if he supported the construction of a road that would link his community to the towns of the mining district. He responded without hesitation: "No. If they build a road, the mestizos will use it to come out here. Its only use will be to bring more mestizo families to our community. That doesn't work for me. It's not worth it."

Essentially, the discussion with Miguel revealed that earning money was secondary to providing basic necessities and ensuring his family's survival. He did not have any reason, or the motivation, to work for cash. Growing his own food and trading excess crops for clothing, medicine, salt, a machete, etc. did not require him to take a job or to save money. Miguel's life is quite different from how we operate in the United States: first
we earn money, then we buy what we need. Not so for the Mayangnas. Obviously they have a different relationship with the market economy.

In addition to illustrating the Mayangnas' low level of reliance on the market, the conversation with Miguel also showed that his community's isolation—a clear and definitive separation from the mestizos on the agricultural frontier—was more important than an income. The benefits of a road did not matter; Miguel could only see that a road would open his community to colonization by outsiders. As he said, whatever advantages the road might offer, the road was "not worth" losing their segregated homelands.

Miguel is not the only Mayangna who believes that protecting the Mayangnas' insularity takes precedence over most everything else. According to recent studies in Mayangna communities, Mayangnas find the influx of landless mestizos more problematic than undernourishment, disease, education, the low prices paid for their goods, or poverty.¹ The number one concern among Mayangnas today is their acquisition of land titles. Title to the land would prevent further colonization by mestizos.

Apparently, the Mayangnas are still fighting to maintain the isolation that they have sought since contact. On their list of priorities, they continue to place isolation well ahead of the acquisition of goods, ahead of money, ahead of earning a wage, ahead of virtually everything else. To many, isolation from outsiders is equated with survival.²

This steadfast pursuit of isolation not only characterizes Mayangna culture today, but it has been a crucial part of their history. True, the Mayangnas are fighting for their

¹These studies were conducted only after support from the Mayangna communities was obtained. In most cases, the studies were done by Mayangnas themselves. Thus, I believe they are a reliable resource. Francisco Zolano, comp, Mayangna Sauni Bu: Documentación del Reclamo Histórico de las Comunidades Mayangna de la Cuenca del Río Bocay (Arlington, VA: The Nature Conservancy, 1997), 72; Baudilio Miguel Lino, Mollins Erans, and Fidencio Davis, comps, Mayangna Sauni As: Tradición Oral de la Historia y Estudio Socioeconómico de las Comunidades Mayangna de la Cuenca del Waspuk (Arlington, VA: The Nature Conservancy, 1997), 10; Justo Peralta and Samuel Indalicio, comps, Sikilta: Historia y Situación Actual de Los Mayangna Balna Del Uli Was (Arlington, VA: The Nature Conservancy, 1997), 64.

²In conversations with Mayangnas, they speak vehemently against the arrival of outsiders and are quick to broach the topic. Mestizo families who have settled near Mayangna communities, Mayangnas argue, are a huge threat to the Mayangnas' way of life and, as some believe, to the Mayangnas' survival. These Mayangna opinions were gathered from my own observations made in their communities, 28 December 1997 to 4 January 1998.
land today because the agricultural frontier is now penetrating the region. They are also fighting for the land because the BOSAWAS legislation may threaten Mayangna autonomy. Even though the legislation calls for the protection of the Mayangnas' homelands, the Mayangnas believe that any national law could potentially limit their autonomous decision-making, a right they supposedly have within the RAAN (Región Autónoma del Atlántico Norte—North Atlantic Autonomous Region). But the thread runs deeper than the agricultural frontier or the BOSAWAS laws. The Mayangnas' desire to live remotely has been one of the key forces in Mayangna life for several centuries.

In the colonial era, both European colonists and Miskitu slave raiders triggered a Mayangna withdrawal toward the remote areas of eastern Nicaragua's interior. At contact, Mayangnas probably lived closer to easily accessible coastal areas. At present, Mayangnas are found mostly at the headwaters of the remote Bocay, Waspuk, Prinzapolka, Uli, and other rivers. With the arrival of rubber, timber, and mining industries in the Mosquitia, the Mayangnas retreated again. Unlike the Miskitu Indians who accepted the foreigners and worked for the companies, the Mayangnas limited their contact and stayed in their own villages. Even when companies, especially mines, set up near Indian communities, the Mayangnas did not integrate into mestizo towns or cities. When they did go to town or took an occasional job, they almost always returned to their homes and their subsistence lifestyle.

Today, the push for isolation persists. Wage labor in business centers is for all intents and purposes non-existent. The rate of language retention among Mayangnas hovers around 100 percent. They rarely marry non-Mayangnas. Young Mayangnas are not lured away, either. Some leave for school, but they usually return. In effect, when the Mayangnas could no longer put geographical or physical distance between them and

3 These conclusions are drawn from the socio-economic studies cited above. Each of the three reports' appendices contains information about occupation, language, birthplace, inter-marriage, emigration, etc.. The reports are: Zolano, *Mayangna Sauni Bu*; Lino, Erans, and Davis, *Mayangna Sauni As*; and Peralta and Indalicio, *Sikilta: Historia y Situación Actual*. For a discussion of the Mayangnas' rejection of intermarriage, see CIDCA, "Sumu," 1982, Documents Collection, CIDCA, Managua, Nicaragua, 1-2.

outsiders, they put up an invisible wall, a cultural barrier. Since contact, the Mayangnas have been working to keep that wall intact. They rarely co-mingle with non-Mayangnas.

Even without assimilation into the *mestizo* culture, contact with outsiders has occurred. Along with contact, the Mayangnas have increasingly participated in the market economy. But participation has been a choice for the Mayangnas; it never culminated in a wholesale dependence on the market. Sometimes Mayangnas chose to leave their villages to trade with Miskitu intermediaries on the Caribbean coast. Through much of the colonial era, however, Mayangnas did not trade, or when they did, they only acquired a few imported goods. After the middle of the nineteenth century, they occasionally tapped rubber trees or worked for a logger or a mining company. Sometimes they bartered with foreigners who visited their communities or who lived in nearby towns. They exchanged natural resources and crafts for manufactured goods and tools. Always, though, the Mayangnas remained isolated and grew, caught, or gathered their own food. This cultural desire for isolation, combined with the capacity to subsist on the land, perpetuates their low level of market interaction.

Today, Mayangnas participate in the market economy on a regular basis, through the buying and selling of goods in *mestizo* towns. They take various crops, animals, wild game, and forest products to market. In exchange, they buy machetes, nails, salt, rifles, clothing, hammocks, and other materials. Some Mayangnas pan for gold or welcome ecotourists into their communities. Indeed, they are part of the market economy. Yet the Mayangnas have not been so thoroughly thrust into the market that they depend on it for their survival. By preserving both their ability to feed themselves and the means to provide their own shelter, the Mayangnas can, to a certain degree, still determine the frequency and the extent to which they participate in the market. In other words, they can still afford to choose isolation in favor of market interaction.

Thus, for the last four centuries—from the time Spanish and English colonists infiltrated the Atlantic Coast up to the present—two principal themes have encompassed
Mayangna society: (1) isolation from outsiders; and (2) gradual integration into the market economy, a process that in many ways has been *chosen* by the Mayangnas. Significantly, one of the reasons that the Mayangnas have been able to preserve their isolation is because they have kept their participation in the market economy at a low level. A stronger link to the market may have rendered isolation impossible. In this context, then, the two themes of isolation and limited market integration are inextricably conjoined. Isolation perpetuates their low degree of incorporation. The low degree of incorporation accommodates their isolation.

Despite the isolation and minimal interaction with the market, both outsiders and the market have made their imprint on Mayangna society. Over time, many factors can trigger social and ecological change in indigenous populations. Even in complete isolation, change occurs. People are not static. What I have attempted here is to delineate the principal causes of transition, the forces that drew the Mayangnas into the market economy and stimulated change in their communities. European colonists, Miskitu slavers, rubber tappers, timber extractors, mining companies, and the Moravian church have all, in myriad ways, influenced the Mayangna people and transformed their relationship with the natural world.

Each of these forces had its own repercussions. Some were small or subtle; others were more profound or overt. Together, they have all shaped how Mayangnas interact with their surroundings. As commerce has increased over the past four hundred years, trees, animal skins, rubber, wild animals, gold and other natural resources were collected for the market. By commodifying forest products, Mayangna interactions with the physical environment have changed. As new technology became available to the Mayangnas, as hunting grounds dwindled, and as contact with *mestizos* and Moravian missionaries heightened, Mayangna subsistence techniques changed. At contact subsistence was achieved through hunting and fishing. Today subsistence is based primarily on agriculture. Spurring the transformation to agriculture, as well as triggering other changes, the use of
manufactured goods and modern tools has become widespread among Mayangnas. Rifles and machetes, for instance, have replaced bows and arrows and digging sticks.

Gender roles have also shifted. Women used to plant, weed, and harvest crops; they also fished. Today women rarely work in the fields, and they only fish occasionally. Their role today is tied to the inside of their home, and they produce a smaller portion of the family's food than they did even a century ago. Another modification to Mayangna society has come in the form of reciprocal sharing. Reciprocity in the nineteenth century consisted of sharing duties and food—most likely peccary, agouti, and other animals. Today, reciprocity (called Biri Biri in Mayangna) occurs, but with the adoption of agriculture, sharing more often entails working in the field than dividing up meat from the hunt. Clearly, the Mayangnas have undergone transformations since Europeans brought the market economy to the Americas.

While the market did induce change, the Mayangnas' isolation has allowed them to avoid being overrun by market forces. The reason: the Mayangnas have crept slowly into the periphery, much slower than many other indigenous groups have. Other groups quickly began to integrate into the market. They lost subsistence strategies, faced tremendous debts, depleted local resources, and were therefore inexorably tied to the market. Without the market, these groups could not survive. This is the scenario that Thomas Hall refers to when he argues that change generally occurs in one direction, which is almost always toward a greater reliance (eventually a dependency) on the market core.

Mayangnas have interacted with the market for centuries. But instead of plunging head first into the market, as many other groups have, the Mayangnas continually test the

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7 In Mayangna Sauni Bu (Bocay River), an average of 84 percent of households participate in Biri Biri; see Zolano, *Mayangna Sauni Bu*, 69. In Mayangna Sauni As (Waspuk River), the rate is over 90 percent in the six months prior to the date the surveys were recorded; see Lino, Erans, and Davis, *Mayangna Sauni As*, 90. Even after adjusting for possible errors, it is clear that reciprocal sharing is part of most Mayangnas' lives.
water. They submerge a toe, maybe a leg, but pull away when they feel the chill of the water. The water has always been too cold for swimming. Mayangnas only bathe in the water of the market economy; it's a chore they should do, and they do it regularly, but they could survive without a bath. Only time will indicate whether the Mayangnas are going to keep increasing their level of market integration, but four hundred years of contact suggests that it will continue to be a gradual process. Perhaps the Mayangnas can still defy Hall's claim that once a certain degree of incorporation is reached, change only occurs in one direction.

Even if the Mayangnas are on Hall's road to dependency, those who live inside the BOSAWAS Reserve ought to be part of the management process. Their stake in the reserve transcends a simple wish for land title. Isolation is a critical element of Mayangna culture. They have fought for it for centuries. They likely believe that protecting their communities from outsiders is more important than buying and selling goods in the market—no wonder they haven't become capitalist participants in the global market economy. Their quest for isolation and for control of their land in BOSAWAS is driven by nearly half a millennium of history. Community-based conservation, in this case, is more than just a catchy phrase. The Mayangnas' link to the land is as real and as vital as that of any frog, bird, or tree.
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