

PROPERTY AND INDIGENOUS STATE FORMATION IN THE HONDURAN
MOSKITIA

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PROPERTY AND INDIGENOUS STATE FORMATION IN THE HONDURAN MOSKITIA

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Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples throughout Latin America have mobilized to demand the state recognition of their collective land rights in an effort to maintain control over the lands and territories that they have traditionally occupied. While communities have been able to secure property titles to millions of hectares in lowland tropical areas, this titling has occurred in the context of a neoliberal turn to state-making and rising global interests in the lands and natural resources held in these territories. The ability of Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities to maintain social reproduction and exercise their self-determination on these titled territories is uncertain. This dissertation investigates how the Miskitu people in Honduras negotiated their new status as property owners with the state, development agencies, and each other. The Honduran state awarded property titles to twelve Miskitu territorial councils over an area covering about 12 percent of the national territory. The central claim of this dissertation is that the Miskitu leadership conceived the titles not merely as property rights but as the basis for exercising broader jurisdictional authority over the land, resources, and population of Moskitia. This re-conceptualization of Miskitu property rights challenges the view held by the Honduran state and other actors. I propose the concept of Indigenous state formation to describe the political structuration that emerges from mobilizing the imaginary of indigeneity to make claims on territory as a state-like jurisdiction. I argue that in the Honduran Moskitia these efforts to claim jurisdictional competencies have created a political structuration that I call the inter-communal

property regime. The dissertation follows this process of Indigenous state formation from the independence of the Honduran Republic in 1838 to the contemporary period after the awarding of the property titles. By engaging theoretical insights on Indigenous sovereignty and state formation from across the Americas, this work advances knowledge on the effects of recognizing collective land rights in the context of settler colonialism and agrarian change.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Fernando Galeana Rodriguez completed his B.A. in Economics at Stanford University and M.A. in International Relations at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies. Before beginning his M.Sc./Ph.D. in Development Sociology at Cornell, he worked as a consultant in land administration and land governance at the World Bank. His involvement in World Bank-funded programs that supported the titling of collective land rights in Central America encouraged him to research the challenges that emerged before and after the awarding of land titles. Fernando has collaborated with Indigenous and land rights activists to defend the right to self-determination and maintain community control over land and natural resources. In the fall of 2021, Fernando will start a position of assistant professor in Sociology and Integrative Conservation at William & Mary, where he will teach and research on environmental justice and contribute to partnerships with communities, conservation and development partners, and government agencies.

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This dissertation was made possible by enduring collaborations and friendships that sparked ideas and nurtured me during moments of career transitioning and personal growth. Growing up in Mexico, I encountered racism and discrimination against Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples and the tokenization of their cultures in everyday life. While I could sense the inequality, I did not have the right conceptual tools to understand this violence. My mestizo heritage and middle-class background shielded me from some of the worst effects of the settler-colonial logics. A combination of academic mentorship, cross-cultural experiences, and collaboration with Indigenous and land rights activists contributed to my understanding of social injustice and fostered a commitment to conduct research that contributed to decolonization efforts.

My undergraduate years at Stanford University shaped my career trajectory. Dr. David McKenzie introduced me to the idea that property rights could contribute to development and supervised my undergraduate thesis on the privatization of Mexico's social land tenure system known as the ejido. Although I was determined to be a development economist, I am so grateful that I took a class with Dr. Bill Durham and Dr. Nickie Irvine on Indigenous peoples and environmental problems in the Department of Anthropological Sciences. This class acquainted me with political ecology and introduced me to people working in environmental anthropology. Dr. Constanza Ocampo-Raeder and Dr. Amanda Stronza provided invaluable support as I launched into my first field research experience in an Indigenous community as part of a collaboration with the Posada Amazonas ecotourist lodge in Peru. Dr. Flora Lu has a special

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title collective land rights in Central America, including the project in Honduras that inspired this dissertation. Our conversations helped me understand the potential and limits of donor interventions to strengthen Indigenous land rights. From Mary Lisbeth Gonzalez, I learned to be more aware of the micro-politics surrounding project intervention. She was also the first to encourage me to pursue a Ph.D. Her friendship and support have meant a lot to me. Under Mika-Petteri Törhönen's guidance, I learned about land administration issues in the Balkan region, which increased my awareness about land tenure reform as part of a global development agenda. Malcolm Childress became a role model of an academic working in operations. He also introduced me to anthropologist Dr. Liza Grandia, with whom we organized an action research project in Peten, Guatemala. I want to recognize Victoria Stanley for her friendship and interest in my long-term career plans. The Ph.D. experience would not have been the same without the continuous support of Enrique Pantoja and David Fissel, who on several occasions opened their home to me in Arlington, V.A., providing a much-needed family environment to reenergize.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 SEEING LIKE A STATE

In 2015, I attended an event in La Ceiba, Honduras, where the Honduran government aimed to consult Indigenous and Afro-Honduran organizations on a new governance framework to export timber to the European Union. For two days, the non-governmental organization in charge of organizing the event assembled about twenty representatives from these organizations and ten representatives from government agencies. The event was held in the conference room of a budget hotel along the busy highway that traversed Honduras's agricultural hub on the north coast. Pineapples, African palm fruit, timber, and cocaine packs traveled down that road every day. The most memorable moment during the event was the distinct way in which the Miskitu federation, Unity of Moskitia (MASTA), expressed its claim to the self-determination of the Miskitu people.¹ MASTA had recently negotiated the titling of twelve Indigenous territories, known as territorial councils, in the region of Moskitia. In the meeting, MASTA's members distinguished themselves by wearing a V-neck white color short sleeve shirt with the organization's logo. This uniform was equivalent to the logo-embroidered polo shirts that government representatives were wearing, and it contrasted with ordinary streetwear of the other Indigenous and Afro-Honduran representatives. Instead of giving oral remarks like the other organizations, MASTA showed a PowerPoint presentation, just like the government

¹ There are different spellings to refer both to the ethnicity and the region. The Miskitu language does not have a vowel sound for "o." Words in Spanish and English with this vowel sound are pronounced with the "u" sound in Miskitu and vice versa. For this reason, I use Miskitu, instead of Miskito, to refer to ethnicity, which is also how most people from the region spell it. For the region, people refer to it as La Mosquitia or La Moskitia in Spanish. The trend to indigenize terminology has led to the use of the term Muskitia to describe the region. However, the use of this alternative spelling is less frequent than Miskitu. Sometimes, it also appears with the definitive article in Spanish as La Muskitia. For simplicity, I use the conventional English spelling of Moskitia to refer to the region.

representatives did. MASTA gave the impression that they were a government agency rather than one of the other Indigenous organizations. “What does it mean to govern?” MASTA’s representative posed in one of the slides. The answer came in the next slide under three bullet points “• a territory • a population • an authority.”

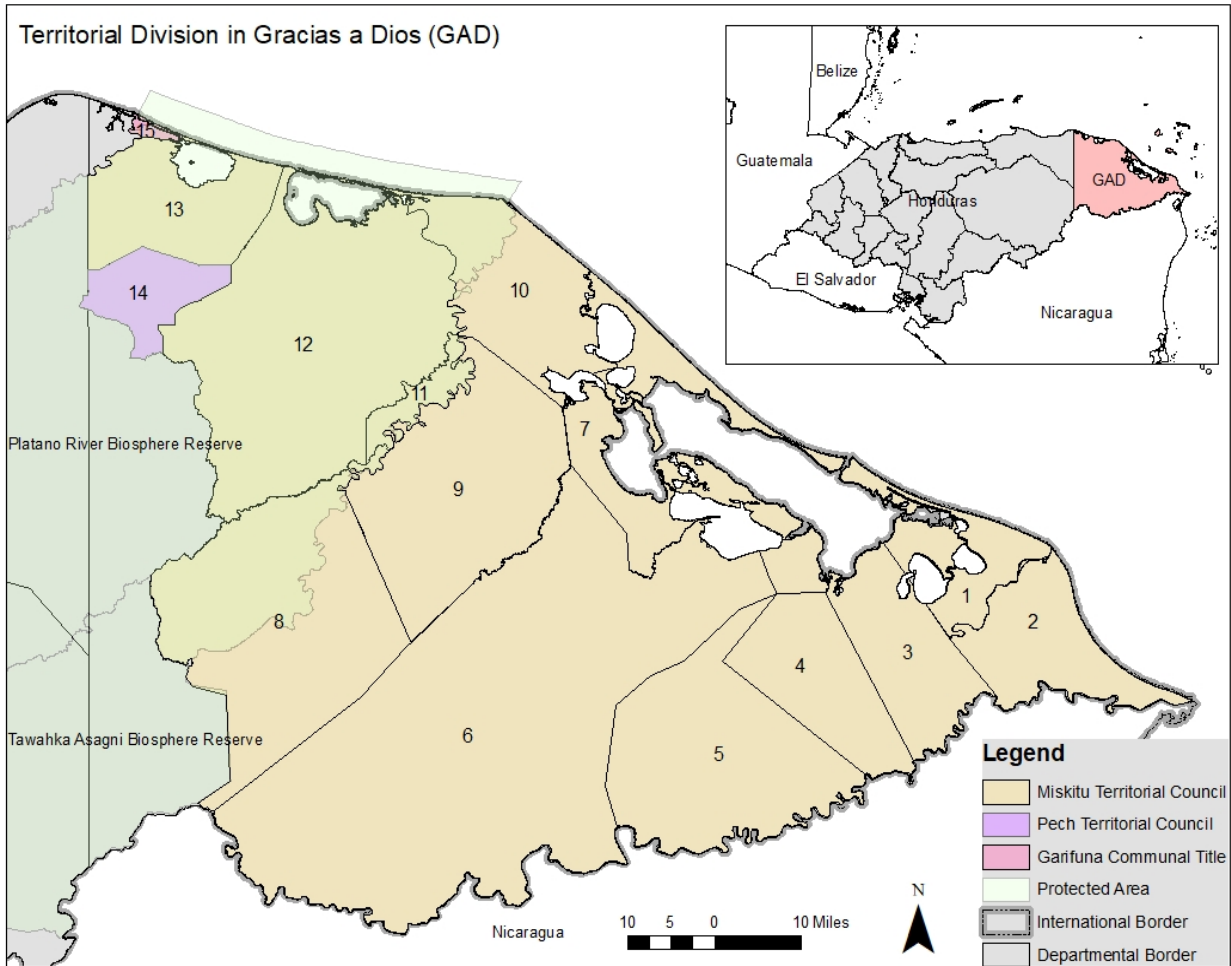
The triad in MASTA’s slide could have well served as the opening slide to introduce students to theories of state formation in a college-level course. Scholars have spent significant efforts trying to understand how discursive and material practices help construct the notions of territory, population, and authority upon which the idea of the state rests (Abrams, 1977/1988; Das & Poole, 2004; Gupta, 2012; Joseph & Nugent, 1994; Li, 2007; Mitchell, 2002; Scott, 1998; Vandergeest & Peluso, 1995). These studies on state formation shifted away from previous approaches that emphasized the functionalism of the state system (Parsons, 1966), the ideology that masked state coercion as a function of capitalist domination (Althusser, 1971), or the embedded autonomy of state institutions from the rest of society (Evans et al., 1985). Instead, they engaged with Gramsci’s perspectives on subalternity and Foucault’s notion of apparatus to help de-center the idea of the state.

I remember finding this candid reference to state formation both exciting and bemusing because of what it implied for thinking about MASTA as a state-like entity. The possibility that MASTA, as a civil society organization, contributed to the practices of state formation was not itself what sparked my curiosity. The state formation scholarship had already prepared me to observe how the interactions between civil society and government agencies were the outside that constituted the state (Das & Poole, 2004; Mitchell, 1991; Sharma & Gupta, 2009). Instead, the possibility that MASTA could be theorized as a government-in-the-making, a state-like

apparatus that co-existed with the Honduran one, enthralled me. But what exactly did it mean for an Indigenous federation like MASTA to embody this state-likeness?

In the ordinary PowerPoint presentation, MASTA's representative was not making a grand call for independence or a passionate speech about the decolonization of the Miskitu Nation. Instead, the purpose was to showcase a mapping project that MASTA had recently completed in one of the newly titled territorial councils in partnership with U.S. and Honduran universities.² The map provided a detailed description of toponyms and land uses in the territorial council. MASTA meant to complete a similar mapping exercise in the rest of the territorial councils. The mapping project encapsulated MASTA's ambition to make the territory and population of Moskitia legible to enact its authority. Through the mapping project, MASTA aimed to "see like a state" in the classical manner of the cadastral survey that James Scott (1998) argued contributed to state formation in the likes of eighteenth-century France and the twentieth-century Soviet Union. MASTA's claim to state-likeness did not amount to a rupture from the Honduran state but rather to a re-purposing of state-making practices to create a counter-hegemonic imaginary.

² The mapping project was part of the American Geographical Society's Bowman Expedition in Central America and funded by the U.S. Department of Defense. The first Bowman Expedition in Mexico created controversy for allegedly failing to disclose the source of military funding to Indigenous communities in Oaxaca. Joel Wainwright's *Geopiracy* (2013) and Joe Bryan and Denis Wood's *Weaponizing Maps* (2015) provide a comprehensive background on the Bowman Expedition and the ethical considerations of conducting participatory mapping among Indigenous communities.



Map 1: Territorial Division in Gracias a Dios

Table 1.1: List of Titled Indigenous and Afro-Indigenous Territories in Gracias a Dios. Adapted from ‘Los 12 Concejos Territoriales’ by MASTA, 2012, *Protocolo biocultural del pueblo Miskitu*.

1. KATAINASTA (<i>Katski Lakunkata Aiska Indianka Asla Takanka</i>) – Organization of the Indigenous Peoples on the Shores of the Caratasca Lagoon. 2. WATIASTA (<i>Waupasa Tanira Indianka Asla Takanka</i>) – Organization of the Indigenous Peoples on Eastern Moskitia. 3. LAINASTA (<i>Laka Indianka Asla Takanka</i>) – Organization of the Indigenous Peoples from Laka 4. Truktsinasta (<i>Truksulu Kiamka Tipi Saitralwi Nani Asla Takanka</i>) – Organization of Truksulu’s Descendants from Tipi. 5. WAMAKLISCINASTA (<i>Wailan Masraka Auka, Klanya, Lisanya, Corinto Ralwi Nani Asla Takanka</i>) – Organization of Waylan’s Descendants from Auka and Surrounding Areas. 6. FINZMOS (<i>Federación de Indígenas Nativos de la Zona Mocoacán-Segovia</i>) – Federation of Native Indians from the Mocoacán-Segovia Area.	7. <i>Auhya Yari</i> – Long Beach, the Miskitu name for the area where Puerto Lempira was established. 8. BAKINASTA (<i>Butuka Awala Klaura Iwi Indianka Asla Takanka</i>) – Organization of the Indigenous Peoples from the High Patuca River. 9. BAMIASTA (<i>Butuka Awala Mayara Iwi Indianka Asla Takanka</i>) – Organization of the Indigenous Peoples from the Middle Patuca River. 10. BATIASTA (<i>Butuka Awala Taura Iwi Indianka Asla Takanka</i>) – Organization of the Indigenous Peoples from the Mouth of the Patuca River. 11. <i>Zona Tripartita</i> – Tripartite Zone. 12. DIUNAT (<i>Drapap Tarara Iwi Nani Asla Takanka</i>) – Organization of the Peoples from the Great Swamp. 13. <i>Rayaka</i> – Life. 14. Pech Tribal Council Las Marías. 15. Plaplaya Garifuna Communal Land Title.
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This dissertation aims to understand contemporary struggles for land and territory in Latin America from the lens of an Indigenous-centered perspective on state formation. Philip Abrams called to study the state not as an ontological reality but as an idea that produced “structuration within political practice” (1977/1988, p. 82). According to Abrams, the combined effects of this idea and concomitant apparatus contributed to the legitimation of rule and domination, masking the true nature of political practice. Following Abrams, scholars have set forth to study the tools, practices, rituals, and symbols that grounded the idea of the state in everyday life. Despite this burgeoning scholarship, the framework of state formation has rarely been applied to study the practices of Indigenous federations in Latin America during land titling

processes. One notable exception is Juliet Erazo's *Governing Indigenous Territories* (2013) which applies the conceptual tools of state formation to examine how Indigenous authorities enact rule in their titled territory in the Ecuadorian Amazon. Erazo proposes that Indigenous authorities foster a distinct governmentality, which she calls the everyday forms of territorial formation, aimed at producing territorial citizens.

In Latin America, the trend has been to understand the effects of governmentality on Indigenous territories as part of neoliberal governance. The critique that developed around the unseemly support to collective land rights in neoliberal policies, which Karl Offen (2003) referred to as the “territorial turn,” provided a much-needed reflection on the paradoxical effects of seeking legal recognition from the state. Charles Hale (2005) proposed the idea that Latin American states were turning to a practice of political control, which he called “neoliberal multiculturalism,” that relied on the partial recognition of cultural rights. In particular, this body of scholarship warned that the mapping and titling of collective lands could facilitate the penetration of state and markets in Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, thus contributing not to empowerment but to the perpetuation of inequality through neoliberal governmentality (Anthias, 2019; Asher, 2009; Bryan, 2012; Correia, 2019; Hale, 2011; Mollett, 2013; Ng'Weno, 2007; Wainwright, 2011; Wainwright & Bryan, 2009). This scholarship acknowledged that the context in which these mapping and titling projects were undertaken mattered and that the outcome may very well be the production of “not-quite-neoliberal spaces” as suggested by Penelope Anthias and Sarah Radcliffe (2015). However, these contributions overall did not approach mapping and titling from the vantage point of Indigenous-focused governmentality, as suggested by Erazo.

I myself struggled to reconcile the theoretical insights that had developed around the territorial turn with what I observed in the Honduran Moskitia. Some of the key contributions in this literature were developed from a direct engagement with the participatory mapping projects that took place in this region as part of the process to claim property titles (Bryan, 2011; Hale, 2005, 2011; Mollett, 2013). These contributions had been instrumental in making me aware that titling could become another form of social control, but I found them less suitable for understanding the image that MASTA was projecting in the post-titling period. Thinking about the Honduran Moskitia from the traditional homelands of the Gayogohó:nq' (Cayuga Nation), where Cornell University is located, lured me into engaging more explicitly with scholarly debates over Indigenous nation-building that were more prevalent in the context of the U.S. and Canada. This detour from Latin America showed me the possibilities of engaging with conceptual frameworks developed in North America by identifying the experience of state formation under settler colonialism as the central area of concern. In this dissertation, I mobilize theories from across the Americas to understand the governance effects that emerge after the titling of Indigenous territories. In this way, this work helps to breach what Shannon Speed (Chickasaw) identified as the “dual theoretical gap” in Indigenous studies that has created uneven attention to dimensions of settler colonialism and neoliberal capitalism in the study of state formation in the Americas (2017).³

Following Nadasdy (2017), I engage with the concept of Indigenous state formation to describe the political structuration that emerges from mobilizing the imaginary of indigeneity to

³ Shannon Speed proposes that this dual theoretical gap exists because “northern theorizations of the settler state have not grappled fully with neoliberal capitalism, and southern theories of the neoliberal state fail to recognize the significance of settler logics that structure the conditions of state formation, including in its current neoliberal iteration” (2017, p. 789).

make claims on territory as a state-like jurisdiction.⁴ I refine my approach to Indigenous state formation by explaining how it is complementary to but not defined by other approaches used to engage the emancipatory struggles of Indigenous peoples. First, Indigenous state formation is not equivalent to formal political autonomy. The practices of Indigenous state formation are present in claims for political autonomy, but they can also exist in their absence, such as in the case of decentralization policies. Second, Indigenous state formation is not a capture of the state apparatus in order to transform it, which is what Nancy Postero (2017) described as the “Indigenous state” in reference to efforts by the MAS regime to decolonize the Bolivian state. Indigenous state formation describes efforts to create jurisdictions that coexist with state agencies. Third, Indigenous state formation, as a concept, points to a different dimension of decolonization than the one articulated by the Latin American school of post-colonial studies (De la Cadena, 2010; Escobar, 2008, 2018; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Quijano, 2000). This body of scholarship points to the recuperation of non-Western ontologies to establish a different epistemological basis for citizenship in the settler-colonial state. Indigenous state formation is also an expression of decolonizing efforts, but the concept attends to the ways in which Indigenous peoples incorporate a Western ontology of sovereignty to articulate their claim for citizenship in the state’s language.

The conceptual separation suggested above is not to imply that Indigenous state formation is a straitjacket for emancipatory struggles. Ultimately, the pursuit of self-determination is what animates the project of Indigenous state formation. However, I propose that distinguishing Indigenous state formation from emancipatory struggles writ large offers at

⁴ I understand indigeneity as a relation that results from the historical encounter that transformed non-European populations into others in settler-colonial societies (Radcliffe, 2017).

least three possibilities to advance our understanding of decolonization struggles. First, the direct reference to processes of state formation among Indigenous societies revives their character as nations and highlights the ongoing occupation of the settler-colonial state, in the ways suggested by Speed (2017). Second, the recognition that Indigenous peoples repurpose the tools and practices of the state to foster their own governmentalities can show the limits of the state apparatus and neoliberal governance, in the ways suggested by Erazo (2013). Third, the characterization of Indigenous authorities as quasi-state bureaucrats allows us to explore the contradictions that emerge from this new subjectivity without having to fall back on the notion of cooptation to explain the effects of institutionalization, as has been suggested by new theories of social movements (Lapegna, 2014; Wolford, 2015).

Similarly, I propose that engaging with Indigenous state formation contributes to recent scholarship on state formation in three ways. First, it helps to unpack the cultural specificity that is involved in the formation of the settler-colonial state (Nadasdy, 2017; Shaw, 2008). Second, it contributes to recent scholarship that examines how the formalization of property rights contributes to the formation of political authority (Beban, 2021; Campbell, 2015; Lund, 2016; Sikor & Lund, 2009). Third, it informs theorization about state formation in frontier areas (Anthias, 2018; Ballvé, 2020; Li, 2014). Next, I will explain the context in which I apply this conceptual approach to Indigenous state formation, which will help to clarify these contributions.

The Miskitu are a binational people, separated by the Wangki River that serves as the border between Honduras and Nicaragua.⁵ In the Honduran Moskitia, the contemporary struggle for land rights began in the late 1980s during the transition from Cold War-era repression to state

⁵ The Wangki River is also known as Coco or Segovia River. It is the longest river in Central America. It starts in the highlands of Nueva Segovia in Nicaragua and empties in Cape Gracias a Dios in the Caribbean Sea.

multiculturalism. The armed rebellion launched by the Miskitu in Nicaragua against the Sandinista regime in the 1980s inspired the Miskitu in Honduras to politicize their ethnic identity (Pérez Chiriboga, 2002). Toward the end of the decade, the Honduran Miskitu began to mobilize to obtain land titles to protect their lands against the advancement of the agrarian frontier. In the 1990s and 2000s, MASTA engaged in participatory mapping projects to document their land claims and tried to occupy the narrow spaces of participation made available by the turn to multicultural reforms (Bryan, 2011; Hale, 2005, 2011; Herlihy & Leake, 1997; Mollett, 2013).

The Honduran government granted legal recognition to the Miskitu lands using a titling modality known as inter-communal property titles. For nearly two decades, MASTA fought to secure property titles that included the functional habitat that Miskitu communities depended on for their livelihoods. The government's original proposal was to title each community separately, as they had done with other Indigenous and Afro-Indigenous communities in the country. However, this titling modality would have resulted in conflicts between communities that shared resources and the exclusion of common areas that extended beyond the perimeter of the settled areas. MASTA used the maps they prepared with collaborators to argue for a different titling modality for Moskitia that recognized blocs of communities as territorial units. They based their demands for territorial claims on the 1859 Treaty of Wykes-Cruz and the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization.⁶ The World Bank-funded Land Administration Program provided the institutional space for the negotiation of this new titling modality. The Honduran authorities adapted elements from the 1992 Agrarian Modernization Law, the 2004 Property Law, and the 2007 Forestry Law to assemble a new titling modality. The

⁶ Honduras and Great Britain signed the Treaty of Wykes-Cruz in 1859 to mark the end of the British Protectorate on the Mosquito Shore. In this treaty, the Honduran government promised to recognize the possession of the Miskitu people to the lands that they occupied.

inter-communal property title recognized the communities in the bloc as the landowners in *dominio pleno* [fee simple], with the territorial council acting as their legal representative. The communities received a fee simple title, but the title prohibited any alienation, subdivision, or mortgaging of the land. The twelve territorial councils were awarded the inter-communal property titles between 2012 and 2016. An area shared by three territorial councils was recognized in a separate title. Although MASTA was not listed as the landowner in the inter-communal property titles, the organization performed the role of central coordinator overseeing the twelve territorial councils.

This research explores Indigenous state formation in the context of the contested meanings of the inter-communal property titles. For MASTA, the inter-communal property titles represent the territorial basis for consolidating a project of Indigenous autonomy. I claim that MASTA views the inter-communal property titles as not only recognizing fee simple domain to the land but also granting the right for these spaces to be governed as special territorial jurisdictions. However, the Honduran government does not readily accept this expanded interpretation of the inter-communal property titles. For the Honduran government, the lands, resources, and population centers inside the inter-communal property titles continue to be under the jurisdiction of domestic law and state institutions. MASTA and the Honduran government continue to negotiate the meaning of the inter-communal property titles, with foreign donors often playing the role of brokers in this relationship.

I argue that these negotiations before, during, and after titling have led to a structuration of political practice that I call the inter-communal property regime. In this regime, the ability of MASTA and the Honduran government to exercise authority on the territory is bounded to each other. MASTA's ambition of having the territorial councils be recognized as jurisdictions relies

on the state recognizing them as such. Meanwhile, the Honduran government cannot ignore that the inter-communal property titles have created the need for new institutional procedures.

Foreign donors play a significant role in shaping the boundaries of the inter-communal property regime because they finance many of the programs that contribute to the operations of MASTA, territorial councils, and local governments.

The inter-communal property regime needs to survive the trial by fire that is resolving the question of third-party claims inside the territories. *Saneamiento* [titling clearing] is a legal concept existing in many civil law countries that involves solving the irregularities in a property title to perfect the right and protect it from contestation in the future. During the titling negotiations, MASTA agreed to prioritize the titling and conduct the saneamiento afterward. The saneamiento of the inter-communal property titles requires resolving the situation of the Ladino colonists who illegally occupy the land. The 2004 Property Law mandates that those third parties without a valid title would need to vacate the land, but it also allows for the negotiation of lease agreements with the communities. MASTA's official position is that third-party colonists should be evicted in order to restitute those lands back to Miskitu communities. This process of restitution would involve evicting hundreds of colonists that have grabbed large swathes of land and forest area. Some of them are involved in drug trafficking and are armed. For this reason, MASTA demands that the Honduran government fulfills its obligation to guarantee their property rights by bringing the state's security forces to carry out the saneamiento. However, the Honduran government has evaded acting on saneamiento. After protest from MASTA, the Honduran government created a special commission to oversee the saneamiento process in 2019. To date, no evictions have been carried out. Meanwhile, powerful Ladino colonists have

meddled with Miskitu politics in an attempt to coopt leaders and seek a favorable position in any future process of saneamiento.

In the rest of the introduction, I will situate the inter-communal property regime in the context of Indigenous state formation, on the one hand, and the Honduran nation-state, on the other. Then, I will explain the research methods employed to collect and analyze data as well as address issues of positionality. I will conclude with a roadmap for the rest of the dissertation.

1.2 INDIGENOUS STATE FORMATION

A discussion on Indigenous sovereignty is central to an understanding of Indigenous state formation. Indigenous sovereignty stands for the right that Indigenous peoples have for self-government on the basis of their ancestral occupation of the lands and territories colonized by settlers. Nonetheless, the invocation of Indigenous sovereignty to analyze the case of the Miskitu people in Honduras requires more conceptual grounding before we apply it. MASTA prefers to use the term autonomy to describe its efforts in pursuing self-determination. According to legal scholar Karen Engle (2010), the use of autonomy instead of sovereignty has in part to do with different colonial legacies in Latin America and North America. In the U.S., the treaty-making process with the British and the French, and later with the U.S. government, cemented sovereignty as the basis for making claims on self-determination. In the U.S., Indian nations engaged in a government-to-government relationship with the federal government.⁷ The status as “domestic dependent nations” conferred Indian nations with the political right to engage in various state functions, like deciding on taxation and gambling.

⁷ This status has a legal basis on three Supreme Court decisions authored by Chief Justice John Marshall during the 1820s and 1830s. Marshall described Indian nations as “domestic dependent nations” in virtue of their status as sovereign powers when they entered into treaties with Britain and later the United States. Although numerous subsequent legal decisions and government policies have tried to limit the reach of sovereignty, the principle itself has remained unquestioned.

In Latin America, Engle (2010) explains that the concept of autonomy evolved from the laws that the Spanish colonial authorities employed to administer Indigenous towns. In the contemporary era, the recognition of cultural rights, and to a lesser extent the devolution of some state-like functions, has occurred within a context of state-sponsored multiculturalism rather than the negotiation of treaty rights like in the U.S. and Canada. Only a few countries recognize the right to self-government in their constitutions (Roldán Ortega, 2004). In the absence of constitutional provisions, many Indigenous organizations have had to rely on international legal instruments like Convention 169 to assert their claim to self-determination. Convention 169 has provided the anchor for organizations like MASTA to claim land rights, but the convention itself does not describe Indigenous political societies as sovereign. The diffusion of decolonization frameworks from North America to Latin America and the 2007 *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* have contributed to more Indigenous activists using the terms sovereignty and autonomy interchangeably (Engle, 2010).

For these historical reasons, it may seem a misfit to describe the struggles for self-determination in the Honduran Moskitia in the language of sovereignty and state formation. I can think of two reasons why this might not be the best approach. First, as mentioned, the Honduran state does not recognize the sovereignty of Indigenous nations, and therefore, it does not engage with them in government-to-government relations. Consequently, it might be more appropriate to use a different set of theories and conceptual tools, like social movement theory, to analyze Indigenous organizations like MASTA. Second, the conceptual framework of state formation is inherently critical of any act aimed at legitimizing authority. Therefore, in applying this conceptual lens to study the practices in which MASTA is involved, I risk exposing the

organization to a critical gaze from the outside that could go against how they wish to be represented.

Despite this hesitation, I propose that state formation and sovereignty offer precisely the kind of conceptualization needed to understand the political formation occurring in places like the Honduran Moskitia. First, MASTA is a well-coordinated federation that represents an Indigenous nation where references to the Mosquito Kingdom still occur in everyday political discourse. Therefore, I suggest that under these conditions, sovereignty is an appropriate term to describe MASTA's political ambitions for autonomy. Although MASTA and the territorial councils are considered civil society organizations under Honduran law, the long-term goal is for them to be recognized as the government of Moskitia. Second, the offset of displaying state-like characteristics is that MASTA has become another form of authority that operates at a distance from villages. This formalization of authority has opened MASTA to some criticism among the Miskitu. I suggest that it is productive to analyze the tensions that emerge from the formalization of customary rule using a conceptual lens that explicitly recognizes that claims on authority always involve acts of legitimation. In other words, applying the critical gaze of state formation to Indigenous organizations that have reached a certain stature of formalization is a way to escape an essentialist trap that might present Indigenous sovereignty as *sui generis*.

For this reason, I find it useful to refer to debates over sovereignty that developed in North America as a point of departure for positioning the challenge of Indigenous state formation. Next, I will highlight some of the key debates and how they are useful to this analysis.

i) Sovereignty

The question of what it means to engage with the concept of sovereignty to assert the self-determination of Indigenous nations is one that has occupied a central place in debates

among Indigenous scholars in North America. One of the crucial concerns has been to understand the conceptual nature of sovereignty: Does sovereignty operate as an empty sign that could be ascribed with whatever meaning the political community provides it with, or does the concept already entail particular cultural ideals that constitute its form? The answer to this question matters significantly for situating agency in Indigenous state formation: Do Indigenous nations have the capacity to mold institutions like property to fit their political objectives, or are they circumscribed by the cultural ideals embedded in these institutions? To outline a way to approach these questions, I turn to the writings of Vine Deloria Jr. (Sioux) and Taiaiake Alfred (Mohawk), two Indigenous scholars who have offered different approaches to the question of sovereignty and nationalism.

Deloria (1979) argued that Indigenous peoples ought to distance themselves from the concept of sovereignty as practiced by the settler-colonial state. According to Deloria, settler-colonial states like the U.S. conceptualized sovereignty as the legitimization of centralized authority. This social construct was the result of a Eurocentric perspective that evolved from the time when Europeans thought that the monarch had a divine right to rule. Deloria argued that this conception of governance was inappropriate for Indigenous nations because it was based on the delegation of power rather than on the proper exercise of it. Deloria believed that Indigenous nations needed to exercise their sovereignty in a way that was culturally appropriated. For this reason, he used the term “tribal sovereignty” to differentiate it from Euro-American sovereignty. According to Deloria, tribal sovereignty could be constructed by deploying cultural values to re-orient the bureaucratic apparatus that had developed to manage the reservations, such as tribal courts, education, and welfare.

Alfred (2009) agreed with Deloria that Indigenous peoples needed to exercise authority in a way that was culturally appropriate, but he contended that sovereignty was an inappropriate concept to express Indigenous self-determination. Alfred argued that the concept of sovereignty could not be separated from its Eurocentrism—with its roots in singular authority, Western domination, and imperialism—and that Indigenous peoples were better off by removing this term from their political imaginary. Alfred offered the alternative of recovering traditional governance based on ancestral knowledge and the recuperation of historical traditions. For him, the extirpation of sovereignty was part of the broader process that Indigenous nations had to go through to eliminate the influence of settler-colonialism and be able to return to an authentic self. Alfred believed that only a conscious embrace of traditional values could set Indigenous nations on the right path for seeking justice and respect.

Deloria and Alfred represent two different perspectives on the potential for Indigenous state formation. The writings of both authors suggest that an Indigenous government should be an expression of traditional culture and that individuals leading tribal governments should be conscious of exercising their authority accordingly. However, their philosophies lead to divergent interpretations of how such an Indigenous government might materialize. Deloria's concept of tribal sovereignty suggests that Indigenous peoples could reconstruct an Indigenous government within the interstices of the bureaucratic apparatus imposed by the settler-colonial state. In contrast, Alfred's refusal of sovereignty suggests that an Indigenous government could only be tenable by existing outside this apparatus.

Both of these culturally-based positions generate some challenges for how we might approach the question of Indigenous state formation. Deloria's model of tribal sovereignty implies that Indigenous nations could develop government programs based on Indigenous

traditions. However, using tradition as criteria to characterize Indigenous governments involves the risk of making them subject to externally imposed judgments of authenticity (Cattelino, 2010). The experience with multiculturalism has shown that subjecting community practices to performances of authenticity in order to achieve legal recognition tends to reinforce the hold of the settler-colonial state on Indigenous societies (Hale, 2005; Povinelli, 2002). Alfred's refusal of sovereignty introduces an even greater provocation for state formation. According to Scott Lyons (Ojibwe) (2010), Alfred's condition of refusal implies that Indigenous peoples could be in the business of nation-building without having to enter into the game of mutual recognition with the settler-colonial state. However, Alfred's attempt to place Indigenous nations outside the realm of Euro-American sovereignty seems to reinforce the notion of shared subjectivity that is fundamental to Hobbesian thinking on sovereignty (Shaw, 2008), raising questions as to whether Alfred is proposing something different from what Deloria had implied with tribal sovereignty (Nadasdy, 2017). Therefore, the act of refusal advocated by Alfred could not exist outside the dynamic of mutual recognition (Simpson, 2014).

The critique of Deloria's and Alfred's turn to tradition suggests that engaging with sovereignty is critical to understand the process of state formation among Indigenous nations. But the embrace of sovereignty leads right into the paradox of mutual recognition: to be sovereign, one must be recognized by others as such. Paul Nadasdy (2017) argues that the efforts to address the paradox of mutual recognition is what has driven the process of state formation among Indigenous nations. Like Deloria and Alfred, Nadasdy argues that the concept of sovereignty is embedded in Eurocentric cultural values. As a result, to make their sovereignty recognizable to the settler-colonial state implies taking on what Nadasdy calls the cultural entailments of sovereignty. For example, the territory has to be conceived as a non-overlapping

jurisdiction with a central authority, an idea that might completely foreign to the way that many Indigenous nations conceive their territoriality (Nadasdy, 2003). These entailments are not only imposed from above, but they act as a form of disciplinary power that creates the desire among Indigenous peoples to present their polities in the shape of these Eurocentric values—adopting these foreign values to protect ones’ own inevitable leads to some transformation in cultural traditions (Nadasdy, 2003, 2017). However, this transformation does not imply erasure of agency but rather the recognition that this agency is exercised in a dynamic process.

In recognition of this dynamism, Lyons (2010) embraces the notion of “Indigenous cosmopolitanism” to highlight the possibilities for constructing Indigenous citizenship within settler-colonial societies. Lyons’s solution is not to reject so-called Eurocentric institutions but to indigenize them by embracing their modernity. To be Indigenous is to be modern, and such a project of modernity requires an active construction. Lyons describes this project as “realistic nationalism,” which in the case of North America, started in the act of treaty-making between Indigenous nations and the settler-colonial state. Although Lyons’ position might seem to resemble Deloria’s earlier call for tribal sovereignty, Lyons believes that Indigenous peoples would be better off embracing a constructivist attitude rather than retreating to some primordial notion of culture. In particular, Lyons advocates for conscious manufacturing of citizenship, meaning that Indigenous governments should elaborate criteria about the kind of citizens that they want to produce. This means entering into the game of the universal language of nationalism, where *members* are turned into *citizens* with rights, duties, and responsibilities. Erazo (2013) follows Lyons’ call to study the formation of Indigenous citizenship after the titling of the Rukullakta territory in Ecuador. Part of her contribution included using Barbara

Cruikshank's concept of "technologies of citizenship" (2019) to understand the practices that Indigenous leaders engaged in to foster governmentalities that were distinctively Indigenous.

Attending to the technologies of citizenship do not preclude Indigenous peoples from exercising refusal as an expression of their citizenship. For example, this act of refusal is a feature that has characterized Mohawk citizenship. Audra Simpson (Mohawk) provides a perspective that engages with Alfred's concept of refusal but within what she called "nested sovereignty," one that is "within and apart from settler governance" (Simpson, 2014, p. 11). Simpson shares Alfred's belief that the Mohawk assert their self-determination by refusing the terms imposed on them by the settler state, but she does not think that this act is beyond the game of sovereignty. Instead, Simpson believes it is important to recognize such refusal in terms of sovereignty because of the way "it can signal different processes and intents to others in ways that are understandable" (Simpson, 2014, p. 105). Simpson is able to reconcile sovereignty with refusal in a way that Alfred cannot by contending that these two concepts operate at different registers. She conceives sovereignty as an exercise of power that is external to being, whereas refusal emerges from the being that interacts with and constantly interrupts this exercise of power. Simpson identifies this interruption in how the Kahnawa:ke Mohawk refuse the citizenship of the settler-colonial state, which in everyday life is expressed in their refusal to use passports, vote, or have legible rules about membership. This refusal is an everyday practice of "self-consciousness and political assertion" (Simpson, 2014, p. 107).

The cosmopolitanism that would characterize practices of Indigenous state formation, as suggested by Lyons, calls paying attention to the structural conditions upon which claims on citizenship are constructed and enacted. I find the concept of moral economy particularly useful to understand how different Indigenous societies enact their citizenship. Thompson used the term

‘moral economy’ to refer to the beliefs about economic rights that served in guiding collective action. In his own work, Thompson (1993) used the lens of moral economies to explain the emergence of food riots in eighteenth-century England as resulting from a set of beliefs and expectations about the proper order and distribution of resources based on the history in the pre-capitalist mode of production. Drawing on Thompson’s insights, James Scott (1976) redefined moral economy as the subsistence ethic of peasant societies that informed collective behavior toward conditions of oppression. Since then, the concept of moral economy has been expanded to guide the interpretation of political mobilization based on cultural logics that extend beyond a subsistence ethic (Wolford, 2005) and that are informed by transnational movements (Edelman, 2005). Following on this tradition, this research contributes to new perspectives that “integrate a deeper appreciation of social class and diversity of motivations within Indigenous communities” (Curley, 2019, p. 76). We need to ask how, when, and why some Indigenous peoples decide to cooperate with or refuse the settler-colonial state by examining the material and discursive elements that make life on the land.

ii) Miskitu Citizenship and Indigenous State Formation

In this dissertation, I make three claims on Indigenous state formation that are drawn from ethnographic research in Moskitia. First, the capacity of the settler-colonial state to exercise its own sovereignty matters for how Indigenous peoples experience state formation. Not all forms of settler-colonialism are created equal. The most important difference I find in comparing the experience of the Miskitu in Honduras with that of Indigenous peoples across the Americas is not the presence or absence of laws defining Indigenous sovereignty but rather the weak capacity that the Honduran state has to enforce its own project of state-building in Moskitia. This weak capacity comes from the country’s peripheral position in the dynamics of global capitalism. The

Miskitu have experienced their own process of state formation from this condition of marginality of the Honduran state. This condition of marginality is more clearly reflected in how the Miskitu have had to construct their political institutions in spaces heavily influenced by foreign interests. From British imperialism to the contemporary development apparatus, the Miskitu have had to assert their sovereignty by using or contesting these external influences. However, the Honduran state's marginal condition does not mean that the process of settler-colonialism has been less violent, but rather that it has been less assertive. This marginal condition ultimately contributed to the de facto autonomy that the region experienced until recently and which facilitated the emergence of the inter-communal property regime.

Second, the enactment of sovereignty requires attention to moral economies that vary across scales. The region of Moskitia is better understood as a collection of localities, each with its own socio-ecological configuration that leads to variations in the Miskitu moral economy. But they do share one feature in common that is central to the construction of a Miskitu moral economy: the importance that the swidden agricultural system has to maintain Miskitu social reproduction. MASTA was able to consolidate its status as the Miskitu federation once the leaders vowed to protect the traditional land tenure system against Ladino colonization. This vow to protect Miskitu land rights led to the emergence of the inter-communal property regime, but I argue that it is not enough to accomplish MASTA's larger ambition of transforming the territorial councils into state-like jurisdictions. The diversity of land enclosures dynamics and the different configurations of authority figures in the communities shape sub-regional moral economies. The local population assesses the stature of territorial councils as state-like jurisdictions based on these sub-regional moral economies. It should not be assumed that the Miskitu would necessarily act as an imagined community under the leadership of MASTA and

the territorial councils. The process to construct distinctive governmentality to exercise the authority of the territorial councils is still ongoing and would require attention to the different configurations of sub-regional moral economies.

Third, the technologies of citizenship are embedded within and shaped by infrastructure. The state of physical infrastructure significantly shapes the possibilities for the formation of political society. This infrastructural constraint might be a constant in all cases of democracy building, but it is particularly pressing for Indigenous peoples because they tend to live in more remote places. Poor connectivity increases the cost of logistics to organize the meetings that are supposed to be the conduit for the formation of citizenship. This constraint on the mobilization of technologies of citizenship cannot be taken for granted in places with poor infrastructure like the region of Moskitia. Furthermore, I also use infrastructure as a metaphor to refer to the conventions and standards that structure collaborations. MASTA and the territorial councils suffer the consequences of having to mobilize Miskitu citizenship through the organizational infrastructures imposed by the Honduran state and foreign donors. This neo-colonial imposition, coupled with poor physical infrastructure, creates a condition of chronic underfunding that external actors exploit to interfere in MASTA's internal governance. However, the potential for the construction of Miskitu citizenship is also embedded within these infrastructures. The Miskitu are actively pushing from within to make both physical and organizational infrastructures more transparent. Moreover, formal structures imposed by external actors are only part of the broader organic infrastructures that have developed around the inter-communal property regime. The emergence of territorial governance as a concept to guide the construction of Miskitu citizenship within structures of dependence is an example of the potential for

Indigenous state formation within these relations of infrastructural inequality. Next, I will provide background on Moskitia and Honduras to add context to these claims.

1.3 MOSKITIA AND THE HONDURAN NATION-STATE

Working in Moskitia poses an interesting challenge to how we conceptualize the region with regard to the Honduran nation-state. The focus on Indigenous state formation throughout this project emphasizes how the Miskitu people try to construct a differentiated regime of sovereignty in Moskitia. However, the practices and events that unfold in the region are always in relation to the broader dynamics occurring at the scale of the Honduran nation-state. In this section, I address three elements that shape the relational space that Moskitia occupies in Honduras. The first two elements are historical. One relates to how the Honduran state has construed its policy toward Moskitia in response to external threats; the other accounts for how the region has functioned historically as a frontier of opportunity for marginalized populations and capital. For the third element, I trace ethnographically the experience of Moskitia with regard to the present crisis marked by the 2009 coup.

i) State Policy in Moskitia in Responses to External Threats

The region of Moskitia has constituted a borderland for the Honduran state both materially and symbolically. Some of the critical interventions in the region by the Honduran state have been in response to foreign interventions. When Honduras became an independent country in 1838, after the dissolution of the Central American Federation, about a third of the territory it claimed was also contended by the British-supported Mosquito Kingdom. The Mosquito King was the ruler of a confederation of Amerindian and African-descend peoples located on the Caribbean coast of Honduras and Nicaragua in an area known as the Mosquito Shore (Mendiola, 2018). The origins of Mosquito kingship date to the 1630s when a Miskitu

chief was crowned as king in England, beginning a line of succession that was only interrupted after the dissolution of the Mosquito Reserve in 1894 (Olien, 1983). The British were interested in the Mosquito Shore as a strategic location to extract natural resources like mahogany and sarsaparilla root and challenge the Spanish in the Caribbean (Floyd, 1967; Naylor, 1989). These interests led to the establishment of a British superintendency for the Mosquito Shore (1749-86), a British protectorate (1837-60), and the Mosquito Reserve (1860-94).

The high level of British influence on the affairs of the Mosquito Shore has raised questions about the autonomy of Miskitu political institutions. Nineteenth and early twentieth-century accounts emphasized the dependency of the Miskitu institutions on the British (Mendiola, 2018). A turn to ethnohistory began a more serious discussion about the cultural significance of Mosquito Kingdom to the locals. Mary Helms (1969) argued that the institution of the Mosquito Kingdom represented an effort to adapt to the changes occurring in the region but that the king himself had no real control over the native population. However, other scholars contended that the Mosquito King had authority that exceeded symbolic functions (Dennis & Olien, 1984; Olien, 1983). More recent scholarship has further the argument in favor of the autonomy of Mosquito Kingdom by showing that Europeans recognized Miskitu territorial control over the region in their maps (Offen, 2007). Furthermore, new research has emerged from previously unexplored archival resources that has provided more details on the alliances that sustained and the warfare that plagued the confederation (Gabbert, 2016; Mendiola, 2019; Thornton, 2017; Williams, 2013). In sum, the Mosquito King may not have been the British puppet depicted by earlier sources, but he had to negotiate his authority with the other chiefs.

The Mosquito Shore was one of the most racially diverse societies in the Americas during the colonial period. Before European contact, the Atlantic coast of Central America was

inhabited by an Amerindian population that spoke Misumalpan languages descended from the South American-based Macro-Chibchan (Craig & Hale, 1992). Miskitu ethnogenesis takes place in the colonial encounter of the Amerindian population with European and African peoples (Newson, 1986). Trade with European pirates, buccaneers, and settlers facilitated access to weapons that enabled the proto-Miskitu tribes located around Cape Gracias a Dios to subjugate other native groups and achieve greater territorial control (Offen, 2002). The intermix of Amerindian and African-descend populations profoundly shaped the socio-political formation of the Mosquito Shore. It is generally assumed that the integration between the two began after a ship carrying slaves that were bound to the English colony of Providence shipwrecked on the Mosquito Shore in 1641 (Pineda, 2006).⁸ Over time, two geographically distinct groups emerged, the Sambo Miskitu and the Tawira Miskitu (Offen, 2002). Tensions between these two groups congealed in the alliances and wars that shaped the confederation of the Mosquito Kingdom (Mendiola, 2019; Thornton, 2017). The slave-raiding expeditions of the Miskitu from Yucatan to Panama contributed to the racial diversity of the coast (Offen, 2015).

The officials of the newly established Honduran Republic interpreted the Mosquito Shore from the perspective of the previous Spanish colonial administrators. The Spanish referred to the Mosquito Shore as the province of Taguzgalpa where hordes of *indios salvajes* [wild Indians] roamed the land (Barahona, 2009).⁹ The category of wild Indians differentiated the inhabitants of Taguzgalpa from the Indigenous population in central and western Honduras that were part of

⁸ More recent scholarship suggests that the English settlers from Providence Island brought the African slaves to the coast after raiding a Portuguese ship (Offen, 2015).

⁹ The descendants of these “wild” inhabitants are the present-day Miskitu, Tolupanes, Pech, Tawahka, and Garifuna.

the systems of *encomienda* and *repartimiento* established by the Spanish.¹⁰ The divide between the Indigenous societies inside and outside the colonial realm followed along the borderlines of the Mesoamerica region in the pre-Columbian period (Lara Pinto & Hasemann, 1993). The hierarchical structure of the agricultural societies in Mesoamerica facilitated Spanish control compared to the egalitarian societies of nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes in low-land tropical areas (Newson, 1986).

The Honduran authorities established different policies to manage the Indigenous population based on the categories inherited from the colonial period. The Indigenous population in central and western Honduras lived in semi-autonomous *pueblos de indios* [Indian towns], where they had some local control over their lands and affairs. After independence, the republican authorities stripped the legal status that classified the Indigenous population as a separate caste, which included the dissolution of this territorial autonomy.¹¹ The Indigenous population that lived in the areas that the Spanish did not have control over were to be subject to a civilization program that included the establishment of settlements and evangelization (Barahona, 2009). The new Honduran republic considered Indigenous peoples to be equal citizens, but it denied them their rights in practice.¹²

¹⁰ The *encomienda* was a grant that awarded the grantee the right to extract labor and tribute from the local Indigenous population in exchange for protection and Christian instruction. Due to the multiple cases of abuses, the *encomienda* system was phased out and the Spanish crown administrators took more direct responsibility for the allocation of labor. The *repartimiento* was a form of tributary system imposed by the crown that established quotas on Indigenous villages to provide labor for a specific period of time and fixed wages.

¹¹ During the nineteenth and twentieth century, the identities of the Lencas and Maya-Chorti were slowly assimilated into that of a mestizo peasant identity. However, these groups reclaimed their Indigenous identity in the second half of the twentieth century (Barahona, 2009; Metz, 2010). Furthermore, the process of cultural assimilation did not mean that there was not Indigenous resistance in central and western Honduras. The most important examples of this type of resistance include the rebellion of Curarén that led to the brief creation of the Indigenous department of La Victoria and the rebellion of Texíguat.

¹² Citizenship rights were conditional on literacy tests and property ownership during most of the nineteenth century (Barahona, 2009).

The enactment of a civilization program toward the Miskitu was part of the Honduran government's efforts to counter British domination over the Mosquito Shore. Without the capacity to confront Great Britain militarily, the Honduran authorities opted for a combination of diplomacy and trade tactics to assert sovereignty, as detailed in chapter 2. In the 1850s, British control dwindled with the rise of U.S. hegemony in Central America. The U.S. sought to curtail British influence in Central America to ensure the neutrality of an inter-oceanic route. In this geopolitical context, Great Britain resolved to end the protectorate in the Mosquito Shore, signing treaties with Honduras in 1859 and Nicaragua in 1860.¹³ After the British left, the Honduran government failed to put into action its civilization program. The former Mosquito Shore continued to enjoy *de facto* autonomy by virtue of its remoteness from the Honduran government and large population centers.

The Moskitia region resurfaced as a national priority as part of efforts to clarify the border between Honduras and Nicaragua. When the two countries declared independence from the Central American Federation, they agreed to set the border based on those of the former colonial jurisdictions, known as intendancies. However, they disagreed over the location of the border in the former province of Taguzgalpa. The Honduran government claimed rights over the province based on the previous jurisdiction by the bishop in Comayagua. In 1894, both countries signed the Treaty of Bonilla-Gomez to delimit the border, but they failed to clarify the stretch between the village of Portillo Teotecacinte in Nicaragua to the Atlantic. In 1906, the arbitration by the Spanish King Alfonso XIII ratified the Wangki River as the natural border, but the Nicaraguan government rejected the verdict and continued to claim a fringe of land north of the

¹³ The British negotiated with the Nicaraguans to allow the Mosquito King to continue ruling over the Mosquito Reserve as an autonomous region. The Mosquito Reserve was dissolved in 1894 when Nicaraguan troops invaded and claimed the territory as part of Nicaragua.

border up to the Kruta River.¹⁴ The tensions rose again in 1937 when Nicaragua issued a postage stamp showing a country map that included the disputed territory. Both countries experienced a short period of military confrontation in February of 1957 in what became known as the Mocoron War.¹⁵ On the eve of the war, the military junta that ruled over Honduras declared the department of Gracias a Dios. The creation of this department in 1957 set the conditions for expanding the Honduran state in the region with the assignment of a governor and the creation of two municipalities. The military began the construction of the first roads in Moskitia to patrol the border with Nicaragua.

In the 1980s, the Honduran state reinforced its presence in Moskitia as a result of the Contra rebellion against the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua. Moskitia became involved in the Cold War tactics of the U.S. government to fight the spread of communism. Under the directive of the U.S., the Honduran government assisted the Contra rebellion and allowed its members to operate in the country. Moskitia became the site of three military bases for the Miskitu faction that joined the Contra rebellion. The Honduran government also moved the fifth military garrison of infantry to a permanent location in Dursuna, close to the border. Approximately 19,000 refugees from Nicaragua settled in Moskitia between 1981 and 1987 (Pérez Chiriboga, 2002). The militarization and refugee influx significantly impacted the region and marked the start of a new phase of integration. More foreign donors began to arrive in Moskitia, setting the stage for a new relation of dependency with the local population. The road network was expanded, and a hospital was built in Puerto Lempira. During this period, the Honduran government began to repress MASTA out of fear that the Honduran Miskitu would want to make

¹⁴ The Wangki River is also known as the Segovia or Coco.

¹⁵ The International Court of Justice issued a sentence in 1960 that confirmed the Honduran claim over the natural border.

claims on Indigenous autonomy, as occurred in Nicaragua. The impact of the Cold War period on Indigenous mobilization is explored in chapter 3.

Presently, the war on drugs has significantly shaped the way that the Honduran government operates in the region. Cocaine from South America has been smuggled through Honduras since at least the late 1970s (Bunck & Fowler, 2012). However, the smuggling intensified in the mid-2000s after a crackdown of cartels in Mexico and more interdictions by the U.S. Navy in the Caribbean forced traffickers to find alternative routes (UNODC, 2012). Located on a remote area of the Atlantic coastline, Moskitia was one of the regions most affected by the rise in cocaine shipments arriving by air and sea (McSweeney et al., 2018). The U.S. government intensified policies to counteract the rise of drug cartels in Honduras, including Moskitia. This intensification included the deployment of a military-trained commando of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration to work as a Foreign-Deployed Advisory and Support Team (FAST). In 2011, a joint operation by the DEA and the Honduran police resulted in the killing of four bystanders after the interception of a drug cargo had gone awry (Forde, 2017). The Miskitu population have continued to experience the violence of militarized occupation justified on the war on drug.

ii) Moskitia as a Frontier of Opportunity

During the colonial period, the Mosquito Shore was a “zone of refuge” (Scott, 2009) for Indigenous and Afro-Indigenous peoples. Indigenous populations from central and western Honduras escaped to the area to flee the forced labor requirements of the repartimiento system (Barahona, 2009). The Garifuna people also found on the isolated north coast the space to settle after the British exiled them from their homeland. The Garifuna are a mix of Amerindian and African ancestry descending from the Black Caribs from the island of San Vincent. In 1797, the

British transported to the island of Roatan a faction of the Black Carib population to expel them in retribution for their participation in a rebellion. The Garifuna that survived the journey requested the Spanish authorities to allow them to settle on the mainland in exchange for their military services. They initially settled on the area around the Trujillo port, and from there, established communities from Belize to Nicaragua. The Miskitu co-existed with these other Indigenous and Afro-Indigenous communities. Sometimes there was tension as a result of Miskitu involvement with slave raids (Offen, 2015). In the case of the Garifuna, records indicate that the Mosquito King gave them permission to settle on the area around the Black River and the Patuca River (Young et al., 1847).

After the British left, the Honduran government desired large-scale colonization programs in the region, but it ultimately failed to attract migration. Initially, the government was mainly interested in attracting European migrants, following some of the same tactics that British entrepreneurs had used to lure settlers, but they did not come (Naylor, 1989). Migration of Hondurans from mestizo descendent, known as Ladino, was also low up to the mid-twentieth century. The results from the first election to elect a representative to Congress showed that there were only 350 registered voters in 1874 (Sinclair, 1874). These voters were in villages that had been established between the Aguan River and the Black River, the area of Moskitia closer to the Trujillo port. More migrants arrived in the 1930s when foreigners expanded banana plantations in the river areas. They came to work in the banana fields, but some stayed after the companies left in the 1940s. Another wave of early migrants arrived in the 1930s, escaping the violence of the Sandino revolt in Nicaragua.

Low migration to Moskitia reflected the conditions of land abundance in Honduras before World War II. Before the 1950s, Honduras had the lowest levels of land inequality among

countries in Central America (Ruhl, 1984). Land was plenty available during the colonial period, and the liberal reforms of the late nineteenth century did not enclose communal lands for coffee production in the same way that occurred in Guatemala and El Salvador (Mahoney, 2001; Paige, 1997). The most important change in the land tenure structure was the rise of banana plantations in the early twentieth century. However, most of this cultivation left traditional land holdings undisturbed because it occurred on the north coast, a region that had low population density and where endemic malaria and yellow fever had prevented agricultural expansion (Soluri, 2005).

Migratory pressures to Moskitia began to increase as a result of structural changes that worsened land inequality in other parts of the country in the postwar period. The expansion of commercial agriculture and rapid population growth made the landholding patterns progressively more unequal (Durham, 1979). It is estimated that 26 percent of the rural population was landless by 1965 (CEPAL, 1973). The main culprit was the expansion of cattle ranching and cotton production as part of efforts to diversify exports away from bananas and take advantage of favorable conditions in international markets for primary products in the postwar period (Ruhl, 1984). The establishment of large-scale land holdings for cattle and cotton production, with support from foreign aid agencies, drove a process of land enclosures that reduced the amount of land available for small-scale agriculture. Susan Stonich (1993) documented how small-scale farmers in the south, one of the regions worst affected by these enclosures, tried to cope by cultivating steep, agriculturally marginal lands, which led to deforestation and soil erosion that started a downward spiral. Farmers from this region were among the first to organize campaigns to colonize the frontier areas of Olancho and El Paraiso, which bordered the region of Honduras, as part of land reform.

Peasant mobilization against rising land inequality led to land reform that relied on redistributing land on frontier areas. The two main peasant organizations—Honduran National Association of Peasants (Asociación Nacional de Campesinos de Honduras, ANACH) and the National Union of Peasants (Unión Nacional de Campesinos, UNC)—emerged in the early 1960s inspired by the banana workers’ unions of the 1950s and the liberation theology of the Catholic Church (Posas, 2019). These organizations pushed the government to implement a land reform program. In 1962, The Honduran government passed the basic agrarian reform law and established the National Agrarian Institute (Instituto Nacional Agrario, INA), but land distribution was slow. Under the populist military regime of General Oswaldo Lopez Orellano (1974-75), a more comprehensive land reform law was passed that increased the land available for redistribution. By 1980, INA had redistributed 8 percent of farmland to about 12 percent of rural families, which amounted to 22 percent of landless farmers in the country (Ruhl, 1984). Most of the redistribution was in the form of colonization programs or the legalization of illegal occupations in frontier areas, which left most of the interests of the rural landowning class undisturbed. The largest of these colonization programs was in the Aguan River valley, where 31 percent of total land was redistributed (Edelman & León Araya, 2013). The Aguan River was the natural landmark that the Mosquito Kingdom claimed as the border with Honduras.

The shift to a neoliberal economic model in the 1990s accelerated migratory pressures to Moskitia by worsening the conditions of landlessness. President Rafael Callejas Romero (1990-94) instituted an aggressive program of structural adjustment reforms that re-oriented Honduras toward a neoliberal economic model. One of the main reforms was the approval in 1992 of the Law for the Development and Modernization of the Agricultural Sector. This law countered the objectives of the previous land reform program. The emphasis shifted from state-led land

redistribution to the promotion of land markets, and restrictions were removed for the commercialization of land previously redistributed to the agrarian cooperatives. It is estimated that more than half of the land redistributed part of the land reform was sold between 1990 and 1994, with the figure reaching over 70 percent in the Aguan Valley; many of these sales occurred under conditions of coercion (Edelman & León Araya, 2013). Many of the farmers that lost their lands in the Aguan Valley moved to the Sico-Paulaya Valley in eastern Moskitia, but they were only one of many that had moved to the region looking for land.¹⁶

Rising land inequality made small-scale farmers turn to Moskitia as an alternative for finding land. These migrants used rivers, old logger roads, and footpaths to access different areas in Moskitia (Herlihy, 1997). The main areas for migration were the Sico-Paulaya Valley, the mid-section of the Patuca River, and the mid-section of the Wangki River. To a certain extent, the Miskitu communities accepted those Ladino migrants that practiced low-intensity agriculture and cattle ranching and married into Miskitu households. However, the larger number of migrants made integration more difficult. As early as the late 1970s, Miskitu communities already expressed concern over migration (Ashby, 1977). The expeditions led by the non-governmental organization Moskitia Pawisa (MOPAWI) in 1987 and 1988 confirmed the rapid advance of the colonization front. The counter-reform in 1992 exacerbated the situation by effectively halting land distribution and producing a new wave of landless farmers.

Apart from small-scale farmers, large-scale investors have also been attracted to the development of the frontier in Moskitia. The Honduran state showed interest at various points to promote large-scale economic development in the region. This interest was especially strong

¹⁶ The Sico River is also known as the Tinto or Black River. The Sico and Paulaya Rivers merge before flowing to the Caribbean.

during the liberal reform period in the 1870s. However, economic activity in the region continued to be tied to boom and bust cycles of various commodities that left little infrastructure or permanent changes (Helms, 1971). The region did not have substantial mining reserves, like in neighboring Nicaragua, or oil and gas deposits to attract large-scale extractive industries (UK. Overseas Development Administration, 1981). In the 1970s, the government expressed a renewed interest in launching large-scale colonization of the region as part of a national planning exercise, but these plans never materialized. In the 1980s, the region became engulfed in the Contra conflict in Nicaragua, which shifted the priorities of the Honduran government. Furthermore, the conservation of natural resources emerged as another area of concern. In 1980, the government established a protected area on the watershed of the Platano River, which received official recognition as part of UNESCO's Man and Biosphere Program in 1982. In the 1990s, two of the state-endorsed projects that commanded more attention were the awarding of a major forest concession to the Canadian-based Stone Container and the construction of a hydroelectric project dam in the Patuca River. Both projects were met with fierce opposition by Indigenous communities, as detailed in chapter 3.

Currently, cattle ranching and African palm are the two economic activities with the greatest weight in how Moskitia is perceived as a frontier of investment. Both activities are linked to the development of agro-exports in the postwar period, and they have a substantial presence in the areas surrounding the department of Gracias a Dios. Olancho is one of the main cattle ranching areas in the country. The valleys in the region have provided pasture for cattle ranching operations since the colonial period. One of the largest meat processing plants for exports is based in the department in the city of Catacamas. On the coast, Colon is one of the

main areas for the production of African palm oil in the country.¹⁷ Production of oil palm increased rapidly in the 1990s and 2000s, and the country is set to become one of the largest producers in the world (Edelman & León Araya, 2013). Cattle ranching in Olancho and African palm in Colon have functioned as the parameter for how Moskitia should be developed under the dominant economic model. Between the two activities, cattle ranching has been more successful at expanding throughout the region than African palm. One of the reasons is that cattle ranching requires less fixed capital and has a faster return on investment than African palm, which better accommodates the riskier nature of these operations in Moskitia, where land transactions continue to be informal.

The impact of cattle ranching on frontier development in Moskitia worsened with the rise of drug trafficking activity in Honduras. Drug trafficking produced windfall profits that required laundering before they could enter the legal economic circuit, and in Central America, agro-exports provided the ideal conditions for these transactions (McSweeney et al., 2017). Cattle ranching in Moskitia became one of the main vehicles for individuals involved in the drug trade to launder proceeds while at the same time claim land and invest (McSweeney et al., 2018). The expansion of cattle ranching under these conditions has accelerated deforestation trends not only in Moskitia but also in other frontier regions of Central America with similar characteristics (Devine et al., 2020; Sesnie et al., 2017; Tellman et al., 2020).

While not all cattle ranching in Moskitia is associated with drug trafficking, the introduction of large-scale interests has complicated the perspective on what it means to be a homesteader in the region. For decades, Moskitia functioned as an escape valve for landless

¹⁷ A large share of the land previously owned by agrarian cooperatives on the Aguan Valley was purchased by Miguel Facusse, who was one of the wealthiest individuals in the country.

peasants from other parts of Honduras. With poverty and marginalization only getting worse in the country, farmers have continued to look at Moskitia as a place of opportunity. However, some of the homesteaders have been associated with drug trafficking networks. They collaborate in these networks by protecting the airstrips where drug cargos are received and maintaining cattle operations for absentee landlords. They do these activities while making their own land claims and engaging in small-scale dairy operations. This intricate connection among migration, agro-exports, and drug trafficking speaks to the particular conjuncture of the present crisis in Honduras.

iii) Moskitia and the Present Crisis in Honduras

Hurricane Mitch in 1998 marked a symbolic moment in the country's contemporary history. The hurricane resulted in more than 6,500 deaths, 29 percent of agricultural land affected, 70 percent crop losses, and incalculable damages to infrastructure (Alaniz, 2017). Moskitia experienced heavy losses in agricultural production and housing. Nearly 95 percent of cacao trees on the Patuca River were lost after the flooding. The reconstruction efforts post-Mitch provided an opportunity for shifting the country toward a more democratic form of governance. The Honduran public expressed more solidarity after the catastrophe (Alaniz, 2017). In 1999, civil society was invited to participate in the formulation of a new plan for the reconstruction and transformation of Honduras. The country prepared a Poverty Reduction Strategy to allocate the funds that would be condoned as part of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative. However, these efforts in the post-Mitch period became a "missed opportunity" to reduce economic inequality and make governance more democratic (Cuesta, 2007, p. 338). Instead of shifting direction toward a more pro-poor development strategy, the

administrations of Carlos Flores (1998-2002) and Ricardo Maduro (2006-06) continued with the neoliberal model.

The presidency of Manuel Zelaya (2006-09) raised hopes for a change in the country's trajectory. During his candidacy and his first years in government, Zelaya followed the traditional line of the Liberal Party, a center-left party, but he veered more toward the left. This switch point in Zelaya's politics was marked by his decision to join the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America agreement (ALBA) in 2008 (Altmann Borbón, 2009). Zelaya enjoyed high levels of popularity and repurposed some of the civil society consultation frameworks that had been established to manage the Poverty Reduction Strategy into his brand of participatory democracy, *Poder Ciudadano* [Citizenship Power] (Zaldívar Guzmán, 2015). However, this consultation framework did not offer specific spaces for Indigenous representation and did not provide a means to discuss the legalization of collective land rights in Moskitia (Galeana, 2020). Zelaya's political project was cut short when the Congress's president ordered the military to remove him from the presidential office on June 28, 2009. On that day, Zelaya was planning to hold a consultation to ask the Honduran public about their preference for calling on the drafting of a new constitution during the general elections in November. The opposition argued that Zelaya was trying to get himself reelected and justified his removal on the basis that the president did not have the authority to organize the consultation.

A new political regime backed by conservative forces emerged from the coup. Legal reforms permitted the approval of a new wave of hydroelectric and solar energy projects with very favorable conditions to the private sector. The moratorium on mining concessions was lifted, and new permits were granted. Honduras became a laboratory for neoliberal policies, the most controversial being the Economic Development and Employment Zones (ZEDEs) that

promised to create extraterritorial enclaves in the name of libertarian ideology (Geglia, 2016; Lynch, 2017). These policies had a direct effect on the territories of Indigenous and Afro-Indigenous peoples, where many of the coveted water, mineral, and land resources were located.

The postcoup period became a new phase for Honduras marked by violence, corruption, and hopelessness in the political system. Following the coup, social protests spread across the country, and the political scene became more polarized. Security forces met the protests with violence (Frank, 2018). Indigenous and Afro-Indigenous peoples also protested the grabbing of the resources in their territories. The country became one of the most dangerous places for environmental activists (Global Witness, 2017). The murder of Indigenous and Environmental activist Berta Caceres in 2016 became an emblematic example of the violence directed against social activists (Lakhani, 2020). The administration of Juan Orlando Hernandez worsened the governance crisis. Soon after beginning his presidency in 2014, a Supreme Court packed with political appointees voted to allow him to run for reelection. In 2015, it was discovered that money from the Social Security Institute had been embezzled to finance his campaign in 2013. (Chayes, 2017). Hernandez won reelection in 2017 but under suspicious of fraud. Hondurans once again turned to the streets to contest the official results. These experiences of social protests have been so consequential for the youth that came of age in the 2010s that Amelia Frank-Vitale and Juan José d'Aubuisson (2020) have called them “the generation of the coup,” marked by a profound disillusionment in the political system.

Another facet of the governance crisis exploded after the unveiling of the intricate connections between politicians and drug traffickers. The testimony of the Maradiaga brothers, the two leaders of the Cachiros cartels, helped to reveal the high-level members of the Honduran political and business elite that were involved in drug trafficking (Spring, 2020). These

investigations have also shown how drug money was used to finance elections and investments. Some of these investments were responsible for the dispossession of Indigenous and Afro-Indigenous peoples. This situation meant that social activists did not only have to confront the interests of a capitalist class but also those of illicit networks that responded with more violence (Spring, 2020).

The migrant caravans symbolized the interlocking crises that have stalked Hondurans. Migrants that joined the caravans that began in 2018 were fleeing violence, the effects of climate change, and a broken political system. In the postcoup period, everyday violence increased, particularly for young people living in urban areas. In 2012, the homicide rate in Honduras became the highest of any country outside a war zone, surpassing 90 murders per 100,000 people. Gang activity and police impunity contributed to the production of this violence (Shorack et al., 2020). On top of this violence, vulnerability to climate change has worsened economic inequality (Méndez, 2020). Those that joined the caravan movement that began in 2018 also did it out of hopelessness that the country's political situation could not improve (Frank-Vitale & Martínez d'Aubuisson, 2020).

The migrant caravan in 2018 was a moment of reflection about the relation between Moskitia and the rest of Honduras during this moment of crisis. Most of the time, researching Moskitia felt like being in a different country from Honduras. Outsiders learn to partake in the regional attitude of viewing the rest of the country as *el interior*, literally inland, which denoted the spatial imaginary of the Moskitia bounded to the Caribbean region. The Miskitu population in Gracias a Dios has experienced the political crisis in a distinct manner. Perhaps the point of starkest difference between the way the postcoup regime unfolded in Moskitia versus the rest of the country is the fact that the inter-communal property titles were awarded by Presidents Lobo

and Hernandez (Galeana, 2020). However, this does not mean that the Miskitu had any special privileges. Rather, it implies that political and social events that affect the Honduran nation-state are filtered through the lens of everyday experiences in Moskitia. I will highlight some of these differences by referring to events that occurred during my time in the field.

The spatial separation between Moskitia and the rest of Honduras became more apparent during political and social events that engulfed Honduras but had little reverberance in my field site. I remember being glued to social media and news websites in October 2018, trying to understand what was happening with the first caravan. As a Mexican national, the images of the Mexican police clashing with the Central American migrants on Mexico's southern border were emotionally crushing. My anxiety was partly relieved by the comedy provided by a conversation I overheard between two women handwashing clothes at the communal washbasin. "If we want to join the caravan, first they will have to send us a boat so we can get out of this place," one woman said jokingly to the other. Ironically, many Miskitu individuals aspired to live in cities like La Ceiba and San Pedro Sula, which were the same places that other Hondurans were trying to leave. As Table 1.2 shows, the level of international migration from the department of Gracias a Dios are indeed much lower than for other departments.

I remember feeling a similar disassociation of Moskitia's sense of place within Honduras in other moments of national turbulence. One was in June 2015, when the streets of major cities in Honduras became filled with people marching against corruption in the administration of Juan Orlando Hernandez in what became known as the movement of the march of the torches. Nowhere in Moskitia were similar marches occurring. The other was in December 2017, when Hondurans turned to the streets to protest President Hernandez's reelection; roadblocks, barricades, and marches sprung all across the country. Nothing that amounted to that level of

political violence manifested in Moskitia.¹⁸ The images of events of high political significance in Honduras—the march of the torches, the violence in the aftermath of the election, and the caravan—when displayed on television, felt like they were occurring in a different country.

Similarly, events of high political relevance in Moskitia were poorly covered or misrepresented in the Honduran media. The most notable example was the mobilization conducted by the community of Auka in 2015 to evict colonists from their ancestral lands. The large group of men marched into the homesteads and held twenty-seven people until the government resolved their claims. The event was misrepresented in the Honduran media as cattle thieves from Nicaragua preying on Honduran cattle ranchers (Redacción, 2015). During my time in the field, the event of the highest political volatility was the protests against the killing of two fishermen in the village of Warunta in May 2018. A soldier platoon killed the two civilians during a counter-narcotic operative. The fishermen were returning to their village at midnight when the soldiers intercepted them. The tragedy echoed the earlier massacre that had taken place in Ahuas in 2011 when a joint DEA-Honduran operative resulted in the death of five civilians. People in Puerto Lempira took over the streets for two days to protest what they perceived to be military abuse. They threw rocks and projectiles at the military garrison in the downtown area and vandalized some of the local businesses. The military occupation of Moskitia, bolded by the war on drugs, was not a topic of conversation elsewhere in Honduras. In contrast, people from Moskitia had to endure the stigmatization of the Honduran media that associated the population with the portrayal of Moskitia as a region without law and order and where narcos roamed free.

¹⁸ A small group of supporters of the political opposition party LIBRE tried to take over the landing strip in Puerto Lempira on December 7, 2017, but they failed to do so. According to an eyewitness, the main business partner and captain of the regional airline scolded the group for vandalism and sent them home.

Lastly, it should not be left unsaid that Moskitia's relation to Honduras continues to be marked by profound inequality. Honduras is one of the poorest countries in Latin America to begin with, but the department of Gracias a Dios occupies even a lower position compared to the national average. This department lags behind in many social indicators. Table 1.2 shows that 29.12 percent of households in Gracias a Dios have four or more basic needs unmet. This number is significantly higher than the national average of 5.95 percent. In addition, Gracias a Dios has a 27.52 percent of illiteracy rate, which is higher than the national average of 21.2 percent. Although there is no available data to compare poverty statistics by department, it is considered that families in Gracias a Dios face some of the highest levels of poverty in the country.

Table 1.2: Demographic data by department.

	Population	Unsatisfied Basic Needs (4 or More)	Illiteracy	Migration
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>
Country	7,657,684	5.95	21.2	118,168
Atlantida	399,029	4.62	18.49	7,902
Colon	271,723	5.18	23.14	5,661
Comayagua	465,927	6.92	22.2	9,629
Copan	352,785	7.44	28.97	5,904
Cortes	1,391,323	3.16	16.78	17,351
Choluteca	414,856	6.77	21.78	4,685
El Paraiso	419,270	7.09	23.98	3,685
Francisco Morazan	1,348,111	5.05	15.29	20,130
Gracias a Dios	84,963	29.12	27.52	118
Intibuca	224,554	7.68	24.22	5,113
Islas de la Bahia	56,317	1.96	12.95	451
La Paz	191,946	7.02	22.32	2,675
Lempira	312,669	10.84	30.37	5,111
Ocotopeque	141,641	5.12	26.28	2,130
Olancho	490,214	8.45	26.75	9,289
Santa Barbara	395,618	5.15	27.18	4,811
Valle	165,843	9.97	22.15	3,453
Yoro	530,895	5.56	22.07	10,070

Note. Data from the Instituto Nacional de Estadística (2013).

1.4 METHOD

i) Data Collection

This dissertation draws primarily on data collected in the region of Moskitia in June and July 2015, August 2016, as well as September 2017-January 2019. The expansion of twenty months of fieldwork over a period of four years allowed me to track a constellation of events and trace how political dynamics unfolded. One notable example is an event I attended in 2015 to elect the authorities of a territorial council that proved to be an important antecedent for understanding a split in MASTA in 2018. From 2015 to 2019, I traveled to every one of the twelve territorial councils—plus the Tawahka, Pech, and Garifuna areas as well as the Ladino-town of Palacios—to interview leaders and get a feel for the place. My initial tour to some coastal and inland territorial councils in 2015 was crucial to inform the preparation of a research strategy that involved spending time in different sub-regions of Moskitia.

Overall, I conducted over 120 interviews, 69 household questionnaires, and 18 oral histories. For the core period of fieldwork (2017-2018), I was based in the departmental capital of Puerto Lempira and conducted shorter periods of research in three territorial councils. I selected to work in three territorial councils that have had problems with Ladino colonization but were located in different geographical settings—BAKINASTA (inland/river), WAMAKLISCINASTA (inland/savanna), and Rayaka (coastal/river). Within each of these territorial councils, I spent time talking to local leaders and getting to know residents. Furthermore, I selected one village in each territorial council to conduct a questionnaire that could provide a more in-depth view of these localities' social dynamics. Additional interviews with Indigenous leaders, government officials, aid workers, and businesspeople were conducted

in Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula, and La Ceiba. In addition, I took a five-week course on Miskitu language in Bilwi, Nicaragua in July-August 2016, which provided me with basic language instruction and the opportunity to engage with Miskitu leaders on the other side of the border.

I conducted participant observation in a number of events that were conducted across Moskitia as well as Tegucigalpa and La Ceiba. These events included two events to elect MASTA's authorities, two events to elect the authorities of territorial councils, six events to elect the authorities of communal councils, three events of a multi-stakeholder forum in Moskitia, eleven events to consult fishing norms in the Caratasca Lagoon system, one event to consult a new timber export protocol between Honduras and the European Union, one event to socialize an Indigenous forestry protocol, two training sessions organized by donors, and the public presentation of a participatory mapping project, among others.

In addition to interviews and participant observation, I conducted archival research. I visited the National Archives, the Newspaper and Periodical Library, and the Ethno-Historical Archives at the Honduran Historical Research Documentation Center. The documentation center is hosted by the Honduran Institute of Anthropology and History at the former Presidential Palace in Tegucigalpa. I also conducted a systematic review of documents hosted at the documentation center of the non-governmental organization Development of Moskitia (*Moskitia Asla Pawisa*, MOPAWI) in Tegucigalpa. This center is the only archive dedicated exclusively to Moskitia. Most of the documents consist of grey literature prepared by government officials, aid workers, and consultants for development interventions in the region. I also visited the Moravian Archives in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, which has documents related to the church's missionary activities in the Honduran and Nicaraguan Moskitia.

One particular challenge of working with the collection at the Honduran National Archives is the lack of an index record. Researchers typically have to comb through piles of documents stacked by year to identify relevant materials. The primary documents I was able to gather for this investigation were partly the result of efforts by the archival staff to develop a vernacular classification for the collection. The staff put documents that other users had identified with Mosquitia inside manila folders that they would label with the title of “Mosquitia” or “Miskitos.” I once asked one of the archivists how I should cite these documents, and she responded that I should say they were part of the “Mosquitia Collection.” I thought about this proposition but declined it as I did not want to give the impression that such a collection formally existed. The Mosquitia Collection lives informally in the vernacular system that sympathetic archivists have put together in collaboration with users, which is another example of the social life of archives. I also relied on two research assistants with ample experience on this archive to identify other sources. This method implied that the documents I reviewed were scattered across the period from 1835 to 1905. I completed some of the gaps by relying on secondary sources.

ii) Analysis and Positionality

My methodological approach to study questions of sovereignty and state formation in Moskitia draws from the principles of engagement of what Simpson (2014) has described as the “ethnographic limit.” Simpson proposes that to counteract the colonial logic embedded in anthropology (as well as the other social sciences), scholars need to strive to find Indigenous sovereignty “at the level of enunciation, at the level of method, and at the level of textualization” (Simpson, 2014, p. 97). In a practical sense, this means asking questions about the questions that matter for Indigenous peoples and refusing to present “everything.” Simpson calls this refusal a

“mode of sovereign authority over the presentation of ethnographic data” to protect communities and put the needs of Indigenous peoples at the center of scholarship (Simpson, 2014, p. 105). More generally, Simpson posits that the ethnographic limit is a question of solidarity. “I reached my own limit,” Simpson writes, “when the data would not contribute to Iroquois sovereignty or complicate the deeply simplified, atrophied representations that Iroquois and other Indigenous peoples have been mired in anthropologically” (Simpson, 2014, p. 113).

Simpson’s proposition is a critical intervention to address concerns over power and coloniality in ethnography, but I do consider that the principle of the ethnographic limit needs to be assessed in the context of each ethnographic encounter. I find that for the Honduran Moskitia, it is productive to talk about some of the details that contribute to or undermine the consolidation of the inter-communal property regime. Applying the lens of state formation to understand MASTA as a state-like entity expresses my recognition of the sovereignty of the Miskitu Nation in Honduras. My political solidarity is with MASTA and the territorial councils. Although some of the observations may appear to be critical of MASTA, it is because I wish that this work will contribute to a nuanced understanding of the challenges and adversities that Miskitu leaders have to encounter to enact their sovereignty. In many ways, it would have been easier to exclude many of the details and focus on the excellent work that the Miskitu movement is doing to fight dispossession. However, this approach would have been disingenuous to the diversity of perspectives on the ground among the Miskitu and other actors that share the territory. I find comfort in Rudi Colloredo-Mansfeld’s (2009) observation that conflict can make communities stronger. Therefore, my sincere hope is that dwelling on these conflicts contributes to new thinking for building solidarity.

I am mindful of the history that brought me to this case study in the first place. I worked for the World Bank when I first learned about the Miskitu people and their territorial demands. I started my initial two-year assignment as a Junior Professional Associate with the World Bank in 2005, fresh out of college, where I enjoyed reading about Hernando de Soto's ideas for using titles to promote growth in the *Mystery of Capital*. I shamefully admit not knowing anything about the Moskitia when my supervisor asked me to join a mission to discuss MASTA's titling demands in a meeting in Puerto Lempira in March 2005. In a way, this one-week trip to Honduras changed me forever. I could not contain my excitement when I learned that the Miskitu made claims over a large extent of the Caribbean coast based on the former existence of an Indigenous kingdom. To the naïve 23-years old, the Moskitia was the stuff that legends were made of. Soon after this trip, I got to see another side of this project when I had to help prepare the World Bank response to the complaint that the Garifuna federation Black Fraternity of Honduras (OFRANEH) had made to the Inspection Panel. I touch upon this subject in my first article published in *The Journal of Latin American Geography*. In a subsequent consultant assignment with the World Bank, I was able to get more directly involved with the titling process during the presidency of Porfirio Lobo (2010-2014).

This experience with the titling process from the perspective of a World Bank consultant continued to shape my approach to the case study and interactions in the field. During fieldwork, some people remembered me from my previous position and assumed that I worked for an NGO. It was challenging to get away from normative discussions about the intercommunal property regime. Once in a while, this positionality got me into difficulties, but for different reasons than I expected. I initially assumed that some people would be distrustful because of my previous participation with the World Bank. Instead, after finding out about my background, some

interlocutors asked me for recommendations for improving their organizations or development project. I learned to politely decline these invitations for advice, mainly because I was humble enough to accept that I did not have any idea about what recommendations I could offer under such complex circumstances. Of course, the irony of this situation is how a 20-something debutante could travel to Moskitia to supervise a project without any previous knowledge of the region while a 30-something doctoral researcher struggled to give recommendations.

My positionality also established some limitations to my work. It is important to talk about what the research project does not cover. Specifically, there were two potential areas of research that I decided not to follow. The first was a decision not to engage in ontological inquiries about Miskitu beingness, which following Simpson, I saw as going beyond my ethnographic limit because of the potential risk of misrepresentation. The second was a decision not to follow the urge to investigate the more controversial aspect of land grabs in the region, which I did to protect the research participants and myself. I will explain each of these cases.

Miskitu territoriality involves a broader set of spiritual and cultural practices that transcend the boundaries of sovereignty and property. They produce an excess that cannot be contained in these categories of knowledge. Following Simpson, I believe that we should continue to posit that there is a particular way of being in the world that constantly interrupts our own classifications. This means that we should continue paying attention to the “sense of being” that sustains and interrupts conceptions of sovereignty.¹⁹ Like other Indigenous societies, the Miskitu experience the spiritual realm in their everyday life. Places are associated with different spirits. The *liwa mairin* [sirena (Sp.), mermaid (Eng.)] inhabits water bodies; the *duhindu*

¹⁹ The literature on placemaking has a lot of useful references to inform an analysis of Indigenous sovereignty (Basso, 1996; Ingold, 2000; Myers, 1986; Thornton, 2008).

[duende (Sp.), goblin (Eng.)] lives in the pine savanna, and the dawan [dueño (Sp.), master (Eng.)] watches over the herds of animals in the forest. These beliefs have intermingled with Christianity in a syncretism that guides understanding of personhood, society, and nature. Indigenous leaders were upfront about the existence of Miskitu spiritual beliefs and presented them in schematic ways that outside audiences could consume. For example, local planning instruments prepared by MASTA and the territorial councils, like Lifeway Plans and the Community Forestry Protocol, have sections that provided textbook-like descriptions of Miskitu spirituality. These descriptions helped me understand the concepts theoretically, but I recognize my limitations in tracing the actual practice of Miskitu spirituality in everyday life. I mark my own ethnographic limit by resisting the urge to over-rationalize the otherworldliness that permeated my encounters. I recognize this force as ever-present. I hope to provide a space for reflection without subduing it.

The other area of research that I avoided had to do with the security conditions in the field. The topic of saneamiento was controversial. Most people did not wish to discuss land sales openly. I work in places that were active drug trafficking routes and where a foreigner could raise suspicion. One encounter during the earlier period of fieldwork in 2017 alerted me to the potential pitfalls of researching land issues. I was in the town of Wampusirpi in the mid-section of the Patuca River on one of three visits to conduct interviews and get to know the place better. One of my contacts in the territorial council, David, who was also a member of the local committee for the National Party, invited me to accompany him and his party colleagues to visit a community upriver.²⁰ They needed to fetch the five community members who were going to

²⁰ The names of individuals referred to by their first name only are pseudonyms. I use pseudonyms following the conventional ethnographical practice when writing about encounters reported in fieldnotes.

participate in a training workshop to be the party representatives in the polling station for the upcoming election. David told me to wait at the grocery store close to the pier while getting a few things ready for the trip. The grocery store was a typical wooden house, elevated from the ground, with a large open room for the products and a veranda for clients to hang out. The shop was relatively busy. It was the perfect place for an ethnographer to observe social life and strike a conversation with the locals.

I bought a soda and sat on the corner of the long bar that served as the division between the shopkeeper and the client's area. A Ladino man, probably in his early twenties, wearing soiled clothes and with the athletic physique of someone who engages in physical labor, approached me. He began to talk about his good luck with the *guirras* ["the ladies"]. I figured I could use the company while I waited for David and learn something about the construction of masculinity in the field site. I offered to buy him a soda, which he readily accepted. In a few minutes, our conversation swirled in an unexpected direction. He began to tell me how he had once found a crashed plane on the savanna with a drug cargo. He described graphic details of the crash site, including the calcinated bodies of the pilots. He did not mention what happened to the cargo, and I did not probe him. I find myself wondering why he was telling me this story when I had not asked him about the subject. I remembered that back in 2015 when I made my first research trip to the region, my research assistant at the time had told me that some people in the communities might confuse me with a member of a foreign drug cartel. Mexican cartels were known to operate in the area, and my accent made my Mexican national origin clear. I figured that this young man was probably telling this (true?) story to get me to reveal my identity. I thought it would be prudent to disclose my status as a Ph.D. researcher. I told him that I was

interested in learning more about life on the land after MASTA had achieved the property titles for the territorial councils.

The young man seemed slightly disappointed that I had turned out to be a researcher interested in MASTA. At this point in our conversation, I noticed that the shopkeeper was listening closely to our conversation and busy texting on his cellphone. David came to get me, and we descended the beach area to mount on the *pipante* [dugout canoe]. The young man came rushing down behind me and approached me inside the *pipante*. He had come to give me a warning.

Amigo, don't go around saying that you work with MASTA. People here don't like that organization. You see, a man got killed a couple of years ago for working on land issues. Just don't go around saying that kind of thing (Fieldnotes, 2017).

This intense fear ran through my spine as I remembered the shopkeeper texting. Was he texting about me? Who else knew about my presence in the community? And could my intention be misinterpreted? David, who was not in the *pipante*, finally arrived and told his two companions that it was time to go. The pier was on a creek that connected to the Patuca River. My head was spinning, and once we were on the main river, I mustered the courage to tell David what had happened. "You don't have to worry about a thing," he said to me as he handed me a can of Carta Blanca beer to relax me. "You are with owners of the territory; you have nothing to fear." I know that David's words were meant to reassure me, but I could not help noticing the sun's reflection on the gun he carried by his belt, which was now visible after his soccer jersey had pulled back. It was a reminder that even David thought that he needed the protection. I tried to calm down by enjoying the majestic view of the river against the backdrop of the limestone mountains in the distance. The one-star navy blue flag of President Hernandez's National Party waved high above the *pipante*. I felt awkward about the open association with a political party,

along with drinking warm can beer at noon, and with questions about my earlier interaction at the shop still lingering in my mind.

I could not entirely avoid similar awkward moments, but I became more proactive about finding ways to keep my informants safe during fieldwork. I was lucky that I had already secured a volunteer position as an associated researcher with the non-governmental organization Development of Moskitia (*Moskitia Asla Pawisa*, MOPAWI). MOPAWI was a faith-based organization, one of the oldest NGOs working in Moskitia, that enjoyed a good reputation among MASTA, the government, and donor agencies. MOPAWI's institutional support provided adequate space to engage interlocutors in questions about the development of Moskitia. I learned to engage the topics I was interested in without directly asking respondents controversial questions on land sales or illicit activities. I also changed my research strategy to spend more time in Puerto Lempira, the regional capital, where my presence was less conspicuous, and I could participate in more events.

1.5 ROADMAP

This dissertation is divided into three parts. In each, I focus on a particular dimension of state formation in the Honduran Moskitia. **Part I (Legacies of Incorporation)** explores the historical antecedents to modern-day struggles that emerged in the transition from the Mosquito Kingdom to the Honduran Republic. I start with the own birth of the Honduran Republic in 1838 (chapter 2) and follow through the multicultural reforms of the 1990s and their aftermath (chapter 3). This part highlights the challenges that Moskitia represented for the Honduran state-building project and the transformation of the Miskitu leadership toward centralized authority. **Part II (Moral Economies of Property)** engages with the geographies of three sub-regions in Moskitia to understand the similarities and differences in how they bounded their territories as

property and the implications for the consolidation of the inter-communal property regime. I describe the socio-ecological setting that led to the emergence of three territorial councils that became the recipients of property titles (chapter 4), analyze the dynamics of enclosures that enable or disable collective action against colonization (chapter 5), and assess the attitudes that the population has toward the territorial councils as their authorities (chapter 6). This part highlights the complementarity of observing the construction of Miskitu sovereignty at the regional and sub-regional scale. **Part III (Technologies of Citizenship)** observes the efforts to mobilize Miskitu citizenship within the institutional apparatus set up for the inter-communal property regime. I analyze the structural factors shaping the celebration of elections for the authorities of MASTA and the territorial councils (chapter 7) and the ways that the Miskitu leadership tried to insert political action into a multi-stakeholder forum (chapter 8). This part highlights the importance that physical and organizational infrastructures have in shaping the possibilities for the construction of citizenship. In the conclusion, I return to the three main claims made throughout the dissertation to think about the future of the inter-communal property regime.

PART I

LEGACIES OF INCORPORATION

CHAPTER 2: FRONTIERS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

On November 10, 1841, the British Superintendent in Belize, Alexander MacDonald, proposed to the Honduran government to mediate an agreement to define the border between the Honduran state and the Mosquito Kingdom. MacDonald's proposal was less of an offer rather than a demand. MacDonald's main motivation for clarifying the border was not to protect the sovereignty of the Mosquito Kingdom per se but rather to safeguard the commercial interests of British citizens who had acquired land and logging concessions on the Mosquito Shore (Naylor, 1989).²¹

Honduras had only become a sovereign state in 1838, following the dissolution of the Central American Federation. The Honduran Foreign Minister, Juan Morales, responded to MacDonald's request first by refuting the notion that the definition of a border was relevant. After all, the Mosquito Shore was within the Honduras territory based on previous Spanish possession. The letter clarified that the Sambos, Mosquitos, Payas, and Xicaques who lived in the region were members of nomadic tribes that did not have the kind of political structure that could resemble a monarchy. According to Morales, foreign speculators had bestowed the titles of king, governor, general, and captain on the Miskitu chiefs to cajole them into granting them land and concessions. Morales conveyed that the young republic had a radically different plan for the hordes of "wild Hondurans" that roamed these lands:

²¹ In this chapter, I use the term "Mosquito Shore" or "Mosquitia" to refer to the present-day Moskitia. These terms were the most common moniker for the region in the nineteenth century. The Mosquito Shore refers to the greater Moskitia region that incorporates Honduras and Nicaragua.

The Government of Honduras, since the general Independence of Central America, has adopted the maxim of not intervening in any kind of conquest, of those that are attempted on these families and individuals independent by nature as the Araucanians, nor under the pretext of establishing monarchies, nor with that of religion that led them to the unfortunate situation in which they lie; but on the contrary, the constitution of the State prescribes their civilization and incorporation with the rest of the Honduran people, their siblings, with whom they must form a single family, as coming from the same origin, for which only persuasion and convincing are used (Morales, 1842, p. 130).

Although Morales appeared certain of the Honduran claim on the Mosquito Shore, the reality was the Honduran government did not have any tangible presence in the area. The claim was purely based on the assumption of former Spanish possession, which had been meager (Floyd, 1967). Although the reality was that Honduras could not afford a direct military intervention to recuperate the Mosquito Shore, Morales occluded this weakness by reaching toward the higher moral ground: The Honduran government would transform the so-called savages into citizens rather than exploit them for commercial interest.

The Honduran response touches on one of the critical tensions in processes of state formation in frontier regions: How did the state legitimate its claims over the sovereignty of spaces where it had no presence at all? European colonial powers had concocted many legal maneuvers, like the doctrine of discovery and *terra nullius*, to justify the territorial appropriation of overseas territories that they barely knew (Moreton-Robinson, 2015; Povinelli, 2011). These legal doctrines were crafted partly based on the legal traditions that already existed in these countries and partly on the circumstances that colonizers encountered on the ground (Seed, 1995). Maps had played a vital role as well in carving out spaces for European empires, exemplified in the Treaty of Tordesillas that neatly divided the globe into spheres for Spanish and Portuguese colonization.

In the post-independence period, the newly minted Latin American states, like Honduras, were trying to lay territorial claims on their own based on sedimentation of colonial practices that had preceded them. They were entering the game of the Westphalian inter-state system when the global economic order had already taken shape, which conditioned the range of maneuvering for state-building in frontier regions. In the case of the Mosquito Shore, British support for the Miskitu claims was a hard constraint for Honduran and Nicaraguan territorial ambitions. Morales's letter shows two strategies that Honduras deployed to assert its claims on the Mosquito Shore. The first move was to attack the legitimacy of Miskitu political institutions, which were presented as British inventions (Olien, 1985). The offices of Miskitu political representation certainly evolved in tandem with the commercial interests of European allies, but they also followed autonomous lineages with a high degree of power at the local level (Dennis & Olien, 1984; Gabbert, 2016) and constituted a confederation-type of structure (Mendiola, 2019; Williams, 2013) that produced a distinct form of Indigenous territorialization on the Atlantic coast (Offen, 2007). The second strategy was to depict the multi-ethnic population on the coast as savages that underutilized the land and precious natural resources in the region (Euraque, 2003; Offen, 2004). The remedy was to pursue a civilization mission that would put order to nature and society in these unruly places following a racialized logic that privileged Whiteness (Euraque, 2005; Mollett, 2011).

These discursive strategies reflected the process of the racialization of the Mosquito Shore and its inhabitants as inferior. These practices were made possible by the matrix of coloniality that construed modernity along an Eurocentric locus (Quijano, 2000). However, in the case of Honduras, the racialization of the Miskitu also occurred in a context in which the Honduran state had little power to take direct control of the area. The utterance of racialized

discourses by a government occupying a disadvantaged position within the global economic order begs the question of what capacity the Honduran state had to enact these plans? The main interest for engaging a more explicit recognition of state capacity is to obtain a more accurate representation of the kind of governance arrangements that emerged in these frontier spaces. Discursive practices shape intentions and subjectivities that contribute to territorial control, but material practices mediate the effects that they produce in the world.

In this chapter, I propose to turn attention to the capacities that the Honduran government had to align discourse and material practices and the effect that this configuration had on the region's governance. The Honduran government's initial efforts at state-building on the Mosquito Shore were thwarted by British interventionism. However, the Honduran government did not fare much better after the British recognized its sovereignty over the region in the Treaty of Wyke-Cruz in 1859. I argue that the Honduran government was unable to accomplish its purported civilization mission during the nineteenth century, which helped establish a regime of *de facto* autonomy for Mosquitia until the mid-twentieth century.

The failure of the Honduran government to establish a more permanent presence in the Mosquito Shore should be seen as part of a more generalizable condition about the formation of the Honduran state. For Honduras, like the rest of the Central American republics, the period following independence was one marked by a political crisis and economic depression (Woodward, 1999). The Creole elite in each of these countries embarked on their own projects of state-building that culminated with a re-integration into the global market during the so-called liberal reform era (1870s-1940s). However, Honduras was behind the other Central American republics in this state-building modernization project (Mahoney, 2001). The state bureaucracy had little penetration and coercive power over a large segment of the population (Stokes, 1950).

Honduran elites depended on foreign capital to transition to commercial agriculture, and in turn, foreign interests captured the state (Euraque, 1996). For this reason, the Honduran Mosquitia experienced even less penetration of the state and capital than the Nicaragua Mosquitia. This unevenness between the two regions created important consequences for the development of the Indigenous movement in both countries, as will be discussed in chapter 3.

Beyond Honduras, attention to the state's capacity to align discursive and material practices contributes to debates on the legacy of former frontier regions. Scott's *The Art of Not Being Governed* (2009) has been one of the key contributions in this field. Scott's work focused on the "fugitive population" in the highlands of Southeast Asia—a region which he referred to as Zomia. According to Scott, the population of this region had voluntarily "exited" the state, and in doing so, they unlearned those cultural practices that made them vulnerable to state appropriation, such as grain cultivation, written language, and centralized authority. One of Scott's primary interventions is to propose that these *non-state spaces* were produced as a strategy to resist the rise of *state spaces*. In a more recent intervention, Andrej Grubačić and Denis O'Hearn (2016) critiqued Scott's idea of non-state spaces for failing to account for the capitalist world-system. They proposed that the so-called non-states spaces interacted with the world-system. Only through an empirical understanding of these interactions could we learn something about the conditions that enabled or constrained their autonomy. For this reason, they referred to these communities as "exilic spaces," which they defined as those "populated by communities that attempt escape from both state regulation (the focus of much anarchist analysis) and capitalist accumulation (the focus of Marxism)" (2016, p.1).

The case of the Mosquito Shore in the nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth century contributes to this debate over geographic areas that managed to maintain their

economic, social, and political autonomy from a centralized state. In the first instance, Scott's characterization of "zones of refuge" for a fugitive population resonates with the historical process in Honduras. Indigenous populations in the central and western regions fled into the isolated areas of the north coast and the Mosquito Shore to escape indenture labor and Spanish domination (Newson, 1986). This fugitive population encountered other native groups already living in the area, such as the Miskitu. One could say that in Honduras, the borderlands of these zones of refuge were defined by the Spanish colonial realm on the western side and the Miskitu realm on the eastern side. The Miskitu embarked on their own wars of conquest, which dominated and absorbed rival native populations and created distinctive political institutions (Dennis & Olien, 1984; Mendiola, 2019; Offen, 2015). Therefore, the characterization of zones of refuge is more appropriated to the mountainous areas of the north coast and the Mosquito Shore but less so for the coastal areas where the Miskitu concentrated their power. Yet, Scott's concern for defining non-state spaces is still valid since the Mosquito Shore stood in the borderlands of the Honduran state, but without embodying the characteristics of a non-state space in the way he defines it.

Grubačić and O'Hearn's concept of exilic spaces offers another valid entry into this debate. The formation of Miskitu territoriality took shape in the interactions with the world-system. The Caribbean region, to which the Mosquito Shore belonged, was central to forming this world-system. The Miskitu Coast became a place where former African slaves were able to integrate with the Amerindian population and create an alternative society in the margins of the plantation economy in the Caribbean (Pineda, 2006). However, the evidence does not suggest that the Miskitu attempted voluntary exile from the world-system. Instead, the historical record suggests strategic articulations among the Miskitu chiefs, European sailors and traders, and

British colonial officials who contributed to maintaining the world-system from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries (Floyd, 1967; Naylor, 1989). Therefore, the Mosquito Shore functioned as a periphery of the world-system, not as an exilic space.

The peripheral state of the Mosquito Shore continued until the mid-twentieth century. Anthropologist Mary Helms (1971), who researched a Miskitu community on the Nicaraguan side of Wangki River in the 1960s, defined the Mosquito Shore as a “commercial frontier.” According to Helms, the penetration of capitalistic relations in Mosquitia had followed the ebbs and flows of boom-and-bust commodity cycles. Each of the booms—mahogany, bananas, gold, rubber—had left a marginal legacy in the social structures of the region. The Miskitu were able to return to subsistence activities during the bust cycles, waiting for the next opportunity to engage in market relations. For this reason, she coined the term “purchase society” to characterize societies like the Miskitu that had adapted to periods of linking and de-linking with global markets and had the resource base to enter market relations in a “more symmetrical level of economic exchange” (Helms, 1971, p. 6).²² One of the most important implications of being a purchase society in a commercial frontier is that the Miskito were able to maintain their political autonomy:

Although officially resident within the republics of Nicaragua and Honduras, the Miskito have never paid significant taxes, either in produce or cash, have never been drafted for conscript labor or served in the armed forces, and have not engaged in extensive trade and commerce with representatives of these states. In all areas of potential influence, the states’ activities have always been of a *de jure* rather than *de facto* nature in the isolated regions where the Miskito live (Helms, 1971, p. 5).

²² Helms offered the following definition of purchase society: “The definitive characteristic of any purchase society is the articulation of local society with the wider complex world through economic channels and trade and wage labor, while political autonomy and a stable social organization are maintained” (Helms, 1971, p. 7).

Helms characterized political autonomy in Mosquitia as a function of the region's isolation from the state. This argument, however, may have understated how the Miskitu engaged with different state agents. Kendra McSweeney (2004) critiqued Helm's ideas on the temporary isolation from global markets, offering useful insights for how we may think about the relationship with the state. McSweeney argued that Helms's concept of purchase society obfuscated the endogenous processes of production and accumulation that mediated the exogenous boom-bust cycles in the frontier. According to McSweeney, Helms's proposition that the Miskitu were only engaged in market relations during boom times and otherwise were autarkic does not hold if one considers the existence of trade networks like those of dugout canoes. Similarly, when considering relations with the state, it is important to consider how interactions with state agents—teachers, soldiers, health personnel—and other civil society actors—Moravian and Catholic missionaries, foreign and domestic traders, etc.—influenced cultural ideals about the state beyond the absence of the formal linkages that Helms suggested.

This chapter attempts to fill our gap of knowledge about what kind of state formation occurred in the Honduran Mosquitia during the nineteenth century. Although the broader evidence concurs with Helms' point that the Miskitu maintained a great degree of political autonomy, a more nuanced analysis can help explain how conditions of articulation/disarticulation with the state shaped legacies of governance for the region while paying attention to the conditions of the world-system as suggested by Grubačić and O'Hearn. The fact that the Miskitu in Honduras and Nicaragua experienced significantly different political mobilizations in the 1980s and 1990s could be partly related to these earlier experiences.

My approach to state formation in the Honduran Mosquitia is influenced by the historical political ecology approach developed in Karl Offen's work.²³ Offen (2004) studied how the Nicaraguan government tried to intervene in commodities markets in Mosquitia between 1838 and 1909. He drew on the concept of geographical imagination to situate the "modes of thought, logics, themes, styles of expression" that contributed to the formation of truths about the resources in the region (Peet and Watts (1996), cited in Offen, 2004, p. 51). In this work, Offen proposed that states with weak capacity had "to construct a geographical imagination that naturalised the right and inevitability of state expansion" (Offen, 2004, p. 87). For this reason, grand discourses of state-building in frontier areas are rarely concretized in practice due to the same weakness that made them necessary in the first place.

Taking this cue from Offen's work, this chapter explores the capacity that the Honduran state had to align discursive and material practices toward state-building in Mosquitia during the nineteenth century. This analysis is based on a review of primary documents obtained from the National Archive and the Newspaper and Periodical Library at the Honduran Historical Research Documentation Center. Based on this review, I identified three cases that contribute to our understanding of state formation in the Honduran Mosquitia. The first is a treaty negotiated with the Miskitu leader General Lowry Robinson in 1843 to weaken British influence. The second is the effort the Honduran government made to extract rents from mahogany concessions in the form of taxes in the 1840s and 1850s. The third is the qualitative change in the plans for the

²³ Offen's work is one of the few that has considered the question of state formation in the Mosquitia region during the nineteenth century. The other important work is Charles Hale's *Resistance and Contradiction*, where the author develops a Gramscian analysis to explain the origins of the Miskitu-Contra conflict in Nicaragua. Hale suggests that the Miskitu acquiesced during the Somocista regime in part because of the common interest in maintaining the flow of foreign companies into the region, which did not only provide employment to the Miskitu but also reaffirmed their historical connection with the Anglo world.

region's administration that followed a change of political regimes in Honduras between 1860 and 1900.

Between discourse and actual capacity for enacting a civilization program, four specific practices emerged that characterize state formation during this period. First, for local Miskitu chiefs, their sovereignty was expressed through their capacity to ally with outsiders that could secure their access to markets. They did not want to remain isolated from global markets but rather control the terms of their engagement. Second, state formation was carried out primarily by frontier entrepreneurs who transformed the socio-territorial configuration of the region in the course of their profit-making enterprises. The notable influence of traders would remain a constant variable in the everyday practices of state formation in Mosquitia. Third, while the territory of Mosquitia was de facto under military occupation, the functions of law and order were performed with the assistance of local chiefs. Although these chiefs served as representatives of the Honduran state, they were organic leaders who continued the functions they previously had under the former Mosquito Kingdom. Fourth, the interests of the commercial elite in the city of Trujillo served to centralize the locus of administrative power rather than foster the development of an alternative pole more centrally located in Mosquitia. Therefore, this integration into the political division of the Honduran state actually served to marginalize the regional population.

These three cases only offer a partial perspective on state formation in nineteenth-century Honduran Mosquitia. Still, one that I suggest is greatly needed to start a more comprehensive research agenda. The history of nineteenth-century Honduran Mosquitia remains largely understudied. Most historical scholarship on Mosquitia has focused on the pre-independence period, drawing primarily from archival materials in Guatemala, Spain, the United Kingdom, and

more recently Costa Rica (Dennis & Olien, 1984; Floyd, 1967; Gabbert, 2016; Ibarra Rojas, 2007; Mendiola, 2019; Naylor, 1989; Offen, 2002, 2007, 2015; Olien, 1983, 1998; Thornton, 2017; Williams, 2013). The collection at the National Archives in Tegucigalpa, which includes documents from the nineteenth-century republican period, is rarely considered outside of the Honduran academic community.²⁴

In the rest of the chapter, I will provide a brief historical account of Honduras's political situation in the post-independence period, explain the three cases identified in the revision of primary documents, and outline some of the implications for how we think about state formation in the Honduran Mosquitia and the legacies it engendered.

2.2 THE HONDURAN STATE AND THE MOSQUITO SHORE

During the colonial period, Honduras was one of the five intendencies that integrated the Captaincy General of Guatemala. After general independence from Spain in 1821, the intendencies annexed to the Mexican Empire and subsequently separated to create the Central American Federation in 1823. The federative period was marred by civil war and economic depression, eventually disintegrating in 1839. Honduras declared its independence from the Federation in 1838. Historians divide the post-independence period during the nineteenth century into the “conservative restoration” (1839-1876) and the “liberal reform” (1876-1940). The conservative restoration period was characterized by the weak legitimacy of state institutions, political instability, economic isolation, and the interference of neighboring states (Barahona, 2015). In the liberal period, the Honduran elite sought to modernize the state apparatus and establish export agriculture. President Marco Aurelio Soto (1876-83), the main promoter of

²⁴ One exception is Craig S. Revels' doctoral dissertation “Timber, Trade, and Transformation: A Historical Geography of Mahogany in Honduras” (2002) that draws on sources from the Honduran National Archive.

liberal reforms, supported the development of agrarian capitalism, which set the conditions for the birth of the banana industry at the end of the nineteenth century (Euraque, 1996).

One of the most pressing problems facing the young republic after achieving independence in 1838 was the disarticulation of the national territory. The Constitution of 1838 claimed as national territory the limits of the former intendency under Spanish rule. These limits included the Mosquito Shore and the Bay Islands, which were under British control at the time of Honduran independence. On the Mosquito Shore, the British were in the course of restating a second protectorate to protect their interests in the Mosquito Kingdom. Since the seventeenth century, the British had maintained relations with the Miskitu, but they had to suspend their diplomatic ties with the Mosquito Kingdom following the Anglo-Spanish Convention of 1786 (Floyd, 1967). The Spanish colonial authorities took advantage of this period to forge new alliances with the Miskitu chiefs to pacify the area and bring the region into their control (Naylor, 1989; Williams, 2013). However, Spanish efforts from the 1780s to the early 1800s were disrupted by the independence movement. The political turmoil caused during the independence movement, combined with the interests of Belize-based British woodcutters, created the conditions for a resurgence of British control over the Mosquito Shore in the 1820s.

During the period of the Central American Federation, the state of Honduras did not have the constitutional power to conduct diplomatic relations with Great Britain to resolve the territorial occupation. The Honduran authorities also had to deal with the more immediate problem of revolts in Olancho that threatened to split the state (Sarmiento, 2006). Therefore, after independence in 1838, the Honduran government put more formal attention to diplomatic relations to find a solution to the question of sovereignty on the Mosquito Shore and the Bay Islands. The three cases I follow trace some of the efforts conducted by the Honduran

government to claim sovereignty over the Mosquito Shore. These cases show how the Honduran government tried to subdue the region while facing significant challenges due to its limited capacity.

2.3 THREE CASES

i) Diplomacy: The Treaty with General Lowry Robinson

During the presidency of Francisco Ferrara (1841-1844), the Honduran government sought an alliance with the Miskitu General controlling the Black River region as part of the strategy to counteract British influence on the Mosquito Shore. This strategy followed in the footsteps of the previous Spanish colonial authorities, who have also entered into diplomatic relations with the regional Miskitu authorities to increase their control on the coast after the British retreated in the 1770s-1780s (Williams, 2013). The Honduran government signed a treaty with General Thomas Lowry Robinson in 1843, intending to turn the leader against the Mosquito King and British allies. Robinson was one of the four paramount chiefs who oversaw the Mosquito Kingdom and controlled the area between the Black River and the Patuca River (Olien, 1998). Robinson's jurisdiction bordered the Honduran settlements on the North Coast and Olancho, and the area also had some of the most valuable timber resources. Robinson's predecessors have operated with a high degree of political autonomy from the king, and he was looking to maintain it.

Robinson did not appreciate the increase of foreign influence on the Black River area that came with the British Protectorate.²⁵ In the 1830s, King Robert Charles Frederick approved generous land concessions to British businessmen that virtually covered the entire Caribbean

²⁵ General Lowry Robinson's father, old General Robinson, had been uncooperative as well with McGregor's initial colonization attempt in 1823 (Naylor, 1989).

coast from Cape Camaron in Honduras to Veraguas in Panama. Black River had been a British settlement in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, and in the 1820s, the site of a fraudulent colonization scheme by Gregor MacGregor (Naylor, 1989). New associates in England were interested in establishing a colony in Black River, and others were interested in obtaining logging concessions. The King seemed to know that Robinson would be displeased with these plans because when he ratified the original title granted to MacGregor's company, he sent specific instructions to Robinson not to interfere with British affairs (Naylor, 1989). The king visited himself at Black River in 1839 to supervise the preparations of the settlement and ensure the compliance of the local chiefs (Naylor, 1989).

The idea for an alliance between the Honduran government and Robinson originated after a Honduran official visited the Black River settlement in 1840. The official reported that the Miskitu leader was displeased with how the Mosquito King was awarding concessions to the British (Bueso, 1840). When the Honduran official visited Black River, he was able to confirm that several Englishmen were already in the area preparing for the arrival of the European colonists. The Honduran official mentioned that Robinson spoke to him privately about his desire to have an audience with the Honduran government, making a point that the Miskitu chief was trying to hide his intentions from the British settlers (Bueso, 1840).

An alliance between the Honduran government and Robinson represented a risk to both parties but one that seemed worth taking with the ascent of the British Protectorate. An alliance with Robinson may not have been the Honduran government's most desirable course of action, considering that they vehemently denied the legitimacy of the Miskitu political authorities. However, British influence in the area had grown significantly, making the Honduran government more amenable to considering the agreement. In 1842, the British attacked

Nicaraguan troops in San Juan del Norte to defend the southern border of the Mosquito Kingdom. British authorities became even more insistent about defining the northern border with the Honduran government (Naylor, 1989). Likewise, Robinson was more inclined to consider an alliance with the enemy because the sudden death of King Robert Charles Frederick in 1842 created a power vacuum in the Mosquito Kingdom. Although Robinson was one of three Miskitu chiefs appointed as regents, he felt threatened at the prospect of the potential erosion of his authority on Black River (Naylor, 1989). The Honduran government took the first step to formalize an alliance with Robinson by inviting his son to stay in the capital of Comayagua to learn Spanish and a trade (Sorel, 1842).²⁶

The alliance was ratified with the signing of a treaty in December 1843 in the capital of Comayagua. The rhetoric in the official press was that Robinson had made a “spontaneous” visit to the capital “to pay the government its due tribute” (Cisneros, 1845, p. 20). Contrary to this rhetoric, it took about a year for the Honduran government to get everything ready for the visit. The preparations started on the wrong foot when the initial commission that was supposed to travel to Black River to meet Robinson could not complete the assignment. In December 1842, the government in Comayagua commissioned Guillermo Herrera, a rancher from Olancho who was familiar with the region, to travel to the Mosquito Shore to meet with Robinson (Ayala, 1842). On his way to the coast, Herrera was supposed to find José Lamotte and ask him to participate in the commission as an interpreter.²⁷ Herrera found Lamotte at the Hacienda of San Felipe, but he was in the company of the Englishman Blanchard. Herrera suspected Blanchard of smuggling and reported the anomalies to the commander in Juticalpa, Olancho (Ayala, 1843). A

²⁶ General Lowry Robinson’s son arrived in Comayagua in 1842. His first three years in the capital went quietly, but his baptism in 1845 was announced in *El Redactor*. The president of Honduras acted as his godfather and the baptism was seen as a symbolic act against the spread of Anglicanism among the Miskitu (El Redactor, 1845).

²⁷ Lamotte was a French national and nephew of Juan Bautista Loustalet, the chief commander at the Trujillo port.

small troop arrived in the hacienda but did not find any smuggled goods.²⁸ However, they were unable to persuade Lamotte to travel to the coast. Herrera reported that Blanchard had discouraged them from completing the mission by saying that the coast was in upheaval and that Robinson was away in Belize. Eventually, Lamotte did travel to Black River, and he was the one who accompanied the General during this trip to Comayagua and served as his interpreter.²⁹

During the preparation for the visit, the Honduran government struggled to maintain Miskitu expectations for diplomacy that were established in relation to the British. This struggle is seen in the difficulties encountered to honor Robinson's request for new clothes to travel to the capital. Miskitu leaders took great pride in wearing Western-style military dress and clothes that symbolized their alliances and authority (Dennis & Olien, 1984). It was customary for the British to present clothes as part of the gifts that sustained diplomacy with the Miskitu leaders (Olien, 1983). When the British retreated from the coast at the end of the eighteenth century, the Spanish tried to continue the practice of providing gifts, but many of the Miskitu leaders were dissatisfied with the quantity and quality of the goods (Williams, 2013). Even the Spanish seemed to have had fewer problems providing gifts than the Honduran government. Robinson requested from the Honduran government a wardrobe of six shirts, six pairs of pants, two pairs of shoes, and a straw hat to travel to the capital. However, the Honduran government struggled to cover the modest request.³⁰ Initially, their funds could only cover four shirts, four pairs of pants, a pair of shoes,

²⁸ Later in July 1843, Blanchard threatened to attack Juticalpa with a group of 500 Miskitu, English, and Carib men to demand payment for an outstanding debt, which could be related to seized goods (Zepeda, 1843).

²⁹ In payment for his services, Lamotte received a grant for land upon request to graze cattle on the banks of the Guallape River (Bustillo, 1843).

³⁰ For comparison, the Governor of Jamaica offered prince George Frederic a wardrobe valued in eighteen hundred dollars during a visit to Jamaica in 1804 (Olien, 1983).

and a hat (ANH, 1843a). Even after the visit was concluded, the government still owed Lamotte for the jacket and pair of pants he bought for the General with his own money (ANH, 1843b).

Despite the potential for a strategic alliance that would serve both Honduran and Robinson's interests against the British, the Honduran government elected to portray the treaty-making process in paternalistic terms. On the occasion of Robinson's arrival in Comayagua, the official newspaper *El Redactor* described the General as "the chief of that disgraced Segment of wandering Hondurans still uncultured, no doubt due to the egoism of the Europeans who did not bring that which we now call civilization" (El Redactor, 1843, p. 357). The article claimed that the General was now convinced that Honduras was ready to recognize him as their "fellow citizen and brother" (El Redactor, 1843, p. 357). The political class favored the ideals of French republicanism promising equality and citizenship rights (Barahona, 2009).³¹ The strong paternalism of the official press occluded the strategic value that the alliance had for the Honduran government. This narrative framed Robinson as the lesser party when it was the Honduran government trying to lure him into turning its back on the Mosquito King and the more powerful British allies.

The agreement was signed on December 16, 1843. Curiously, the agreement itself did not contain any language referring to the disputed sovereignty on the Mosquito Shore. The agreement had sixteen articles, most of them concerning trade. The agreement guaranteed free transit and protection of Honduran citizens in the area controlled by the General. The Honduran government guaranteed the same right for the Miskitu traveling on Honduran territory. The Miskitu were allowed to sell their products to Hondurans, except for smuggled goods, and the

³¹ Political classes in all of Central America also used the concept of equality under the law to strip the Indigenous communities of the rights that they enjoyed under colonial rule (Mahoney, 2001). In Honduras, the political class was never able to fully eliminate these special rights (Barahona, 2009).

Honduran government promised to protect Miskitu property (as in goods). The Honduran government did not mention an intent to occupy or establish their own settlements on the Mosquito Shore. However, they agreed to cooperate in future colonization projects that involved European nations. In terms of a civilization program, the Honduran government promised to propose measures to introduce civilization to the Mosquito Shore, but the General was responsible for their implementation (meaning that the Honduran government was not promising any funds). There was no specific mention of military cooperation, but the General was supposed to assist the Honduran government when required. Also, a mail service was established for regular communication between Comayagua and Black River.

The only source that discusses what the Miskitu thought of the agreement are two documents included in a book written by Honduran writer and politician Augusto Coello (1923). The first document is an undated letter sent by General Metizon to President Ferrara. Metizon was Robinson's cousin and also bore the title of General. Although Robinson was considered the official representative of the Miskitu in the Black River area, Metizon's older age granted him special status in Miskitu political society. Since he could not travel to Comayagua due to his advanced age, Metizon asked Lamotte to write a letter for him that would serve as Robinson's introduction to President Ferrara. In this letter, Metizon referred to the previous alliance between the Miskitu of Black River and the Spanish.³² Metizon mentioned that under Spanish rule, "we were happier, our nation was brighter, but now look at the despondency that we are subjected to under a kingdom protected by the English" (Coello, 1923, p. 59). He credited the Spanish for doing them many favors, including introducing cattle to the Mosquito Shore.

³² Metizon is specifically referring to the period when the Spanish briefly resumed control of the Black River at the end of the eighteenth century.

The second document in Coello's book is a statement prepared by Robinson to address the Honduran government. In the statement, Robinson declared that their interests in an agreement were to establish means of communication, such as ports and roads, to facilitate trade between "one nation and the other" (Coello, 1923, p. 61). The Miskitu were especially interested in being able to purchase cattle from Honduran ranchers. Robinson identified a location on the Guayape River, one of the Patuca's tributaries, where they could open a port. He promised to clear a road from the river to the settlement in Black River and offer his protection to the vessels that travel on this route. The statement suggests that it was Robinson's idea to set up an official mail service between Black River and Comayagua to report on any British attempts to gain control of his territory.

The treaty served to show the agency of the Miskitu chiefs. The two documents cited by Coello provide a window into how the Miskitu chiefs themselves viewed the strategic value of the alliance. Far from assuming an autarkic position, they were interested in establishing trade relations with Honduras without necessarily falling under its authority. Another evidence of Miskitu agency is the fact that the Nicaraguan government criticized its Honduran counterpart for signing the treaty. The Nicaraguans did not approve that the Honduran government was elevating Robinson to the status of a state representative with whom they could sign a treaty.³³ The criticism must have gotten to the Hondurans because they promised to renegotiate the agreement to clarify that Honduras did not recognize the Mosquito Kingdom (Coello, 1923). However, there is no indication that any substantial efforts were made to renegotiate the treaty with Robinson.

³³ The agreement speaks of "a treaty of friendship, alliance, and mutual protection between the state of Honduras and the peoples that have recognized General Lowry Robinson as the successor of the Mosquito King" (ANH, 1843c).

Similarly, the British did not take it lightly that Robinson had signed an agreement with the Hondurans. The troops that accompanied the General back to the Mosquito Shore reported that British agents had tried to sabotage Robinson's visit (Zelaya, 1844). Before the trip, a British subject attempted to convince the General not to go with Lamotte to Comayagua, telling him that the Hondurans would imprison him. While the General was away, British agents spread rumors that he was already in a Honduran prison. The trip must have represented a high risk to Robinson's position on the coast. Although he had delegated authority to General Metizon, it was no guarantee against the British efforts to undermine his authority. In fact, the agreement between Robinson and the Honduran government catalyzed the decision by the British Superintendent in Belize to send Patrick Walker to officially reestablish the British Protectorate on the Mosquito Shore (Naylor, 1989).

In light of the controversies with Nicaragua and the British, there is no evidence that the agreement itself led to any substantial change in the way that affairs were handled in the Black River area. The possible reason for any absence of change is the fact that the British reinforced their efforts to maintain control of the coast. The official declaration of the second British Protectorate effectively neutralized any action that Robinson could have taken. Robinson died in 1846. He was the last of the paramount chiefs of Black River. After him, no other Miskitu chief enjoyed the same level of authority (Olien, 1998). This could explain why the 1843 agreement was not discussed again in communications about the Mosquito Shore, as no counterpart could enforce it. However, there is evidence that the Miskitu chiefs continued to approach the Honduran authorities to safeguard their local interests against the Mosquito King and the British policies. For example, General Metizon continued to inform the Honduran authorities in Trujillo about the timber concessions operated by the British on the Mosquito Shore (Loustalet, 1847d).

The 1843 agreement between Honduras and Robinson shows two facets of state formation during the early period of the Honduran republic. First, the Honduran government had to hide the strategic value that an alliance with the Miskitu chiefs had for them by presenting the treaty-making process in paternalistic terms. Similarly to the way that Offen (2004) described the grandiosity of the geographical imagination as an indirect function of state capacity, we can say that the language of paternalism was aggrandized to cover up for the weakness in state capacity that pushed the Honduran government to seek an alliance with a Miskitu chief. Second, and inversely to the argument about the weakness of the Honduran government, we can observe the agency that Miskitu chiefs had over the management of local affairs. Robinson's and Metizon's actions showed their will to be autonomous from the Mosquito King. This is an early indication of the regional differences that separated the Honduran and Nicaraguan Mosquitia. Also, as shown later in this chapter, it points to how the Honduran state would come to rely on local chiefs for the administration of some state functions. Next, I turn to the management of timber concessions, another arena for state formation during this period.

ii) Taxation: Exerting Control Over Timber Concessions

The Honduran government sought to curtail British influence on the Mosquito Shore but without necessarily closing out the region to British cutters and other potential European investors. The government depended heavily on tariffs from the mahogany trade to fund the public treasury, and England was the main market for mahogany. Also, British cutters based in Belize controlled the trade. Therefore, the finances of the Honduran state depended on these cutters being able to ship mahogany to England. The Honduran government was also interested in partnerships with British investors to establish new colonies for European migrants, but mahogany was by far a more important activity.

The Belizean woodcutters tried to get concessions from both the Honduran government and the Mosquito King for mahogany. Both the Honduran government and the Mosquito King claim sovereignty over the watersheds of the Aguan and Black Rivers, which were both rich in mahogany wood. The British claimed that the Aguan River was the natural border between the two countries, but Honduras denied it.³⁴ In some way, Belizean woodcutters were responsible for dragging the British government to reactivate the protectorate in the Mosquito Shore (Naylor, 1989). The Honduran government either cooperated with or intimidated the woodcutters to ensure that the fees and customs duties of mahogany works went to their coffers rather than to those of the Mosquito King. The willingness of the Honduran government to allow British subjects to work in Mosquitia despite being involved in open conflict with the British authorities shows that commercial interests trumped any rhetoric of defending national sovereignty. Paradoxically, Honduran efforts to capture tariffs often ended in further indebtedness for the Honduran government as they reimbursed traders for damages incurred by the confiscated timber.

The actions of the Honduran government need to be understood within the unequal relations among countries in the world-system. Historian Dario Euraque (2015) explains that in the 1840s, the Honduran government suffered from excess indebtedness and became more dependent on timber concessions to service its debt. Before independence, Honduras was one of the provinces that generated less fiscal revenue for the colonial administration in Guatemala. In the 1820s, the whole Central American region was engulfed in an economic depression with the collapse of export markets for indigo and silver. The newly independent Central American Federation began to issue bonds and acquire loans with British banks. When Honduras separated

³⁴ The Aguan River was also referred to as the Roman or Romano River in the nineteenth century.

from the Federation, they assumed a debt of 27,000 pounds (Yeager, 1975, cited in Euraque, 2015). The plan was to pay this debt with the profits and tariff taxes from the mahogany trade on the North Coast (Guevara-Escudero, 1983, cited in Revels, 2003). The area between the Aguan and Patuca Rivers contained some of the most important mahogany reserves, but it was under the control of the Mosquito Kingdom, backed by the British. Therefore, the fiscal health of the Honduran state depended on keeping the British government out to be able to levy taxes on the Belize cutters to pay off the debt to British banks.

The territory of the Mosquito Shore on which the Honduran state pretended to assert its sovereignty was largely shaped by the practices of independent businessmen competing against one another. Belize-based cutters began to arrive on the Aguan and Black Rivers watersheds in the 1820s when the supply of logwood in Belize diminished and the demand for mahogany in England increased.³⁵ Cutters operated independently from each other under conditions of fierce competition (Naylor, 1989). They competed for access to well-stocked logging areas that were close to navigable rivers, geographical conditions that helped them to maximize profits.³⁶ The two areas with the highest density of mahogany trees in Honduras were the Chamelécon and Ulúa watersheds in the west and the Aguan and Black watersheds in the east. The mahogany reserves on the eastern front were monopolized by a concession granted to Francisco Morazan, leaving the eastern front as the most attractive location for newcomers (Revels, 2003). Cutters tried to secure concessions in the eastern front from either the Honduran government or the Mosquito King.

³⁵ Demand for mahogany-made fine furniture increased all over Europe, particularly in England, during the Industrial Revolution (Naylor, 1989).

³⁶ The distribution of trees and the proximity to a river made all the difference in the cost of the operation (Revels, 2002).

British diplomacy over the Mosquito Shore evolved around protecting the private interests of British citizens who obtained concessions from the Mosquito King rather than the advancement of strategic goals.³⁷ Honduran officials were well aware of the motivations behind British intervention and constantly remarked that the British were only interested in the Miskitu to exploit their resources. As seen in Morales's response to MacDonald at the start of this chapter, the official rhetoric of the Honduran government was that the Honduran state was interested in civilizing the Miskitu and integrating them into the nation rather than merely exploiting them (Morales, 1842). However, the acts performed by the Honduran government in their attempts to assert sovereignty over the Mosquito Shore showed that they were equally driven by an interest in the mahogany profits rather than instituting a civilization program.

The historical record suggests that the conflicts generated by Morazan's concession were the first time that the Honduran government paid proper attention to affairs on the Mosquito Shore. As the most important political and military figure in Central American politics, Morazan used his political influence to obtain an extraordinarily generous concession for timber from the Honduran government in 1835 (Revels, 2003). The concession stretched along the North Coast from the Ulua River to the Patuca River and virtually covered all commercial mahogany in the country. Morazan obtained the exclusive right to cut and sell mahogany for twelve years and named the Belize-based merchant Marshall Bennett as his sole agent. With virtually all the mahogany reserves monopolized by Morazan and Bennet, Belizean merchants looked eastward to the Mosquito King to secure their own concessions. Hydes and Forbes were the first to obtain

³⁷ Naylor refers to this form of diplomacy as "informal empire," which was characterized for lacking a grand design for intervention (Naylor, 1989).

a grant from King Robert Frederick in 1836 to fell timber from Cape Camaron to Cape Gracias a Dios (Revels, 2003).

The Morazan concession began a series of commercial and diplomatic disputes between Honduras and Great Britain that significantly shaped the territorial contestation over the Mosquito Shore from the late 1830s to 1850s. Morazan promptly complained to the British Consul for Central America, Frederick Chatfield, that the concession awarded by King Robert to Hydes and Forbes was on Honduran territory (Revels, 2003). Morazan sent direct notice to the Mosquito King to desist him from granting any more concessions. According to Naylor (1989), Superintendent MacDonald used Morazan's threats as an excuse to increase the intensity of British influence on the region. The Colonial Office had been hesitant about the strategic value of committing resources to defend the Mosquito Shore, but MacDonald was able to convince the Foreign Secretary Lord Palmerston that defending a historical ally was also a question of maintaining British hegemony over the Caribbean region. In the following years, Chatfield and MacDonald would try numerous times to get the Honduran government to clarify the border between the two countries. Meanwhile, Belizean woodcutters moved back and forth between the two jurisdictions seeking to secure access to the mahogany stocks.

The conflict over mahogany concessions illuminates some of the dynamics contributing to state formation on the Mosquito Shore. One dynamic was the central role that the Trujillo port played in managing the affairs on the Mosquito Shore. The military commandant and the customs office at the Trujillo port were the key agencies where the Honduran government enacted its policy to control the concessions. The commandant was in charge of patrolling the area, apprising woodcutters of unauthorized works, confiscating timber, and closing down cattle

roads.³⁸ Sometimes, workers were taken to the jail in Trujillo. They would also supervise that imported supplies shipped to the woodcutters paid the customs duties.³⁹ The objective was to ensure that Honduras benefitted from the payment of the cutting fees and customs duties. Honduras charged 5 dollars per tree, a higher fee than the 2 dollars charged by the Mosquito King (Revels, 2002). The custom office drafted the contracts for the mahogany works and received the payments. The Trujillo authorities had limited staffing to patrol the vast area, but they relied on reports from informants and the complaints of other woodcutters to identify offenders. They would also find out about works authorized by the Mosquito King by reading the advertisements for public auction of timber felling in the Belizean press (Sorel, 1841).

The Trujillo port authorities performed their functions with only partial knowledge about the plans of the national government in Comayagua. The Trujillo authorities were sometimes uninformed of the concessions granted by the national government. For example, the General Intendency awarded the Belizean merchant James Welsh the right to fell five hundred trees in exchange for the same number of rifles. Welsh was the largest woodcutter working with the Honduran government. The Trujillo commandant did not know that Welsh had an arrangement with the Intendency when he was questioned in August of 1843 for felling timber on the Aguan River (Gonzalez, 1843). Part of the confusion was that Welsh did not have a contract issued by the customs office in Trujillo. In February 1843, a Honduran official had already requested the Intendency General to notify the Trujillo custom office about the agreement with Welsh, but this information did not seem to have reached the local authorities (Bulnes, 1843). A Honduran woodcutter that also obtained a concession on the Aguan River expressed his concern about the

³⁸ Cattle were needed to pull the carts that moved the logs.

³⁹ Woodcutters generally shipped supplies from Belize that consisted of salted pork, flour, rum, biscuits, and materials for logging (Revels, 2002).

informality with which the Honduran government had handled Welsh's operations. The Honduran woodcutter was concerned that, without accountability from the customs office, Welsh would cut more trees than agreed, possibly encroaching on his concession (Prieto, 1844).

Despite the interest in stopping loggers from working under concessions awarded by Mosquito King, the Trujillo port authorities lacked the resources needed to prevent unauthorized works and confiscate the timber. Juan Bautista Loustalet, the military commander in Trujillo, often complained about the inadequate resources for supervision and defense. In 1846, Loustalet reported that he could not stop a schooner coming from the Aguan River because he did not have a ship; he requested a budget for a vessel and an additional troop of eight men for the patrol (Loustalet, 1846a). A year later, the approval for the funding to procure the ship was still pending (Loustalet, 1847b). The budgetary problems extended to the payment of wages and allowances. The commander in Trujillo did not have a budget for a regular patrol to the Mosquito Shore and had to request funds to Comayagua for the payments and allowances of the officials (Loustalet, 1847a). On one occasion, a group of men sent on an expedition to the Mosquito Shore complained that they did not receive their wages (Loustalet, 1847c). As a solution to budgetary problems, Loustalet proposed that the sale of seized timber be used to cover the cost of apprising unauthorized woodcutters (Loustalet, 1846b).

As explained, the Belize-based woodcutters had played a significant role in reactivating the British Protectorate on the Mosquito Shore. Their actions also directly contributed to the ways in which the Honduran government attempted to enact its state presence over the Mosquito Shore. The traders developed personal connections with jurisdictional authorities that served as conduits for the enactment of state acts. These personal connections were fundamental for large traders who aimed to secure monopoly-like concessions. Obtaining one of the said concessions

was an investment, which required the traders to remain loyal to one or another jurisdiction. Other minor woodcutters bought their rights from these more extensive concessions and were more likely to switch between jurisdictions.⁴⁰ During the 1840s, Antonio Mathe and James Welsh were two of the largest woodcutters working in the region. Mathe worked in concessions awarded by the Mosquito King and Welsh in those awarded by the Honduran government. Their concessions became the target of efforts by the Honduran and British authorities to reassert their authority. The settlements of their private commercial affairs became a matter of diplomacy in asserting sovereign rights on the Mosquito Shore.

Mathe's compensation claim to the Honduran government became one of the primary conduits for the British and Mosquito King to assert sovereignty on the eastern border. The Mosquito King granted Mathe permission to work in an area previously awarded to Archibald Montgomery (Loustalet, 1846b). The Honduran government questioned Montgomery for his works, and to avoid any problems, the woodcutter reluctantly agreed to enter into a contract with Honduras and pay for the timber. When Mathe showed up to work in the same area, the Hondurans expected him to pay for the fell wood as per the previous contract with Montgomery (Zelaya, 1847). However, Mathe argued that he was working on an area that belonged to the Mosquito Kingdom. Honduran troops seized Mathe's provisions and assets in 1847, interrupting his work (Naylor, 1989). Mathe complained to the British government about the abuses of the Honduran army on Miskitu territory. In response, the British official in charge of the protectorate sent a ship to the Aguan to display military presence on behalf of the Mosquito King. Also, the British consul in Guatemala began diplomatic communication to demand compensation for

⁴⁰ For example, Robert Wardlaw initially worked with Welsh on the Aguan River with Honduran permission. Then, he obtained a permit from the Miskitu King to work independently in the Limon area, but the Honduran authorities intercepted him. He desisted from this work and worked again for others, including Welsh and Mathe (Revels, 2002).

Mathe's losses.⁴¹ The claims for Mathe's compensation dragged for many years and served as an excuse for the British Consul to put pressure on the clarification of the border between Honduras and the Mosquito Kingdom.

On the other hand, Welsh's relationship with the Honduran government also served as a conduit for establishing a Honduran presence on the Mosquito Shore. As explained, Welsh worked under a concession awarded by the Honduran government. British officials did not take it lightly that a British national was working under Honduran law when the British were trying to protect the interests of the Mosquito Kingdom in the area (Revels, 2002). As a result, MacDonald demanded that Welsh switch sides and pay the Mosquito King for the mahogany works. However, Welsh had invested considerable money in securing a monopoly for mahogany on the Aguan River from the Honduran government. Switching loyalties this far in the game was a substantial risk to his investment. Therefore, Welsh decided to maintain its concession with the Honduran government.

The most visible signs of Honduran military presence in the Mosquito Shore during the British Protectorate were to defend Welsh's private interests. In 1851, Welsh wrote to the Honduran government to inform them that on October 22, the Mosquito King had arrived at the Aguan River, along with the British officials James Green and James Daly, to demand payment for the timber he had felled in the area (Welsh, 1851b). This visit followed an earlier one that James Daly had conducted in 1850 to demand that payments be made to the Mosquito King (Daly, 1850).⁴² The king's men prevented Welsh from loading the timber to his schooners. In

⁴¹ Mathe's made claims for actual losses and the depreciation of his mahogany works, which brought the sum to \$103,938 pesos (Revels, 2002). However, Chatfield considered that Mathe shared some of the blame and presented only a sum of \$17,738 pesos to the Honduran government for reimbursement (Chatfield, 1848; Revels, 2002).

⁴² James Daly was a captain of the British navy stationed on the mouth of the Aguan to protect the interests of the Miskitu King and the woodcutters working under his jurisdiction.

response to Welsh's supplication, the Honduran government promised to offer its support, but no military action followed (Velásquez, 1851b). In 1852, again, Welsh wrote to the Honduran government to request assistance against intrusion by another woodcutter, John Carmichael, who was working on the Limas sector (Welsh, 1851a). This was one of the areas where Mathe had previously worked and had sold its rights to others. On November 10, 1852, the commandant in Trujillo sent a troop of sixty men to stop the works (Alvarez, 1852). This operation was the most vigorous exercise of military presence displayed during this period, and it was to defend Welsh's interests. The Honduran government demanded that the fell timber be given to Welsh and ordered Carmichael to seek out new permits for operations in areas outside Welsh's concession.

Welsh's concession proved to be a conduit for the Honduran government to establish its authority on the Mosquito Shore. The defense of Welsh's concessionary rights justified the raid that the Honduran military carried out in the sector of Limas, the most notable example of military action during this period. Also, the Honduran president José Velásquez mentioned the payments that Welsh made to his government as evidence of Honduran sovereignty in discussions with the British Consul (Velásquez, 1851a). The Honduran government even used diplomatic channels with the British authorities to request that Welsh, a British subject, paid his obligations to them in full (Welsh, 1850). Although Welsh was moved by personal interest, his refusal to switch allegiances to the Mosquito King, even under British pressure, helped the Honduran government strengthen its claim.

Overall, the Honduran government ended on the losing side of this proxy war through the mahogany concessions. The Honduran government was constantly intimidated by British officials who demanded compensation payment for losses incurred by mahogany traders working under concessions granted by the Mosquito King. For example, in 1847 and 1851, the British

sent ships to Trujillo to demand compensation for timber seized. The Honduran officials openly recognized their disadvantaged position against the British authorities to highlight the unfairness in these dealings. For example, in reply to Chatfield's demands to compensate Mathe, the Honduran foreign minister responded that the "weak government of Honduras" had no choice but to denounce Great Britain's unfair treatment to the other nations of the world (Zelaya, 1848, p. 210). Sometimes, the Honduran government sometimes had no choice but to pay the compensation to the mahogany traders. In the Mathe case, the Honduran government finally agreed to pay 10,000 pesos annually from the Trujillo custom duties to cover the debt to avoid a blockade on the ports by the British navy (ANH, 1851).⁴³

Honduras's proxy war over mahogany concessions gave the country little control over the area. Ultimately, the intervention of the U.S. in Central American affairs is what allowed Honduras to assert its sovereignty over the area. The U.S. had become more interested in Central America after the Mexican-American War and the discovery of gold in California in 1848. The region offered the potential for an inter-oceanic route to connect the east and west coast of the U.S. In 1850, the U.S. and Great Britain signed the Treaty of Clayton-Bulwer, guaranteeing neutrality over the control of an inter-oceanic canal in Central America. In the next decade, U.S. influence in Central America grew as Great Britain started to become more interested in its colonies in Asia. In the context of this transition of hegemonic powers, Great Britain agreed to sign treaties with Honduras in 1859 and Nicaragua in 1860 that marked the end of the British Protectorate. In Nicaragua, where the influence of the British Protectorate had been more

⁴³ The agreement proposed by Chatfield was to pay \$20,000 pesos annually to cover a total debt of \$109,861.50 pesos.

substantial, the British negotiated for the reorganization of the Mosquito Kingdom into the Mosquito Reserve. In Honduras, however, the Mosquito Kingdom officially ceased to exist.

Although the proxy war over concessions was ultimately not a winning strategy for Honduras, it shows two critical dimensions of state formation during this period. First, the commercial interests of private individuals served as the conduits for the materialization of the Honduran state. Second, the locus of state action on the Mosquito Shore was the Trujillo port, where the local authorities often acted with partial knowledge and insufficient resources to carry the government's mandate. This amalgamation of state formation with concessions and the influence of Trujillo on the affairs of the Mosquito Shore continued well throughout the first half of the twentieth century. This next section will elaborate more on the implications of these legacies for governance in the region.

iii) Administration: From Evangelization to Rational Exploit of Resources

With the dissolution of the Mosquito Kingdom and the British authorities out of the game, in the 1860s, the Honduran government had for the first time the space to accomplish its plans for state building on the Mosquito Shore. What did the Honduran authorities do to fill that space, and what were the implications for state formation? The Honduran government found that, even with the British out of the way, the task of accomplishing its civilization mission faced numerous challenges that they could not easily overcome. Offen argued that, in the case of the Nicaragua Mosquitia, “the prevailing geographical imagination overlooked environmental constraints as a significant factor affecting the viability of human endeavours” (Offen, 2004, p. 87). Likewise, the low population density and rugged terrain in the Honduran Moskitia proved to be significant challenges for establishing state presence in the region.

The geographical imagination of the Honduran authorities concerning the consolidation of state presence in the region responded to changes in Honduran politics. In the 1870s, Honduras experienced a political regime transition from conservatism to liberalism that brought new interests to the resources on the Mosquito Shore. One can trace how these different political regimes tried to apply their political imaginaries in the face of significant environmental constraints. This historical trajectory shows how the discourse of the civilization mission on the Mosquito Shore was transformed over the years. This transformation also helps to situate better the legacies of governance that persisted until the twentieth century and more directly influenced contemporary struggles. For the third case, I will explain the transformation of the civilization mission during conservative and liberal rule.

When Honduras signed the Treaty of Wykes-Cruz, the political system was still dominated by conservative rule. The first set of government policies toward Mosquitia resembled the colonial policies based on *reducciones* and evangelization. In fact, the Spanish priest Manuel Subirana was primarily responsible for setting up the direction of policy toward the Mosquito Shore.⁴⁴ Subirana had managed to establish missionary activities among the Xicaques and Pech on the north coast, making him one of the most influential figures on Indigenous policy at the time. Subirana had created regulations to evangelize and protect the rights of the Indigenous population in the Yoro sector that served as a model for how the Honduran government should attempt to install rule in the Mosquito Shore (Alvarado García,

⁴⁴ Subirana was a Spanish Jesuit missionary that arrived in Honduras in 1856. He carried out missionary work in Honduras until his death in 1864.

1964).⁴⁵ Yoro had also been one of the borderlands during colonial rule, an area befitting Scott's characterization of zones of refuge.

The responsibility to carry out Subirana's regulations rested on Lamotte, who was appointed as the first governor of the Mosquito Shore in 1861. As mentioned earlier, Lamotte was the person responsible for accompanying Robinson during his visit to Comayagua in 1843, and he participated in military deployments to supervise mahogany works on the Aguan watershed. His appointment was as the civil and military governor of the *Mosquito tribes*. One aspect to notice is that Lamotte's authority was to be exercised on the population rather than on a territorial jurisdiction per se. In the aftermath of the 1859 agreement, the Honduran authorities had not yet determined the territorial status of the Mosquito Shore within the country's political division. The tendency to associate the geography of the Mosquito Shore with the Miskitu population was also present in the 1843 agreement with Robinson, where the area was identified with the population that considered him the successor of the Mosquito King.

Based on Subirana's instructions, Lamotte's task as governor was to start a civilization program that reproduced the model of Indian townships present in other parts of Honduras. This program required settling the Miskitu population into permanent locations where they could practice farming, receive catechism, and obtain school instruction (Gómez, 1861/1958). As governor, Lamotte was supposed to reside in La Criba, the former Black River settlement site. This location suggested that the Honduran gaze on the Mosquito Shore was still focused on the Aguan and Black River watershed mahogany resources. The area east of the Patuca River was relatively unknown to the Honduran authorities. However, Lamotte did not have an easy time

⁴⁵ Subirana is well-remembered among the contemporaneous Indigenous movement for convincing the Honduran government to title communal lands in favor of the Xicaque and Pech. These titles became the basis for the vindication of land rights in the 1980s and 1990s for these communities.

trying to implement Subirana's instructions. One could assume that Lamotte was one of the most experienced with the affairs on the coast among Honduran officials and could presumably communicate with the native population. Nevertheless, soon after assuming office, Lamotte wrote to the governor of Olancho to notify that Mosquito Shore was in a state of "anarchy." (ANH, 1862b). In his letter, Lamotte mentioned that the *Caribs* [Garifuna] were submissive but that the *Sambos* [Miskitu] were insubordinate. Lamotte partly blamed the Honduran authorities for contributing to this state of anarchy.

According to Lamotte, the Miskitu were insubordinate because they did not believe that the Honduran state was the sovereign authority. This distrust was not necessarily born out of allegiance to their former ruler, the Mosquito King, but rather resulted from the lack of visible acts of Honduran sovereignty in the area. Lamotte reported that the Miskitu in Black River were visited by the Mosquito King in 1860, who informed them that they would be under the protection of the Honduran flag from now on. Since then, the local population had been expecting a visit by high-level Honduran authorities to ratify the handover. In particular, Lamotte noted that the locals were disappointed that the Honduran government had not sent a box of ammunition to perform an official ceremony to raise the Honduran flag as they had done on the island of Roatan. This reference to the ceremony in Roatan referred to an event in June 1861, during which the Trujillo commandant visited the island to take formal possession of the Bay Islands (Padilla Durán, 1861). During this event, the government envoy read a statement that President Santos Guardiola had prepared to inform the population of the Bay Islands about their rights (Santos Guardiola, 1861).

The Honduran government did not take the same level of action to uphold the obligations in the treaty of Wykes-Cruz with respect to the subjects of the Mosquito King compared to those

of the British monarch. There is no evidence that the president issued a statement for the Miskitu population like the one he read for the British subjects in Roatan. The treaty included clauses to equally protect the property of British subjects and the possessions of the Miskitu. While a commission was established to manage the property claims of the British subjects in the Bay Islands and the Mosquito Shore, there were no comparable actions taken to uphold the rights of the Miskitu population. For the most part, most British subjects decided to exchange their property in Mosquitia for land closer to Honduran settlements (ANH, 1862a). The treaty also obligated Honduras to educate the native population and pay an annuity of 5,000 pesos to the head of the Miskitu for ten years.⁴⁶ There is no evidence that these funds were ever disbursed. In fact, the Honduran government tried to renegotiate the treaty to remove the payment of the annuity to the Miskitu (*Legación de Honduras en Francia*, 1862).

Although Lamotte could have been exaggerating his claim on the state of affairs in Black River, his argument that the local Miskitu population seemed disappointed with the poor showcase of Honduran sovereignty is plausible. We know that Robinson's earlier visit to the capital had involved some degree of diplomatic formalities. Also, the Miskitu chiefs were used to the formalities with which the British dealt with the affairs of the Mosquito Kingdom. Robinson himself had presumably visited Belize, where he received his education (Olien, 1998). Furthermore, the raising of the Honduran or Miskitu flag had occurred on several occasions during the military raids performed by both parties to claim sovereignty over the area occupied by the mahogany works. To correct this situation, Lamotte requested assistance from the

⁴⁶ The annuity was to be guaranteed by forest resources of the Mosquito Shore. The annuity could be seen as a continuation of the practice that the British had of paying gifts to local leaders.

governor of Olancho to secure an allowance to travel to Comayagua and inform the government in person about the need to increase state presence in the area.

After a brief visit to Comayagua, Lamotte returned to La Criba to proceed with his plans for a civilization mission. One of Subirana's instructions was to appoint local authorities to serve as middlemen between the government and the population. Lamotte lamented that he had been unsuccessful in making many appointments because of the sparse distribution of the population (Lamotte, 1862).⁴⁷ Apart from the civilization mission, Lamotte was also responsible for protecting the resources on the Mosquito Shore from unauthorized extraction. British woodcutters had not ceased to fell timber on areas claimed by Honduras, particularly in the Wangki River watershed. However, Lamotte claimed that he needed an additional allowance to carry out the trip of 128 miles to apprise the woodcutter (Lamotte, 1862). Ultimately, Lamotte could not accomplish the Honduran project of state-building because of the insufficient resources he had that were no match to the environmental constraints for travel.

Lamotte's tenure as governor was short, from 1861 to 1863, with little success in the tall order of tasks that he had been assigned. In 1863, Lamotte was removed from the governorship after a quarrel with the prominent Garifuna military leader, Juan Francisco Bulnes (Suazo, 2016). Bulnes, also known as Captain Bull, had been Morazan's personal bodyguard during the Central American civil wars and was rewarded for his service by receiving the title of chief of the Garifuna on the North Coast (Suazo, 2016). The nature of the quarrel between Lamotte and Bulnes is unknown, but it was enough to destitute the former. Bulnes enjoyed high legitimacy as a leader so much that Father Subirana pled with the government to name him governor

⁴⁷ Lamotte counted thirty-nine settlements between Black River and the Cape of Gracias a Dios, in addition to the population of Paya, Tawakas, and Uluas living inland. However, he claimed that he was able to talk to some communities about agriculture, morals, and religion, as well as assign a few places for the construction of oratories.

(Subirana, 1864/1958). Subirana claimed that there was no better person than Bulnes, a native himself who spoke the local languages, to carry out the arduous task of touring villages. Bulnes was appointed as governor in 1864 (Suazo, 2016).⁴⁸ In 1866, the commandant in Trujillo, General Alvarado, took direct control to supervise mahogany works better, but he kept Bulnes as the lieutenant governor.

In 1868, still within the conservative period, the Mosquito Shore received official recognition as a department of the Honduran Republic (Medina, 1868/1957).⁴⁹ This was the first time that the government called for a more substantial state-building program. The decree that established the department of Mosquitia called to assign a capital on the coast. The governor was vested with political, judicial, and taxation functions. One of the main responsibilities was to control smuggling that arrived through the ports of Mosquitia. Apart from the governor, the only other state personnel in the department were a sergeant, a corporal, and eight soldiers. However, the department of Mosquitia did not have representation in Congress, meaning that the government had failed to put in practice its discourse of extending full citizenship rights to the native population. However, state-building continued to be tethered to the principles of the civilization program outlined by Subirana during the conservative period.

Loreto Mazier was appointed as the first governor of the Department of Mosquitia. Mazier arrived on March 14, 1869, at a landing spot known as Bonnet Place in the Caratasca Lagoon with his family and ten men (Mazier, 1869/1957). His instructions were to establish the

⁴⁸ There is a discrepancy in the historical record as to whether Juan Francisco Bulnes was appointed governor in 1864. According to a chronology prepared by Pedro. J. Bustillo approximately in 1895, Victoriano Zambolá, a resident of Sangrelaya in Mosquitia, was appointed governor in 1964. Although his ethnicity is unknown, Zambolá grew up Mosquitia, and presumably also spoke the local languages and was familiar with the customs.

⁴⁹ President José María Medina conducted a general reorganization of the territorial administration and created the departments of Mosquitia, Copan, Cortes, El Paraiso, and La Paz. Medina also supported the creation of the department of La Victoria, between Choluteca and La Paz, to function as an Indigenous reserve. This department was abolished following Medina's removal.

capital of the department in this sector, which Lamotte had claimed difficult to access. This was the first time that the Honduran government was having a presence eastward of the Black River area. With a limited staff and budget, the governor effectively depended on the local chiefs to maintain control. Upon his arrival, Mazier told the local chiefs that he was willing to uphold the appointments they had held previously during the Mosquito Kingdom as long as they wanted to exercise them for the benefit of the Honduran state. Then, he proceeded to swear in the local chiefs using the titles of captain, quartermaster, and commander. Bulnes was appointed as commandant for the entire department.

There are clear differences between Lamotte's and Mazier's actions as governors that speak to a slow evolution in the civilization mission's approach. Lamotte's mandate was more focused on evangelization, while Mazier's also included building state presence. Even before arriving in Mosquitia, Mazier wrote to the government about his intention that the department had its own judicial court, so they would not have to depend on Trujillo for judicial affairs (ANH, 1869; Mazier, 1868).⁵⁰ In the same letter, he expressed his satisfaction in having found the official stationery that the government had given to Robinson a few years ago. He even submitted a design for the stamp that would bear the department's name in official correspondence.

Mazier faced challenges in his plan to civilize the Miskitu almost from the beginning. Soon after arriving, Mazier reported that he could not complete a tour around the department due to the "ill disposition" of the troops and Captain Bulnes (Mazier, 1869, cited Barahona, 2009, p. 154). The substitute governor, Felipe Rivera, conducted a shorter visit around the Caratasca

⁵⁰ The department of Mosquitia did not obtain its own judicial court. In 1869, the department was assigned to the judicial district of Comayagua (ANH, 1869).

Lagoon which was enough to discourage him about the prospects of building the state in this frontier. Rivera's opinion was that "there is so much poverty, or rather misery and isolation, that I can think of no way to get contributions from them except by material work which they give with little difficulty" (Rivera, 1869, cited in Barahona, 2009, p. 155).

In June 1869, the government issued a new decree that presumably would help Mazier in his state-building mission. The new decree approved one congressional representative for the department and gave the governor the authority to levy taxes (Congreso de la República, 1869).⁵¹ Some of the other duties were similar to those that Lamotte previously had, such as appointing local authorities as state representatives, finding places to settle the population, promoting evangelization, opening schools to teach the Spanish language, and instructing the natives on concepts such as property and agriculture. Presumably, the taxes from mahogany works would cover this civilization mission. In a subsequent amendment, the governor was given the authority to demand communal work from the local population (Congreso de la República, 1872). By 1870, the area between the Aguan and Black Rivers was divided into seven municipalities.⁵² The department held its first election in 1874 with an electorate of 350 votes (Sinclair, 1874).

The election of Marco Aurelio Soto in 1876 marked the start of the liberal reform period in which Honduras started to develop a more commercial orientation toward export markets. The liberal ideology marked a shift in the state-building program in the Mosquito Shore toward a greater interest in developing a scientific understanding of the region's resources and population in an attempt to exploit them commercially. However, the state-building program under the

⁵¹ The department of Gracias a Dios continues to have representation of only one representative in the Honduran Congress until today.

⁵² The seven municipalities were: Limon/Limoncito, Iriona, Sangrelaya/Tocamacho, La Criba/La Laguna, El Dorado, Agua Caliente, and Cusuna/Urraco (Sinclair, 1874).

liberal period was not a complete rupture from the earlier one. Instead, it could be seen as a reinvigoration of the civilization program by more direct participation of the Trujillo-based commercial elite. As explained in the previous section, the authorities in the Trujillo port had been primarily responsible for enacting state policies in the Mosquito Shore during the British occupation. After Honduran sovereignty was asserted, the commercial elite in the port also began their own plans to profit from the region's resources. As with the case of the proxy war fought through mahogany concessions, state formation during the period became embedded in the plans of these commercial elites.

Among the Trujillo-based elite, Guillermo Burchard emerged as a key figure among the Trujillo-based elite interested in developing the Mosquito Shore as a potential site for investments. Burchard was a U.S. citizen who came to Honduras to seek out business opportunities. In 1859, the same year Honduras signed the Wykes-Cruz Treaty, Burchard convinced the government to issue him and his business partner, Raymond Weed, a concession for exclusive rights for transportation on the Aguan, Black, and Patuca Rivers, which had the larger objective of promoting a colonization project (ANH, 1859). The plans for the colony did not take off, but Burchard remained in Honduras and acted as the U.S. Consul in Trujillo. He continued to promote his business interests in the region. In 1865, he obtained a large estate from the government in an area of Black River that became known as El Dorado (Burchard, 1865).⁵³ On the eve of Soto's ascendancy to the presidency, the Honduran government appointed Burchard as the governor of the department of Mosquitia.⁵⁴ One of his first acts was to move the capital to El Dorado, where he had his estate. It is unclear why the Honduran authorities

⁵³ Burchard obtained the land in exchange for musical instruments that he had procured for the Honduran army in New York City.

⁵⁴ It is unclear if Bouchard renounced his post as U.S. consul and obtained Honduran citizenship to be appointed as governor.

appointed Burchard as the governor, but we can presume that it had something to do with his commercial ties to U.S. investors. One of his first acts as governor was to travel to New Orleans to promote new agricultural projects in Mosquitia. He seemed to have carried out his duties with a relatively high degree of freedom because he did not ask the central government for authorization before making the trip (Burchard, 1874).

Burchard exemplified the attitudes of the Trujillo-based commercial elite that sought to convert Mosquitia into a potential investment opportunity. While Subirana's instructions remained part of the civilization program, there was a new emphasis on investments. One of Burchard's main projects was to habilitate a seaport in Iriona. He considered that Iriona's location, a few miles east of the mouth of the Aguan River, was ideal for shipping out the agricultural products and cattle from the region (Burchard, 1874). He was particularly enthusiastic about the potential for exporting cattle to Belize. During his trip to New Orleans, Burchard contacted Henry Synder, who represented a group of U.S. investors interested in developing the port at Iriona. Snyder arrived in Honduras in 1875 to scope out the plans for the port, and Bouchard told the government that their plans also included building roads and bringing machinery to exploit other opportunities in mining, agriculture, and livestock (Burchard, 1875). Although Burchard's plans did not lead to the kind of economic growth that he expected, it did position the region as a new site of investment in the minds of the Trujillo-based elite.

During the liberal period, the political and economic elite in Honduras started to become more interested in the economic potential of the Mosquito Shore beyond the mahogany concessions. The commercial elite in Trujillo was particularly eager to claim the resources in their hinterlands. At that time, Trujillo was part of the department of Yoro. In 1881, the leaders

of Trujillo convinced President Soto to create the department of Colon that would include Trujillo and the Mosquito Shore (El Eco del Norte, 1881). The justification for dissolving the department of Mosquitia was that its low population density did not lend itself to support an administrative structure (La Paz, 1882). In reality, the commercial elite of Trujillo had a great interest in opening the region for settlement and investments, and they wanted more direct control (Gutierrez, 1883).

Influenced by the principles of positivism, statesmen of the liberal period believed that the production of knowledge would help accomplish the task of civilizing the Mosquito Shore. In 1875, the first comprehensive geographic description of the region was prepared (Zuñiga Echenique, 1875/1905). The report made it clear that Mosquitia had valuable resources. Shortly after the creation of Colon, Francisco Caceres, its first governor, commissioned a new study to collect information about the resources and population of the new department. In alignment with the principles of positivism, Caceres was convinced that a “scientific study” based on the principles of statistics would lead to exact knowledge about the territory and more effective governance (Cáceres, 1882/1905, p. 150). The commission, led by Colonel Manuel Fleury, produced a report that offered details about the natural resources, demography, and social customs of the Indigenous populations (Fleury et al., 1882/1905). Both the 1875 and 1882 reports contributed to the birth of a “nationalist ethnology” to understand the underdevelopment of the Indigenous population (Barahona, 2009).⁵⁵

The Trujillo-based elite maintained administrative control of the Mosquitia region until 1957 when the department of Gracias a Dios was created. The region had its own administrative

⁵⁵ The 1882 commission’s report was published again in 1930 in *El Crónista*, which spoke to the continuity of this vision of the civilization program in the early twentieth century (Mollett, 2011).

jurisdiction during a brief period of conservative rule between 1889 and 1894, but it was re-annexed to Colon when the liberals regained power.⁵⁶ The new decree established a more formal structure for administration in Moskitia, indicating that the Honduran government had refined its strategy for the incorporation of the territory. Three districts were following the geographical areas identified by the previous studies (Black River, Patuca, and Caratasca). Each district had a chief, but the administrative functions over the entire territory were centralized in the town of Iriona. This administrative organization was a radical shift from the previous mandate under the conservative period called to establish a capital in the Caratasca region that would serve as a more central location for a government siege. The superintendent in Iriona exercised the administrative, judicial, economic, and military functions over the entire territory of Mosquitia. It seemed like Burchard had realized his plans to make Iriona the most important settlement in the region.⁵⁷ The reality is that most of the territory of Mosquitia continued to be weakly connected to Iriona as a center of administrative power. The more tangible connection with the central government was through the military units that patrolled the area. These military commanders continued to rely on local chiefs for the exercise of law and order.

2.4 LEGACIES OF GOVERNANCE

During the nineteenth century, the Mosquito Shore underwent a radical transformation. It went from being the site of an Indigenous kingdom that cultivated diplomatic ties with both the British and Spanish to the battleground of contested mahogany concessions between the British and Honduran authorities. This transformation made clear that Mosquitia was neither a non-state

⁵⁶ The establishment of the *Comarca de la Mosquitia* in 1889 occurred during the presidency of Luis Bogran Barahona (conservative). When the liberals regained power, they re-annexed the comarca to the department of Colon. The argument was that the concept of a special territorial jurisdiction was incompatible with the new constitutional order.

⁵⁷ Ironically, when the department of Gracias a Dios was created, Iriona stayed in Colon. The present-day status of Iriona as a town in Colon reinforces the notion that Trujillo-based interests dominated Mosquitia during the period that the two regions were joined in a single department.

space (cf. Scott, 2009) or an exilic space (cf. Grubačić, 2016). The Miskitu chiefs were interested in establishing alliances with external actors and engaging in trade, as exemplified in the 1843 agreement. Despite Lamotte's intent to characterize the Miskitu as an anarchic society, his comments served to reinforce the notion that the Miskitu population had come to expect certain formalities of state-likeness as a result of their participation in the Mosquito Kingdom. The Mosquito Shore, however, was not a unified entity under the Mosquito Kingdom. Like General Lowry Robinson, local chiefs safeguarded the autonomy of the areas that they controlled and sought out alliances to defend them. After 1859, the Honduran government came to rely on these local authorities to perform everyday functions of law and order in the communities.

Helms's description of the Mosquito Shore as a commercial frontier is an interesting alternative to the duality of state and non-state spaces. The concept of a commercial frontier accounts for the emergence of governance arrangements that resulted from interactions with the global capital. However, Helms's commercial frontier implies that the Miskitu were living in autarky during the periods when they were not actively participating as labor in export markets. The experience of the proxy war over mahogany concessions and the later domination of the Trujillo-based elite showed that these commercial interests had significant effects on socio-territorial organization beyond the temporal presence of foreign companies. Therefore, the commercial frontier is better understood as another instance of state formation rather than as a period of voluntary linking and delinking from global markets.

This analysis of state formation in nineteenth-century Mosquitia serves to recenter the importance of considering the capacities that states have to align their discursive and material practices toward the appropriation of frontier regions. The grand vision for a civilization mission

outlined by Morales in his letter to MacDonald in 1843 could not be achieved during the course of the nineteenth century. Many of the same constraints remained in the twentieth century.

Between discourse and actual capacity for enacting a civilization program, four specific practices emerged that characterize state formation during this period. First, for local Miskitu chiefs, their sovereignty was expressed through their capacity to ally with outsiders that could secure their access to markets. They did not want to remain isolated from global markets but rather control the terms of their engagement. Second, state formation was carried out primarily by frontier entrepreneurs who transformed the socio-territorial configuration of the region in the course of their profit-making enterprises. The notable influence of traders would remain a constant variable in the everyday practices of state formation in Mosquitia. Third, while the territory of Mosquitia was de facto under military occupation, the functions of law and order were performed with the assistance of local chiefs. Although these chiefs served as representatives of the Honduran state, they were organic leaders who continued the functions they previously had under the former Mosquito Kingdom. Fourth, the interests of the commercial elite in the city of Trujillo served to centralize the locus of administrative power rather than foster the development of an alternative pole more centrally located in Mosquitia. Therefore, this integration into the political division of the Honduran state actually served to marginalize the regional population.

In the following chapters, I will continue to allude to these legacies of governance to explain the continuation or interruption of certain practices of state formation. The next chapter focuses on how these legacies influenced the emergence of contemporary forms of Indigenous representation.

CHAPTER 3: INTELLECTUALS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Tegucigalpa's downtown teems with modern-era buildings that house shops, restaurants, and other offices that cater to middle and working-class families. At the main square, a protest or rally always seems to be taking place under the shadow of the trees and the equestrian statue of the national hero Francisco Morazan. I visited the downtown area often during my short stays in Tegucigalpa in order to visit the National Archives housed at the former Presidential Palace.⁵⁸ Although it was a busy district, some of the people I knew from the Indigenous movement frequented the same spots and were easy to spot. One of them, Manuel, agreed to meet me at a coffee shop for an interview. Our conversation was interrupted twice by people who came to greet him.⁵⁹ The first was a middle-aged woman who was concerned that she did not have money to pay for her daughter's prescription. Manuel took out a piece of paper and wrote the name of a person that could give her assistance. I could see in his eyes that he felt sorry he could not do more for her. He took out a one-hundred-lempira bill from his pocket and told the woman to have herself a cappuccino.⁶⁰ The woman did not seem to understand, but Manuel assured her, "it's a delicious drink." The other person who approached Manuel was a man in his sixties wearing a business suit. I recognized him immediately. Jimmy had been the liaison between MASTA and the government agency in charge of implementing the World Bank-funded Land Administration Program I had previously worked on. Jimmy offered consultant services on

⁵⁸ The new presidential office is located in a newer business district.

⁵⁹ I use first names to mention pseudonyms.

⁶⁰ About US\$5.00.

issues related to projects in Indigenous areas and had a downtown office. We engaged in small talk before he turned to another table to meet a client.⁶¹

Manuel and Jimmy epitomized those Indigenous leaders that graduated from collaborating with MASTA on regional affairs in Moskitia to operating on different aspects of a national-level agenda related to Indigenous rights. In their youth, both leaders had been involved in community-level action linked to MASTA. Manuel participated in the first participatory mapping project in Moskitia in 1992 and the campaign against the hydroelectric project in the Patuca River in 1996. Jimmy spoke against the U.S.-backed Contra rebellion that affected Moskitia in the 1980s, for which he was detained by the military. Over time, Manuel and Jimmy grew further apart in their approaches and evolved into two different types of leaders. Manuel worked for an NGO, but he remained linked to the national-level Indigenous movement and committed to a progressive agenda to increase Indigenous autonomy in Moskitia. Jimmy had chosen to work in the public sector. He had occupied a high-level cabinet position in the Lobo administration, and he now worked in controversial development projects that other Indigenous leaders opposed.

Manuel's and Jimmy's stories interweaved biography, geopolitical changes, and MASTA's organizational transformation. From the Contra rebellion in the 1980s to the participatory mapping projects in the 1990s and 2000s, each of these periods presented different challenges and opportunities to Miskitu leaders that, at various points, had collaborated with MASTA. Over four decades, MASTA evolved in tandem with these changes to become the state-like federation that I encountered in the 2010s. Although MASTA had been established in

⁶¹ Although some of the conversations with leaders took place during formal interviews, I prefer to use pseudonyms because I combine interview material with participant observation.

1976, its origins need to be traced further back to the educational policies and missionary activities of the early twentieth century that encouraged the formation of Miskitu teachers. These teachers were the quintessential model for Miskitu leadership that evolved to mediate the interest of the local population with external actors. MASTA's founding was made possible by the activism of young Miskitu working as teachers or studying at teacher colleges. The actions of these teachers set the stage on which leaders like Manuel and Jimmy carried out their actions.

In this chapter, I use history and personal narrative to trace MASTA's organizational history. This reconstruction is not only an attempt to write MASTA's institutional history but also to understand the socio-spatial transformation of Moskitia during the twentieth century from the lens of this organizational transformation. I apply the concept of the "intellectual" to make better sense of the roles that different personalities played in the making of this transformation. I find Gramsci's concept of the organic intellectual a useful heuristic to think about MASTA's organizational transformation. According to Gramsci (2014), subaltern classes needed to develop their own organic intellectuals to give rise to counter-hegemonic action. These organic intellectuals needed to counteract the traditional intellectuals whose actions contributed to the reproduction of the capitalist hegemonic order.

In this chapter, I analyze the composition of elements associated with traditional and organic leadership in MASTA's organizational practices. I argue that the earlier experiences of leadership that led to the founding of MASTA in the 1970s encouraged the formation of vanguard-style leadership that had poor linkages to the grassroots. Although these first wave of leaders were not traditional in the Gramscian sense, they were not necessarily organic either because they did not have a firm connection to the grassroots. Contrary to what a Gramscian analysis would have predicted, they developed this organic connection to the grassroots by

becoming more involved in activities led by NGOs. These external actors facilitated MASTA's leaders to embrace a new role as the co-organizers of a campaign to legalize Indigenous lands in Moskitia. The campaign included the preparation of participatory maps to document customary land tenure, which served to provide MASTA with the cartographic inputs that helped to recreate its own territorial organization in the form of federations. These federations provided MASTA's leaders with a firmer connection to their grassroots base. However, they continued to face numerous challenges in maintaining their role as organic intellectuals. In the end, the negotiation that led to the approval of the inter-communal property titles required MASTA's leaders to combine elements of traditional and organic leadership.

This analysis of Indigenous intellectuals offers two specific contributions to the discussion on state formation. First, it suggests that externally-driven interventions, like mapping projects, can introduce new social arrangements that, despite being foreign, contribute to the fostering of more organic forms of leadership. Second, it suggests that organic forms of leadership are never completely divorced from those characterized as traditional because cultivating a grassroots-oriented ethos involves being perceived as an effective broker with hegemonic actors.

The analysis is based on historical sources and interviews with Indigenous leaders. The historical analysis is based on materials from two sources. One is a compilation of *indigenista* policies and laws in Honduras prepared by Ernesto Alvarado Garcia for the Inter-America Indigenista Institute in Mexico City. This compilation offers a valuable collection of Honduran policy in Mosquito during the first half of the twentieth century. The other source is MOPAWI's Documentation Center in Tegucigalpa. The Documentation Center is the organization's institutional archive, and it includes gray literature produced by them and other NGOs and

government agencies. It is the most important source for development literature on Moskitia. The documents I found at the center proved to be the most useful in providing details not only about early efforts for land legalization but, given the absence of scholarly sources on Moskitia, about the social organization in the region during the 1970s and 80s. Since virtually all these archival materials were prepared by state officials, foreign missionaries, and aid workers, I had to confront the fact that the descriptions of Miskitu intellectuals I was encountering were influenced by the prevailing development discourses at the time (Escobar, 1995; Ferguson, 1994). Following historian Florencia Mallon (1995), I had to analyze the history of Miskitu intellectuals “as analytically separate from—though historically connected to” (p. 3) the discursive practice of aid workers. This task has involved “reading along the grain” (Stoler, 2010) to understand the set of expectations that aid workers placed on social organizations in Moskitia.

In addition to the archival materials, my research was informed by interviews with Miskitu leaders and participant observation carried during the period of dissertation field research. These experiences outside the archive provided me with insights to query the representations I encountered in the archival materials. However, I do not suggest that my analysis be read as an attempt to write MASTA’s history from below. Albeit necessary to have this account “against the grain,” as a community outsider, I did not find it appropriate to pursue such a task, at least within the bounds of the existing research project. Up to date, the most notable attempt to undertake this kind of historical project is the book *The Unknow Ways of Moskitia Asla Takanka* written by one of MASTA’s founders, Jacinto Molina (2019). Unfortunately, this type of bibliographic material is virtually impossible to get outside of Moskitia, pointing to the structural problem with the production and circulation of scholarship

produced in the Global South (Cusicanqui et al., 2016).⁶² I believe that in the future, much is to be gained from collaborations that permit Indigenous authors to offer their own accounts of the intellectual history of their movements. In the meantime, analytical work that contributes to a better understanding of the hegemonic processes by reading “along the grain” will continue to be a necessary academic enterprise (Stoler, 2010).

3.2 INTELLECTUALS

Gramsci emphasized that it was important for a subaltern class to develop their own organic intellectuals to help bring forward the emergence of a new hegemonic order. He contrasted organic intellectuals to traditional intellectuals who, while pretending to keep themselves “autonomous and independent of the dominant social group,” contributed to the perpetuation of the existing order (Gramsci, 2014, p. 7). Gramsci’s insights on the various kinds of individuals that function as intellectuals in society have continued to inspire ethnographic work on the relationship between civil society and the state.

Observing intellectuals offers a lens to understand the formation and dynamics of movements, like MASTA, and how they start to engage in state-like functions. A focus on individual intellectuals draws attention to the multiplicity of actors that contribute to the “mobilization that goes on inside of movements as well as by them” (Wolford, 2010, pp. 221-222). Leaders have to negotiate with the state, which blurs the lines between organic and traditional intellectual. These negotiations usually require compromises. However, these compromises do not have to imply the loss of counter-hegemonic action. New political subjectivities are created in these engagements with the state that take on different roles. These

⁶² I was able to secure a copy with the help of a research assistant.

roles might land somewhere in between a spectrum of functions that might characterize traditional versus organic intellectuals. The litmus test for whether the members of an organization fall more in the camp of organic or traditional intellectuals is on whether their practices help them mobilize an assertion of Indigenous sovereignty.

My approach was inspired by the work of Joan Rappaport (2005), who drew on Gramsci to develop an ethnographic explanation of how different leaders linked to an Indigenous movement in the Cauca region of Colombia assumed roles typically associated with organic and traditional intellectuals. Rappaport argued that being of Indigenous origin was not enough to be considered an organic intellectual. Those that earned this label did it because their work contributed to the construction and maintenance of ethnic consciousness. Rappaport mentioned that this type of leader could be found in various organizational settings, from government offices to community organizations, de-stabilizing the notion that the attribute of organic leadership was pegged to institutional form. Rappaport's work called for paying attention to the process that informed how individuals used their positions to advance goals associated with social movements.

I contend that in order to understand the formation of leadership attributes in the way suggested by Rappaport, we need to look into the historical antecedents that shaped these spaces of participation. For this reason, in the next section, I start my analysis with the education and missionary practices that shaped the emergence of new forms of political subjectivity connected to the state and the development apparatus. After providing this background, then I turn to the rise of MASTA and the transformation of the leaders and the organization over the course of four decades.

3.3 THE ORIGINS OF POLITICAL SUBJECTIVITY: EDUCATION AND RELIGIOUS MISSIONS

i) Educational Policies

The education of the unassimilated tribes was one of the main elements in the civilization program of the Honduran government. As discussed in chapter 2, the so-called civilization program was not a set of comprehensive policies but rather an ideological orientation built on racialized notions of the native population which helped to legitimize interventions in the area. One element that remained constant in this ideological framework was the need to establish schools to teach the Spanish language to the native population. Aggressive policies of *castellanización* [Spanish instruction] had been the norm since the colonial period as a measure to disarticulate Indigenous collectivities by erasing their language (Herranz, 1996). Educational policy and school access became one of the priorities for state modernization during the Liberal Reform (1876-1883), but the application to Moskitia lagged considerably behind.

The Honduran government developed the first official educational policy for Moskitia as part of an effort to assert sovereignty over the disputed territory with Nicaragua. In 1906, the arbitration decision made by the Spanish King Alfonso XIII confirmed that the Wangki River was the natural border between Honduras and Nicaragua.⁶³ Since Nicaragua refused the outcome of the arbitration, the Honduran government made plans to solidify its presence in the area. One of these strategies was to establish *misiones escolares* [school missions] based on a model developed and applied by the Chilean authorities on Mapuche territory (Alvarado García, 1958). The first schools were established in 1915 during the government of Francisco Bertrand (1915-

⁶³The Bonilla-Gomez Treaty of 1894 had already established the border between both countries, but the area from Portillo de Teotecacinte to the Caribbean Sea was not delimited.

1919) to serve the Miskitu, Pech, and Tawhaka populations. The schools for the Miskitu were established on the coastal settlements of Patuca, Kaukira, and Brus Laguna.⁶⁴ The teachers encountered enormous difficulties, and most students had barely learned the Spanish language (Anonymous, n.d./1958). The school mission was abruptly ended in 1919 as a result of insufficient funds to cover the expenses of the educators that “with deprivation and isolation had agreed to undertake the missions” (Anonymous, 1919/1958, p. 94).⁶⁵

In 1928, there was another attempt to reestablish the school mission during the government of Miguel Paz Barahona (1925-1929). A single teacher, Gilberto Valle Castrejón, was assigned to cover the schools in Ahuastá, Kaukira, Cruta, and Mocerón (Barahona Paz, 1928/1958). It is unclear how long this effort lasted, but it should be pointed out the enormous challenge for a single person to cover four schools in an area about the size of Delaware and where the only means of communication was by rivers. There is no indication of a reactivation of the school mission during the dictatorship of Tiburcio Carias Andino (1933-1949). This period is remembered in oral histories as one of increased military occupation in Moskitia (Barahona, 2009).

In 1950, under the more progressive administration of Juan Manuel Gálvez (1949-1954), there was a renewed interest to launch a different version of the civilization program that would complete the assimilation of the Miskitu population into Honduras. Jesús Aguilar Paz was assigned by the Ministry of Education to conduct a fact-finding mission to Moskitia and propose

⁶⁴ The school in Patuca had 22 students, the one in Brus Laguna 25 and the one in Kaukira 80 (Anonymous, n.d./1958).

⁶⁵ Some of the teachers who participated in the missions published works based on their experience. These included the preparation of a guide to teaching Spanish to Miskitu children prepared by the teacher in Kaukira (Sierra Valladares, 1919) and an article about the Tawhaka language (Martínez Landero, 1934) and another about their culture (Martínez Landero, 1942) by the teacher in Yapuwás.

recommendations.⁶⁶ His mission to Moskitia fell in the tradition of the earlier studies conducted in 1874 and 1882 described in chapter 2. An alchemist and polymath, Aguilar Paz was known for his vast knowledge of Honduran cultural and physical geography. Some of his achievements included completing the first official map of Honduras and publishing books about Honduran folklore and toponymy. Aguilar Paz was an avid supporter of indigenismo and participated in various conferences about geography and history throughout Latin America (Aguilar-Paz Cerrato, 1995). Aguilar Paz had previously written about the region of Moskitia, and the visit seemed to have stirred in him a strong sentiment to do something about the region. He submitted his report to Congress, but he also decided to write an essay to share his findings with the public.

Aguilar Paz's essay "Moskitia, an Unbroken Land" was intended to raise public awareness about the need to carry out "a Plan for the *Hondureñización* of the Mosquitia" (Aguilar Paz, 1952, p. 31, emphasis in the original). The essay started with a plea:

The abandonment of the Mosquitia cannot be prolonged any longer; its immediate redemption is urgent, and the people of Honduras, who are short of land, must be able to supply their needs with the use of the abundant land that exists there, fortunately so far (Aguilar Paz, 1952, p. 20).

Aguilar Paz's proposal included the creation of a department for Moskitia, which at the time was part of the department of Colon. According to Aguilar Paz, the incorporation to the department of Colon had contributed to the "regrettable backwardness" of the region by centralizing authority in Trujillo instead of developing administrative capacity inside the region (Aguilar Paz, 1952, p. 27), confirming one of the points made in chapter 2. The other element of his proposal concerned the remaking of the population of Moskitia. Aguilar Paz considered that the only way for Moskitia to progress was to make the population more Honduran. This objective would be

⁶⁶ The other member of the mission was Federico Gonzalez, a teacher from the department of Colon.

achieved by teaching the Spanish language and Honduran culture to the Miskitu and bringing Honduran Ladinos, not foreigners, to colonize the region. Looking at the performance of the earlier school missions, he considered that opening schools by itself would not lead to the take-up of the Spanish language. He noted that bringing a few Ladinos to live among the Miskitu in an effort to assimilate them was futile because what ended up happening was that “the people from the interior who arrived in Mosquitia were easily ZAMBIFICADAS and soon learned the Misquito dialect” (Aguilar Paz, 1952, p. 28). Aguilar Paz coined the term “Zambificar” (to be made like a Zambo or Miskitu) to denote a negative influence on the Ladino population.⁶⁷

Aguilar Paz’s ideas had a significant influence on government policy. Although some of his more elaborated plans for incentivizing the use of the Spanish language were not implemented, the Ministry of Education created a permanent “cultural mission” for Moskitia in 1953.⁶⁸ The mission was staffed with personnel trained at the Regional Center for Fundamental Education in Patzcuaro, Mexico, one of the institutions promoting indigenista policies across Latin America, and opened twenty-five schools (Anonymous, 1953/1958). When tensions with Nicaragua over the border dispute heightened in 1957, the Honduran government created the department of Gracias a Dios, as suggested by Aguilar Paz. They also applied some of the ideas for the creation of municipalities and colonization programs that Aguilar Paz had suggested.

In his report, Aguilar Paz failed to mention the growing influence of the Moravian missionaries from the U.S. The Moravians had already begun literacy programs and other

⁶⁷ His observation actually shed light on a process of social integration among the earlier waves of Ladino colonization, which would be explored in chapter 4.

⁶⁸ Aguilar Paz had proposed to extract the Miskitu from their communities and send them to live in the interior for a year or two to force them to learn Spanish. His proposal was to start with the Miskitu men doing military service and with children ages 10 to 15 who could work as domestic help in a Ladino household in exchange for room and board. It is interesting that Aguilar Paz did not propose the creation of boarding schools, as had occurred in many other countries in the Americas. It was probably clear for Aguilar Paz that the Honduran government would not even have the budget to start such a policy.

development interventions among the Miskitu population. Whether this absence was intentional or not, Aguilar Paz embraced a nationalist sentiment that was distrustful of foreign interventions. He explicitly called against the promotion of foreign immigration, one of the preferred proposals during the previous liberal period. He also advocated for the exclusive migration of the mestizo population, which would have excluded the Garifuna and the Afro-descendant populations from the Caribbean who had come to work on the banana plantations. Aguilar Paz held the worldview of indigenismo that favored the assimilation of the Indigenous population into the national culture dominated by an idealized version of the mestizo (Earle, 2007). Although he favored the education of the native population, he did not propose to train Miskitu teachers. Instead, the Moravians were the ones to support the training of Miskitu individuals as teachers, a decision that contributed to MASTA's formation.

ii) The Moravian Missionaries

In the nineteenth century, Moravian missionary work became entangled with the colonization ambitions of the Prussian government and the British government's plans to reestablish the protectorate.⁶⁹ Both the Prussian and British authorities supported Moravian missionary work as part of a larger strategy to promote foreign colonization on the Mosquito Shore (Von Oertzen et al., 1990). A group of German Moravians arrived in Bluefields, Nicaragua, in 1849 to establish their mission work. The original plan was to encourage the Miskitu population to move to Bluefields.⁷⁰ They even opened a school to incentivize the Miskitu to settle in the town. After these initial efforts failed, the Moravian mission switched

⁶⁹ The Moravians were a Protestant denomination organized by the followers of the Czech theologian Jan Hus during the Reformation in the fifteenth century. The movement began in Bohemia and Moravia but gained strength when the German count Nicholas Louis von Zinzendorf offered the Moravians sanctuary in Herrnhut.

⁷⁰ Most of the Miskitu lived in scattered villages along the coast and the savanna and Bluefields was a predominately Creole town.

strategies and decided that missionaries should live in the Miskitu villages and attempt to communicate in the local language (Mueller, 1932). After three decades of tepid success, the Moravian Church experienced a rapid rate of conversions between 1881 and 1981 in a period known as “the Great Awakening” (Offen & Rugeley, 2014). Despite the rapid expansion of missionary activity in the Nicaraguan side of the Mosquito Shore, the Moravians did not have a presence on the Honduran side until the 1930s, when they opened stations in Kaukira, Brus Laguna, Auka, Cocobila, and Ahuas (Tillman, 2011).⁷¹ The Honduran Miskitu responded well to the missionary efforts and the number of congregations rapidly increased across the entire region.

The Moravians had a significant effect on the formation of new forms of Miskitu leadership linked to the formal education system. The Moravian mission offered a radically different approach to education compared to the school missions of the Honduran government. Instead of forcing the Miskitu to speak a foreign language, the Moravian missionaries implemented a policy of bilingual education to teach the bible (Herranz, 1996). In 1951, the Moravians opened a school in Brus Laguna (*Instituto Renacimiento*) that applied the same principle of bilingualism. Children from all over Moskitia would come to Brus Laguna to enroll at the Moravian school. The Moravian mission also supported the formation of collective capabilities by encouraging graduates from their school to become accredited as teachers. The plan was for these professionals to return to Moskitia not only to teach the next generation but also to act as leaders in their communities. They sent off the first cohort of students in the 1960s. But Miskitu students faced many challenges pursuing their studies in teachers’ colleges in cities

⁷¹ Missionary activity in Honduras was organized by the chapter of the Moravian Church based in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

like Tegucigalpa, Comayagua, and Choluteca. Without a road connecting the heartland of Moskitia to the urban center in the east, the students needed to make onerous travel arrangements by air or sea. Then, they faced the challenge of paying the school fees and their living expenses.

The influence of the Moravian missionary even reached those Miskitu who had already left to do their studies in Tegucigalpa. The Moravians sent Samuel Gray, an American missionary, to minister to the growing population of Miskitu living in the capital city of Tegucigalpa. The congregation was mostly composed of students, but there were also a few “professionals,” referring to those who had already graduated and had managed to secure jobs in the city. I interviewed Adalberto Allen, one of the Miskitu students who was part of the Moravian congregation at the time, who mentioned that Gray played an important role in providing a space for socialization. Gray used to invite them every Saturday to his home to share a homecooked meal from Moskitia, like the plantain porridge *wabul*. The meetings at Gray’s house offered the space for Miskitu students to articulate their desires for having their own forms of representation. Allen remembered that these meetings were frequented by more experienced colleagues like Jacinto Molina and Nathan Pravia, who had already graduated. They seeded the idea to create an organization that could help Miskitu students secure assistance to support their education. “They helped us see that someone else’s problem is also my problem,” Allen exclaimed about the birth of a collective consciousness among the students (A. Allen, Interview, 8 April 2018). This was the start of the Organization of Students of Gracias a Dios (Organización de Estudiantes de Gracias a Dios, OEGAD), the first Miskitu-led civil society organization in Honduras.

3.4 THE EMERGENCE OF INDIGENOUS REPRESENTATION

OEGAD was officially founded in 1970 to make collective demands for grievances that Miskitu students faced when pursuing their studies outside Moskitia. They complained that the students from Gracias a Dios faced additional challenges for pursuing higher education because of the high cost of transportation to come to the city and the lack of resources to pay for school fees and room and board. Jacinto Molina, one of the founding members, recalled that the students began to articulate these collective demands in 1969 when university students and the teachers' federations went on strike to demand better conditions (J. Molina, Interview, 16 August 2016). Molina said that a discussion they had with the journalist Germán Allan Pageth inspired them to organize OEGAD. The journalist had experience working with the teachers' federations, and he advised the Miskitu students to organize rather than attempt to make demands on an individual basis. Molina and the other Miskitu students followed his advice and founded OEGAD.

OEGAD members began to make plans for an organization that could represent the department of Gracias a Dios and not just the interests of Miskitu students. They were motivated to think about this transformation from an exchange they had with Miskitu students from Nicaragua and the opportunities that the Honduran government was offering them. Forty-five Miskitu students affiliated with OEGAD traveled to Managua during the Holy Week recess of 1976 to meet with Miskitu students from Nicaragua who had also created a similar organization (J. Molina, Interview, 16 August 2016). The Nicaraguan students were more involved in politics, which broadened the horizon for what the Honduran students could do. The political climate in Honduras in the mid-1970s also facilitated the creation of the new organization. The country was experiencing a period of state-led corporatization under a reformist military junta (Sieder, 1995).

In this context, the government supported the idea that Miskitu students and professionals created an organization that could represent the interests of the region. Molina played a crucial role in this transformation because at the time, he worked at the recently created Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Information. The minister himself encouraged Molina to create a regional organization (J. Molina, Interview, 16 August 2016).

With the blessing of the Honduran government, the Miskitu students and professionals who had integrated OEGAD organized the creation of MASTA. The Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Information arranged to charter a plane from the Air Force to carry the Miskitu delegation from Tegucigalpa to the village of Ahuas to celebrate MASTA's inaugural congress in 1976. They baptized the congress with the name of Camilo Miralda in honor of the first Miskitu to receive a teaching degree. The Moravian Church provided ample moral support for the formation of MASTA, including financial assistance for the celebration of the first congress. MASTA was created as an organization with representation over the entire population in the department of Gracias a Dios, including the Tawahka, Pech, Garifuna, and the Ladino living in the region.

Although MASTA was not exclusively for the education sector, teachers continued to dominate the leadership and membership. This was to be expected as the Miskitu teachers were in a privileged position to speak for the communities. They were professionals who understood state bureaucracy, spoke Spanish better than most, and enjoyed the job security that allowed them to engage in coordination and training activities. Furthermore, Miskitu teachers belonged to teachers' federations that provided them with an organizational model. Every president of the board was a teacher up until the early 2000s. Most importantly, membership in the organization was defined along professional lines. The teachers in the communities acted as MASTA's

representatives. These local representatives were neither elected nor appointed. The interests of the professional classes—such as scholarships to obtain a teaching or nursing degree—dominated the requests made to the government (Ashby, 1977). MASTA did not have an agenda for land issues during the early period, even though at the first congress, some of the attendees had complained about the invasions by Ladino cattle ranchers and loggers (minutes of MASTA’s First Congress cited in Ashby, 1977).⁷²

Two reports I found at MOPAWI’s Documentation Center helped me to understand how MASTA’s leadership was perceived by outsiders during this early period. The first report was prepared by Maggie Ashby (1977), a volunteer with the Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR). CIIR was a faith-based organization that was interested in supporting community-action work inspired by the principles of liberation theology.⁷³ The volunteer was slightly disappointed in what she observed in MASTA. She described the organization as showing potential to be “a department-level indigenous organization expressing the interest of the region” but found that its leadership was too disconnected from the “peasant majority” (Ashby, 1977, p. 32). For this reason, she described MASTA as a “pressure group, more like an embryonic political party than a genuinely popular organization,” and admonished that its leaders preferred resolving problems “by making demands on the government rather than by community organization” (Ashby, 1977, p. 34). She partly blamed the Moravian missionaries for cultivating “an elitist and paternalistic mentality” among the teachers and pastors (Ashby, 1977, p. 34). The second report was a study commissioned by the Overseas Development

⁷² During this early period, MASTA’s leaders also requested the government to improve a fluvial canal (Ashby, 1977).

⁷³ CIIR was established in 1965 based on the anti-fascist movement of the Catholic Church that started in the 1940s. CIIR’s perspective on social order and development was significantly influenced by the Second Vatican Council and the new direction that the Catholic Church took toward the poor in the 1970s. One of the CIIR’s core activities was to manage an overseas volunteer program which was largely funded by the ODA.

Administration (ODA) in 1981 to take stock of the natural resources and social organization in Moskitia. The British-based team that conducted the study characterized MASTA as a “nationalistic, militant, and ‘development’ oriented Indigenous organization...[with] a strong flavour of ‘liderazgo’ and ‘caudillismo’” (UK. Overseas Development Administration, 1981, p. 66, emphasis in the original). The study described MASTA’s leaders as “educated and articulate, and learning fast how to operate within government and donor agency circles,” but unable to undertake “organizational and managerial capabilities” (UK. Overseas Development Administration, 1981, p. 66).

I tried to understand what these reports were offering that could inform analysis on MASTA’s early period. It was clear that the foreigners that wrote these reports did not have a favorable opinion of MASTA. Both reports agreed that the organization was weak and captured by the interests of a Miskitu elite. However, both reports were based on trips to the region that took about two weeks each, barely enough time to understand the social context. Furthermore, the ODA research team quoted extensively from Ashby’s report, which reduced even further the number of primary sources. It seemed to me that the perspective of MASTA as an elite-based organization was influenced by the views of the CIIR volunteer, who clearly preferred the grassroots orientation of other organizations that the Catholic Church was supporting in other parts of Honduras. Despite these shortcomings, these two reports offered valuable insights that confirmed that MASTA did not have an organizational structure to link the leadership and the communities. This assessment was not disputed by the Miskitu leaders that I interviewed.

The overall picture that emerges from this early period is that MASTA was an organization dominated by Miskitu teachers. These teachers were the ideal candidates to function as Miskitu intellectuals. However, the evidence suggests that in the early period, MASTA’s

leaders exhibited more the characteristics of traditional rather than organic intellectuals. Their main interests were on brokering development assistance with the state rather than promoting a project based on Miskitu identity and territoriality. The transition from traditional to organic leadership would take place between the 1980s and 1990s. Each period posed a different set of challenges and opportunities for MASTA's transformation. The 1980s was an incredibly difficult period for organizing collective action, but the Miskitu leadership started to envision a political project based on autonomy. The 1990s offered more opportunities for fostering collective action but also created new threats of cooptation. Next, I turn to this transformation during the 1980s.

3.5 THE IMPACT OF THE COLD WAR

The 1980s was the period when the Cold War had finally reached the hot tropical lands of Moskitia. The Honduran Moskitia became engulfed in the Miskitu-Contra rebellion that had broken against the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua.⁷⁴ The Honduran government gave its support to the U.S.-backed rebels as part of the effort to fight the communist threat represented by the Sandinistas. Three Miskitu-Contra bases were established on the Honduran Moskitia, and about 17,000 refugees arrived to escape the war (Pérez Chiriboga, 2002). The Honduran government built a headquarter for the 5th military zone in Dursuna, a couple of kilometers away from the border with Nicaragua and close to the Miskitu village of Mocoron. Since the integration of the Mosquito Shore to the Honduran state in 1859, the 1980s was arguably the decade when state presence was felt the strongest through the military occupation of both the Honduran and the Miskitu-Contra armies.

⁷⁴ The Miskitu-Contras were a counter-revolution army integrated by Miskitu and Sumu people that joined the Contra rebellion against the Sandinista regime. The Contra-Miskitu received the support of the right-wing the Nicaraguan Democratic Force (FDN) and its ally, the United States.

This geopolitical shift had a direct impact on the political mobilization of Miskitu teachers. This is one of the main topics that I discussed with Jimmy during our interview. Teachers like Jimmy, who were affiliated with MASTA, had a difficult time in the 1980s. According to Isabel Perez Chiriboga (2002), who conducted fieldwork in Moskitia during the 1980s, MASTA's leaders were caught in the middle of a war that was not their own and contrary to their interests. For MASTA's leaders, the presence of the Miskitu-Contras in their territory represented U.S. interventionism. This was an unpopular position, which gained them the distrust of the Honduran army, the Miskitu-Contra rebels, and the conservative Moravian Church. During this period, MASTA's leaders were ostracized and did not enjoy the privileged position that they had in later decades. Jimmy, who himself personified this transition from outcast to broker, described the period in this way:

I was kidnapped by the military. At that time, I had a different ideology. I was more of a leftist. The military did not like that because they thought we were in collusion with the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. When I finished my studies [education degree], I went to [redacted] for a year. Then, they [Ministry of Education] sent me to Puerto Lempira as the principal of the school [redacted]. It was a semi-official school. The state subsidized part of it, and the parents paid the other part. At the school, I began to impose a social agenda, a liberation agenda. Some soldiers took us to the barracks in Mocerón. Angel Romero was there, and five other teachers. They told us that they were taking us into custody to protect us because they had received news that someone in Nicaragua had issued an order to kill us, but it was an excuse. We were afraid they would kill us. At that time, the secret police were disappearing people. We were lucky that the people in Puerto Lempira realized that we had been taken. Also, the driver was a Garifuna, who treated me like a brother and risked his own life by declaring himself an eyewitness to the events. My mother and Doña Florinda raised the whole town until we were released. Another commander who took a like on me told me to get out of the Moskitia. That is how I was "deported" from the Moskitia in a plane of the Area Force. He told me, "you are young; you have your life ahead of you." (Interview, 31 January 2018).

Jimmy's story captured the precarious situation of MASTA's leaders in the 1980s. During his self-exile in Tegucigalpa, Jimmy grew out of the ideology that he himself identified as "leftist." During the rise of the multiculturalist wave in the 1990s, he learned to occupy some of the spaces

that had opened for Indigenous leaders, like the consultancy of “ethnic liaison” that he once held with the Land Administration Program. He played the role that Charles Hale and Rosamel Millaman (2006) have described as the *indio permitido* [authorized Indian], an interlocutor for Indigenous issues that could operate within the confines enforced by the state. Eventually, he became one of the highest-level officials when the Secretariat for the Development of Indigenous and Afro-Honduran Peoples and the Promotion of Politics of Racial Equality (Secretaría de Estado para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas y Afro-hondureños y para la Promoción de Políticas de Igualdad Racial, SEDINAFROH) was created in 2011.

Aurelio Ramos, another Miskitu teacher who still lived in Puerto Lempira, recognized the precarious situation of MASTA’s leaders in the 1980s, but he added a dose of self-criticism:

MASTA was successful at the beginning, but unfortunately, the leadership fell into the hands of teachers. The Moravian Church thought that MASTA would lead a movement; they said, "we have to put the younger children, who already have an education, to help the people." But the students took another ideology, another path. As teachers, they spoke as a guild, not as a people. (A. Ramos, Interview, 15 August 2016).

Aurelio brought the role that the Moravian Church had played in incentivizing MASTA’s formation and recognized the ideological conflict that had split the teachers from their early benefactors. Like Jimmy, Aurelio had also completed his education degree and returned to work at a school in Moskitia in the early 1980s. Soon after his return, he was elected as MASTA’s president. Unlike Jimmy, Aurelio has continued to be an active participant in MASTA since then.

Jimmy’s and Aurelio’s accounts both pointed to the conjuncture of the 1980s when MASTA’s leaders grew further apart from the Miskitu communities. A decisive factor behind this distancing was MASTA’s loss of support from the Moravian Church. Church officials

considered that some of MASTA's leaders were communist sympathizers. Perez Chiriboga (2002) explained that the Moravian Church in Honduras aligned with the anti-communist rhetoric of the Miskitu-Contra rebellion, which created this rift with MASTA's leaders. According to her informants, Moravian pastors frequently visited the military bases of the Miskitu-Contra. The Miskitu population in Honduras was also exposed to anti-communist propaganda by the U.S. The region's first radio station, Radio Sani, was created as part of the U.S. government (Fieldnotes, 2018). They were also exposed to the rhetoric of the Contra-Miskitu rebels and the stories of the refugees (Pérez Chiriboga, 2002). The leader of the Miskitu-Contras, Stedman Fagoth, liked to intimidate the Honduran Miskitu that dissented from the rebellion, and he took a particular dislike to the Honduran Miskitu teachers. The Honduran army also tried to repress any kind of social mobilization by the Honduran Miskitu. The Honduran authorities ended expelling Steadman Fagoth from the country for promoting a separatist movement. Although MASTA was separate from the Miskitu-Contras, they suffered the repression due to their identification as communist sympathizers.

Despite the repression, the rise of the Miskitu-Contra movement also profoundly affected the transformation of a regional consciousness for the region. When I interviewed Jacinto Molina, he said their ideas about Indigenous autonomy in Honduras had been directly influenced by Nicaragua. Perez Chiriboga confirms Molina's explanation. According to the anthropologist, the Miskitu-Contra conflict provided the first opportunity since the dissolution of the Mosquito Kingdom for the population on both sides of the border to reflect on their relationship. This is because the Miskitu interpreted the conflict against the Sandinista not necessarily in anti-

communist rhetoric but as the continuation of a longstanding fight against Spanish incursion.⁷⁵

According to Perez Chiriboga, the Contra conflict provided the historical condition to reunite the Miskitu Nation. The Miskitu-Contra reinforced the rhetoric that the Honduran Miskitu had been spared the invasion of the Sandinistas thanks to their military intervention. The rhetoric justified the emergence of an autonomy movement that included the Miskitu in both Honduras and Nicaragua. Although the Honduran Miskitu did not necessarily share the ideals of the Nicaraguan Miskitu, as exemplified in the rift between the Miskitu-Contras and MASTA, it did provide an opportunity to think differently of their ethnic identity in politicized terms.⁷⁶ In sum, indirect involvement in the Contra rebellion damaged MASTA's status in the communities but incentivized the politicization of Miskitu ethnic identity in Honduras. MASTA's participation in a program to legalize Indigenous lands in Moskitia would provide the opportunity for MASTA's leaders to engage this new form of political ethnicity with community representation to develop more those attributes connected to organic leadership.

⁷⁵ Charles Hale's (1994) own analysis on the origins of the conflict concurs that the Miskitu in Nicaragua were fighting for their autonomy and that their closeness to the U.S. was facilitated more due to a historical Anglo-Miskitu affinity than an ideological connection.

⁷⁶ Different historical processes of the social organization explain why ideas about autonomy arrive from Nicaragua rather than developing organically among the Miskitu in Honduras. The Nicaraguan Miskitu were in a different position to engage questions of autonomy than their counterparts in Honduras. The structures of the Mosquito Kingdom had survived in the Nicaraguan Moskitia until 1894. Organizational experiences in Nicaragua date back to 1967 by forming agricultural cooperatives under the Association of Agricultural Groups of the Coco River (ACARIC). The purpose of these groups was to improve agricultural practices to increase production and empower the organization. ACARIC was led by the Capuchin monk Gregorio Smutko, who was responsible for introducing liberation theology on the Wangki River. Smutko's version of liberation theory included a reinterpretation of biblical text in which he identified the Miskitu people with the Biblical Hebrews. This organizational model based on liberation theory was somewhat distinct from the ACORDE program supported by the Moravians in Honduras, which focused on agricultural production and individualism. ACARIC was followed by the Alliance for the Progress of the Miskitu and Sumu (ALPROMISU) that had a more political angle but still centered on a cooperative model. ALPROMISU was the direct organization antecedent to MISURASATA, which eventually led to the formation of the Miskitu-Contras. Progressive teacher federations had also inspired MASTA in Honduras, but they did not have the same level of grassroots organizational experience that ACARIC and ALPROMISU enjoyed.

3.6 THE LAND LEGALIZATION PROGRAM IN MOSKITIA

The Nicaraguan refugee crisis marked the birth of the modern development apparatus in Moskitia. For the first time, multiple international organizations visited the region to coordinate relief efforts through the UN Refugee Agency (UNHRC). World Relief, a Christian-based organization from the United States, implemented one of the largest programs with funding from USAID. The emphasis on humanitarian assistance to the Nicaraguan refugees created resentment among the local population, who also suffered from high levels of poverty (Pérez Chiriboga, 2002). In response to these unmet needs, World Relief established MOPAWI in 1985 with the mandate to foster self-reliance based on Christian principles.

When MOPAWI began operations in 1985, they inherited World Relief's program and assets, which were based mainly on supporting a marketing system for staple foods. It was not until 1987 that MOPAWI established the Land Legalization Program.⁷⁷ In 1988, they sought the assistance of a Miskitu Moravian pastor, Navarro Allen, to select a group of leaders who would accompany them in an expedition to evaluate the state of the colonization front in the Platano River Biosphere Reserve. The expedition participants were alarmed by what they found. Even though the reserve had protected status, the Honduran state considered land in Moskita to be "national," which gave Ladino colonists the impression that it was up for grab. This mentality reflected the racialized view that Indigenous peoples were unproductive and could not possibly put the land to its most optimal social use (Mollett, 2011). To counteract this tendency, the Land Legalization Program proposed that the government should assign property rights to the Indigenous communities as a measure to prevent more land invasions and conserve natural resources. In 1988, MOPAWI also organized exchanges between the Indigenous peoples of

⁷⁷ They also selected to work on bilingual education.

Moskitia with the Tolupan in Honduras and the Kuna in Panama to learn more about their organizational structures.⁷⁸ However, the Land Legalization Program did not articulate Indigenous grievances in the language of autonomy or sovereignty because it would have been seen as too politically sensitive considering the political situation in Nicaragua (O. Munguia, Interview, 23 January 2018). In short, MOPAWI was able to introduce the question of land rights in a way that bridged the Moravian Church and Indigenous activism and that reduced tensions with the Honduran government.

i) Early Activities of the Land Legalization Program (1988-1992)

In this initial phase of the Land Legalization Program, MOPAWI enlisted MASTA as a co-organizer. Although MASTA was organizationally weak, the idea was to promote a capacity-building approach. MOPAWI and MASTA issued a joint declaration in 1988 which demanded: “a process of legalization of land tenure in favor of the Indigenous peoples of Mosquitia” (MOPAWI & MASTA, 1988). MASTA’s claim to be an organization that spoke for all people of Moskitia facilitated this role as the central coordinator. MASTA made its first steps towards consolidating its organization. MOPAWI assisted MASTA in registering as a civil society organization in 1988. Its by-laws described a general mission of promoting development in Moskitia without any clear indication of MASTA’s territorial composition or land rights agenda. The concept behind MASTA was still amorphous, with an ambivalence between the representation of a region or ethnicity. Most of the breakthroughs concerning territorial rights in this initial phase were achieved at a more local level, with communities that had more concrete grievances. Three experiences of local grievances are discussed next.

⁷⁸ The Tolupan established the first Indigenous federation in the country in 1985, with the specific purpose of recuperating their tribal lands (Barahona, 2009).

(1) The Tawahka Federation

In the 1980s, the Tawahka people occupied five communities in the mid-section of the Patuca River. These communities were on the border between the departments of Olancho and Gracias a Dios. The advance of the colonization front put immense pressure on the communities living on the Olancho side, causing them to retreat to the communities of Krausirpi and Krautara in Gracias a Dios. The Tawahka communities also experienced an influx Miskitu population as the result of migration and intermarriage. In the early 1990s, the population size was estimated at 2,000 individuals (MASTA, 1995). After losing much of their traditional territory and experiencing the threat of losing cultural identity, the Tawahka leadership began to explore ways to create their own organization apart from MASTA.

In 1987, the Land Legalization Program assisted the Tawahka in organizing the Indigenous Federation of Honduran Tawahka (FITH). The program also assisted the Tawahka and Miskitu in sketching out rudimentary maps to delineate the perimeter of a few communities in the mid-Patuca River. They used these maps to request titles to the National Agrarian Institute (INA) in 1989. Up to that point, INA had only issued titles to individuals or agrarian cooperatives. INA only agreed to issue provisional land protections to two Tawahka and two Miskitu communities. These instruments were not titles but an acknowledgment that Indigenous communities claimed the land.

The experience with FITH influenced the course of the Land Legalization Program and set the basis for a new type of organizational model that could better connect the leadership and communities. The Tawahka were able to organize their federation during a period in which Gracias a Dios was still militarized, setting an important precedent (Pérez Chiriboga, 2002). Also, their experience requesting community titles helped to clarify what should be the

conditions for future titling efforts. A professional geographer and a MOPAWI volunteer had collaborated to prepare a land-use map of the Tawahka territory which showed that the provisional land protections offered by INA only covered a fraction of the area used by the communities (Herlihy & Leake, 1990). This experience served to raise awareness about the threat of accepting titles that only covered the community perimeter, causing MOPAWI to reconsider its strategy for claiming land rights.⁷⁹ Therefore, it was clear that the organization that requested the title should also have administration over the entire functional habitat. A new organizational approach was beginning to take hold that required Indigenous leaders to have foster relations with the communities to protect their habitat.

(2) The Platano River Biosphere Reserve

The Land Legalization Program also supported the local population living in the Platano River Biosphere Reserve. The Reserve had been created in 1980 and had received distinction as a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Site in 1982. The creation of the reserve had been a top-down decision without consultation with the local population.⁸⁰ The communities complained that, contrary to the objective of protecting nature, the creation of the reserve had increased the migration of landless peasants to the region by giving the impression that the area was unoccupied. Furthermore, the status of the reserve prevented the locals from claiming their own land rights. In 1990, the Land Legalization Program helped to establish the Land Vigilance Committee (CVT) as an organization that could represent the grievances of the population inside the reserve. CVT was an inter-ethnic alliance

⁷⁹ Eventually, the efforts for the recognition of Tawahka lands led to the creation of the Tawahka Asangni Biosphere Reserve in 1996.

⁸⁰ The population that was affected the most was those living between the Sico-Paulaya and Platano Rivers, which included Miskito, Garifuna, and Pech communities, as well as a few Ladino communities that had been established during an earlier period.

that included Miskitu, Garifuna, Pech, and Ladino communities in Gracias a Dios. In their constitutive assembly, they described the objective as “the protection and conservation of the special lands and forests of the Platano River Biosphere Reserve” (CVT, 1990, p. 1), which showed that they bridged the conservation and land rights agenda.

CVT became another important organizational precedent for the formation of organic intellectuals. CVT was led by Miskitu teachers, but like FITH, they were concerned over specific grievances affecting their communities. These leaders also had to establish an organization that could coordinate the demands of a multi-ethnic population, which required a more conscious effort to define their goals and establish channels of representation. The threat of Miskitu domination in CVT was a point of tension with the Pech and Garifuna communities that integrated the organization. During the initial period, CVT’s members tried to maintain organizational coherence by keeping themselves separate from MASTA. Although MASTA claimed to represent the entire population of Gracias a Dios, the organization was identified with the Miskitu. Also, the Pech and Garifuna had federations that represented them. The tension over Miskitu dominance increased after CVT became formally incorporated as one of MASTA’s federations. Eventually, CVT broke along ethnic lines, with the Miskitu, Garifuna, and Pech forming their block each. CVT’s dissolution marked the end of what could have been a multi-ethnic future for social organizations in Moskitia. Nonetheless, it provided an organizational experience that shaped the leaders’ abilities to link the demands from their communities with national and international priorities like conservation.

(3) The First Miskitu Federation

Following the model established by FITH, the villages in the Morocon area were the first to group into a Miskitu federation. They already had some organizational experience because

they had been part of an Agro-Forestry Regional Committee organized by Honduran Corporation for Forestry Development (Corporación Hondureña de Desarrollo Forestal, COHDEFOR) to help control forest fires and participate in reforestation campaigns. In 1991, their access to the forest was being threatened by a concession that the government had assigned to the Stone Container Corporation, a Canadian papermill corporation. The concession would have given the company the right to exploit over one million hectares of forests in the pine savanna region between the Wangki and Mocerón Rivers. Drawing on the experience with the Tawahka, MOPAWI encouraged the communities to organize into a federation to defend their land rights against the concession. The Federation of Indigenous and Native Peoples of the Río Segovia Zone (FINZMOS) was established in 1992.

FINZMOS provided MASTA with the most direct experience for how to create federations based on clusters of Miskitu villages. Although CVT had been created in 1990, the model was more specific to the Platano River Biosphere Reserve. Participation in CVT was already predefined by inclusion in the protected area, whereas participation in FINZMOS required a more conscious effort on behalf of the villages to join together as a federation. The village of Morocon served as an anchor bringing together nearby villages into a single federation.⁸¹ FINZMOS's formation was a true grassroots effort to defend community land rights against the concession, which was a different departure point from how MASTA had been established in 1976.

The qualities of organic leadership in FINZMOS can be seen in the way that they defended the autonomy of their organization against MASTA. MASTA was involved in the

⁸¹ Some of the villages included those where Ladino population lived along the Wangki River. This is the reason why the name of the federation identifies both Indigenous [Miskitu] and native [Ladino] communities.

organization of FINZMOS as part of their participation in the Land Legalization Program. However, FINZMOS made it clear that their organization was autonomous from MASTA. In FINZMOS's inaugural congress, the local leaders made a point to clarify that MASTA's president had been invited as an 'observer' only, without the right to interfere in their internal matters (FINZMOS, 1992). However, during the meeting, MASTA's president insisted that "MASTA should occupy the top position [in the organizational chart] so that all the support to the federation should be channeled through MASTA" (FINZMOS, 1992, p. Annex #7, my own translation). The local leaders rejected this proposal, noting that if FINZMOS "were to rely on MASTA, it would be as an organization to support the Federation without any conditions" (FINZMOS, 1992, p. Annex point #7, my own translation). The organizational chart (figure 2) that was finally agreed upon placed MASTA as one of the institutions that supported FINZMOS, at the same level as other NGOs like MOPAWI. In 1995, FINZMOS's autonomy was reinforced further when they registered the organization as a forest cooperative, obtaining their own legal personhood.

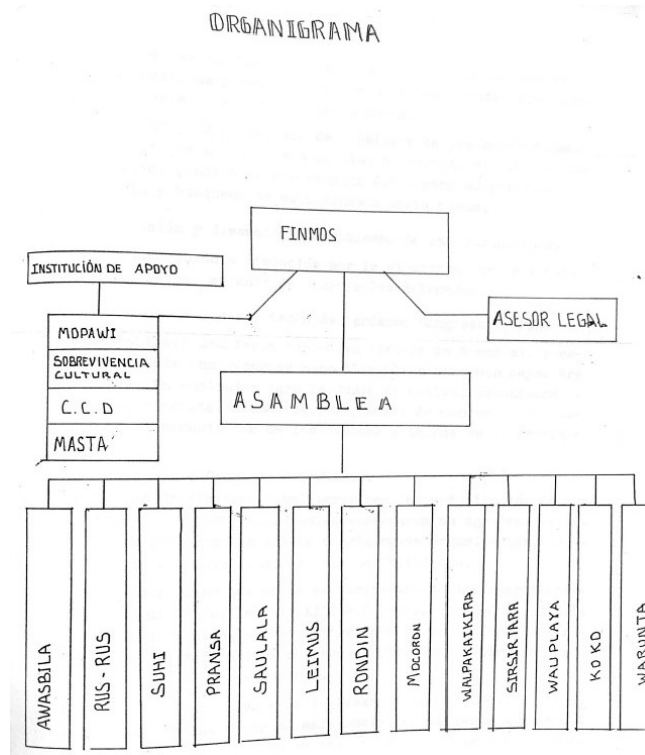


Figure 1: Organizational chart of FINZMOS circa 1992. Taken from FINZMOS, 1992, I congreso indígena nativos Mocoron/Segovia.⁸²

ii) Participation Mapping and the Emergence of the Federations (1992-1995)

By 1992, organizations like FITH, CVT, and FINZMOS represented organizational experiences that articulated attributes of organic leadership. However, MASTA's leadership had not yet been transformed in the same way. This transformation occurred in the context of a participatory mapping project that helped to document customary land tenure at the regional level and that contributed to MASTA's transformation as an organization represented by a block of Miskitu federations. The mapping project transformed MASTA into the protagonist in the defense for land rights in Moskitia, giving the leaders an unequivocal mandate centered on Indigenous territoriality. The new organizational model based on federations provided the

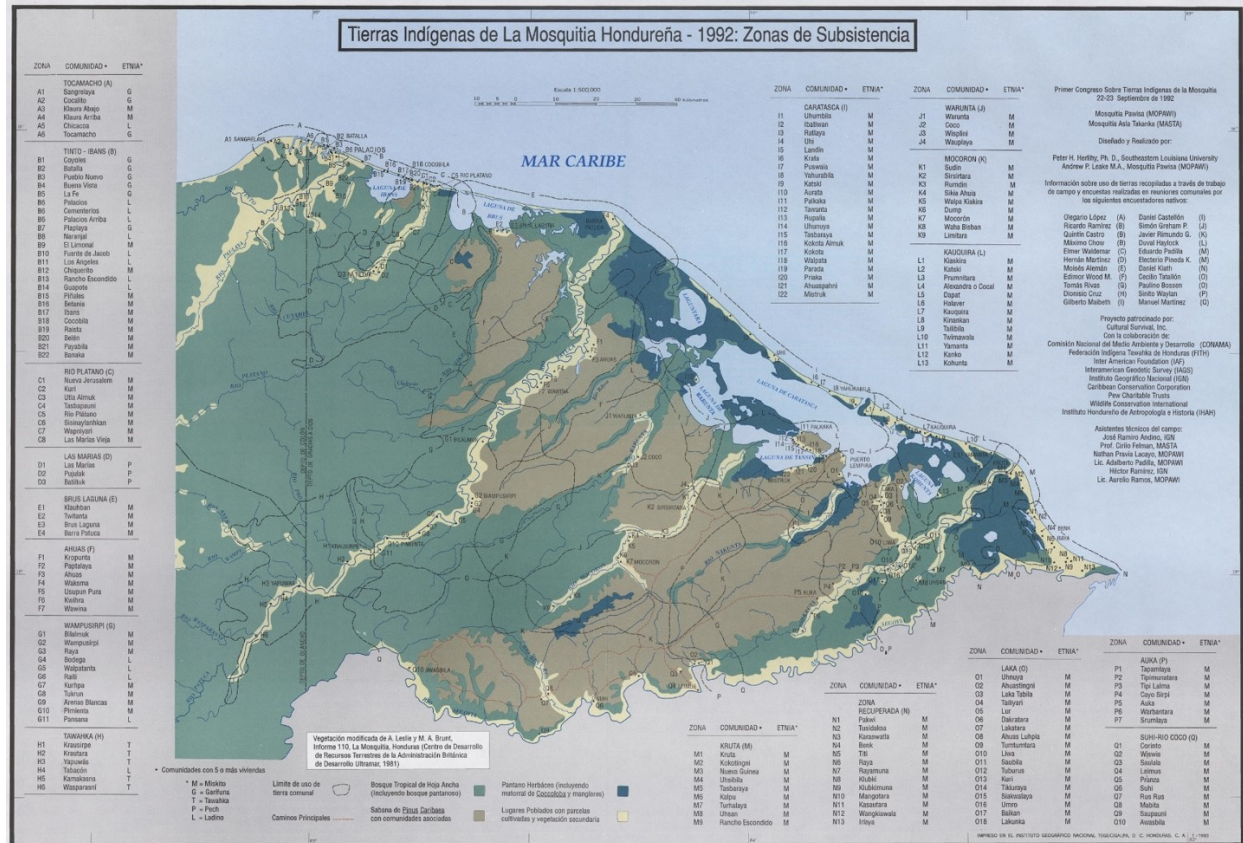
⁸² The federation's acronym was spelled incorrectly in the organizational chart in Figure 2.

opportunity to have a more direct link between the leadership and the grassroots base fostering the qualities of organic leadership. By 1995, the structure of MASTA's leadership had achieved a transformation from a network of Miskitu teachers who resembled traditional intellectuals to that of a regional coordinator with the capacity to mobilize a land rights agenda.

The idea for the first participatory mapping project of Indigenous lands was inspired by external collaborators, but it provided an opportunity to build organizational capacities in MASTA's leaders. The idea emerged from NGOs that tried to highlight the synergies between the conservation of nature and the defense of Indigenous land rights. In 1992, MOPAWI coordinated with the Center for Native Lands, an American-based NGO affiliated with Cultural Survival, to carry out a participatory map of Indigenous land tenure in Moskitia.⁸³ Although the geographical scope included non-Miskitu areas, MASTA became the project's official partner. The efforts to conduct this mapping exercise became more urgent after the government assigned the concession to Stone Container. The objective was that the map would help the Indigenous peoples in Moskitia document their land use to eventually obtain property titles. Twenty-two Indigenous research assistants, most of them Miskitu, were selected to obtain the data over a period of three months (Herlihy & Leake, 1997).⁸⁴ MASTA and the Indigenous collaborators took the protagonist role during the presentation of the map to the government, donors, journalists, and other Indigenous federations (Herlihy & Leake, 1997).

⁸³ Native Lands had previously collaborated with National Geographic to prepare the map "The Coexistence of Indigenous peoples and the Natural Environment in Central America" (Chapin, 1992). The project leader, Mac Chapin, had the idea of preparing a similar map for Honduras to show the extent of Indigenous land use in so-called empty lands. Native Lands contacted MOPAWI to serve as the national partner in the project. A research geographer, Peter Herlihy, and a Tear Fund volunteer, Andrew Leakey, were appointed to coordinate the project, as they had already collaborated in the mapping of the Tawahka land use.

⁸⁴ The three-stage method consisted in going to the field to sketch land use with local residents, bringing the information to the office to locate the sketches in maps, and returning to the field to validate the information.



Map 2: Subsistence zones map. Taken from Chapin, M. and Threlkeld, B., 2001, *Indigenous landscapes: A study in ethnocartography*. Center for the Support of Native Lands.

Aside from documenting land tenure, one of the most important contributions of the mapping exercise was to install a geographical consciousness in MASTA's leaders. As mentioned, MASTA's leaders were used to interacting with each other as part of a network of teachers. It was common practice for the teachers in each village to act as MASTA's representatives. By default, villages that concentrated the highest number of teachers, like those in the coastal zone, became the nodes for coordinating MASTA's activities. The mapping exercise provided a new lens to conceive the territorial dimension of their organization. The map documented customary land tenure by showing villages clustered around subsistence zones, a category inspired by the concept of functional habitat (Herlihy & Leake, 1997). This

cartographic representation gave MASTA's leaders a new way of conceiving their role as representatives of territorial clusters rather than individual villages. The collaborators at Native Lands argued that as a result of the mapping project, the Indigenous leaders had developed a new form of "region-wide consciousness" that would allow them to be more assertive in defense of their land rights. They argued that before the mapping project, leaders in Moskitia "felt no particular responsibility for what was occurring beyond the boundaries of their own communities" (Chapin & Threlkeld, 2001, p. 13). Similarly, the mapping coordinators noted that although the Indigenous researcher assistants were asked to collect data on practices that they were presumably already familiar with, "very few previously had [had] the opportunity to sit and reflect on it in such a manner" (Herlihy & Leake, 1997, p. 717).

The claims made by these external collaborators pointed to the paradoxical way in which the mapping project helped to foster attributes of organic leadership. It was unsurprising that the Indigenous leaders were not accustomed to having this bird's eye view of the region. This totalizing perspective was a defining feature of Western cartographic practices (Wood, 2010). In fact, the polygons identified with subsistence zones were themselves an artifice that resulted from applying these cartographic practices to rationalize customary land tenure. The external collaborators claimed that the subsistence zones represented Indigenous land use as found in the field, but the areas had already been pre-determined during the preparatory stage "to facilitate the logistics of collecting the information" (Herlihy & Leake, 1997, p. 715) and they were modified during the post-production stage "to make the map more legible" (Herlihy & Leake, 1997, p. 724). Critical cartographers have warned that these practices of simplification could negatively disrupt customary land tenure systems (Mollett, 2013; Wainwright & Bryan, 2009). While it is true that this form of rendering territory eventually led to the creation of new categories to formalize

customary land tenure, I agree with the external collaborators who argued the mapping project installed a new form of geographical consciousness among the leaders. One Miskitu leader I interviewed in 2015, and who had participated in the mapping project had this to say about this contribution:

Our participation in MOPAWI's mapping project helped us reached the conclusion that titles at the individual or collective level were not convenient because there were many overlap areas between communities. That is when we got the idea that we should title at the level of the federations. The map opened our eyes to see, for example, how people from the Tansin island traveled to Mocoron to extract many of the resources that they needed (C. Feldman, Interview, 24 June 2015).

I find that the ultimate positive aspect of developing this geographical consciousness was to foster a closer connection between leadership and the grassroots. This connection was formalized with the formation and delimitation of the Miskitu federations.

One of the lasting legacies of the 1992 mapping project was to inspire the formation of the Miskitu federation, significantly contributing to MASTA's transformation. Based on the mapping exercise, MOPAWI promoted the idea of re-organizing MASTA's structure into federations. The 1992 map included seventeen subsistence zones that crisscrossed each other. These overlaps provided the raw material for making decisions about the clusters of communities that had to be kept together for the purpose of claiming property titles. These clusters became the basis for the new federations' boundaries. The new federative model was officially unveiled in 1994. The first map of the federations showed the entire area of the department of Gracias a Dios divided into a seamless collection of MASTA's seven federations and FITH (figure 2). In contrast to the overlaps found in the 1992 map, the federation map showed non-overlapping, fixed borders between these jurisdictions.

Moskitia. Furthermore, the high degree of local autonomy embedded in organizations like CVT and FINZMOS contributed to the decentralization of the federative model. In other words, MASTA's claim over the villages that constituted the federations had to be cultivated. It is the cultivation of this relationship that contributed to the more organic dimensions of MASTA's leadership.

Not all the leaders supported MASTA's restructuring into federations. MASTA's 1994 declaration that announced the federations was contested by the founding members, including Molina. In a letter addressed to the government, this dissenting faction implored the state officials to disregard these federations that had been created without the consent of the people (MASTA, 1994). For this faction, this model "could lend itself to wrongful purposes" and was decided upon "at a distance" from MASTA's assembly (MASTA, 1994, p. 1). These protesters could have been referring to the fact that the declaration of the federations had been issued a few months earlier at a workshop in Tegucigalpa on conservation research organized by MOPAWI. The declaration also collapsed the representation of the Miskitu peoples and all peoples of Moskitia as one and the same. Furthermore, they were against the MOPAWI-endorsed plans to request titles based on the model of the subsistence zones. Instead, they argued that each community should receive its own title and that individuals should be able to receive titles as well. In other words, they contested the idea that the federations represented the Miskitu.

Although MASTA's leadership had evolved toward a more organic model, the contestation against the federations showed that this transition was not automatic. MASTA may have delineated a geo-body, but this did not mean that communities or that the Honduran government readily accepted it. The government rejected the proposal that MASTA and MOPAWI had put together to legalize land in Moskitia according to "social functional habitats"

(aka federations) (MASTA, 1995, p. 4). Instead, the government tried to respond to the mobilization for land rights by creating four new municipalities. The next section will describe some of the challenges that MASTA's leaders faced in consolidating their role as organic intellectuals. This analysis suggests that the tension between traditional and organic intellectuals never disappeared, but the overall effect was one of moving the organization towards a more grassroots orientation.

3.7 MAINTAINING ORGANIC LEADERSHIP

In the 2010s, it was evident that MASTA's leaders had managed to achieve the status of "ethnopolitical entrepreneur" who simultaneously "live *off* as well as *for* ethnicity" (Brubaker, 2004, p. 166, emphasis in original). Long were the days when MASTA was assumed to be an organization controlled by Miskitu teachers. Although this new position as ethnopolitical entrepreneurs made them more likely to exhibit the qualities of organic leadership, MASTA's leaders faced new challenges in enacting their new role. These challenges emerged in the context of Honduras's turn to multicultural policies that opened spaces for participation but also added threats for the co-optation of Indigenous representation.

In order to provide context for the multicultural turn, I will go back to the conversation I had with Manuel at the downtown coffee shop described in the vignette that opened this chapter. Manuel had collaborated in the creation of the Confederation of Autochthonous Peoples of Honduras (CONPAH) in 1992, which institutionalized the rapidly growing Pan-Indigenous movement. In 1994 and 1995, he participated in a series of protests that became known as the Indigenous pilgrimages (Sosa, 2016). Manuel believed that the protests had opened up a space for social change, but he lamented that many in the leadership were unprepared to face the challenges that were coming their way. Manuel recognized that the proposals made by most

Indigenous leaders were still too scattered. In this context, state agencies and foreign donors got to shape the agenda for multiculturalism (Anderson, 2012). Manuel explained that externally-driven efforts to support CONPAH and the Indigenous federations ended up creating rivalries among them that set the movement backward.⁸⁵ These programs became sites for the formation of new clientelistic relationships between the state and the ethnic federations as well as a source of conflict among the federations that weakened the pan-Indigenous movement in Honduras (Anderson, 2007; Sosa, 2016). This competition over jobs and resources is captured in the sociopolitical category that Hale and Millaman (2006) have called *indio permitido* (authorized Indian), which reflects the domestication of Indigenous movements through their inclusion in institutions that promote multiculturalism.

This tension was most palpable in the experience of *Nuestras Raíces* [Our Roots], a program of the Honduran Social Investment Fund (Fondo Hondureño de Inversión Social, FHIS) funded by the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank. *Nuestras Raíces* incorporated the Indigenous federations as intermediaries for the implementation of programs that supported small-scale public works, capacity-building activities, and micro-enterprises (Lara Pinto, 2002). The federations participated in project management by preparing proposals, selecting target communities, recommending local staff, and managing funds. *Nuestras Raíces* marked a turning point for multicultural policy in Honduras by being the first program to use the federations as intermediaries and distribute cash to members of Indigenous communities in the form of temporary wages and productive sub-projects (Renshaw, 2001). More donors started funding programs like *Nuestras Raíces*.

⁸⁵ CONPAH split in 2002 as a result of tensions among the different groups (Anderson, 2007). Leaders fought over how much control to demand from the government for the implementation of the *Nuestras Raíces* program, with one faction accusing the other of cooptation. (Concejo Nacional Indígena de Honduras, 2002).

MASTA's leaders experienced first-hand the tension created by participation in multicultural turn. The program provided MASTA's leaders with the chance to manage sub-projects as well as receiving stipends. Instead of elevating their stature as development brokers, participation in the program made the leaders subject to intense scrutiny (Galeana, 2020). During my fieldwork in 2017 and 2018, I heard on numerous occasions about MASTA's alleged corruption during this period. An evaluation of *Nuestras Raíces* provided more insights into the opinion that the Miskitu population had of the program and MASTA. Miskitu participants had the lowest level of satisfaction with the performance of their organization, MASTA, among the ethnic groups (ESA Consultores, 2003). Furthermore, the evaluators concluded that MASTA was less effective than the other federations in mobilizing projects for the Miskitu communities. The evaluators also noted that Miskitu participants had complained about corruption in MASTA's leadership and distrusted community banks. Nearly 90 percent of Miskitu respondents in a survey said that they stopped participating in community banks because they did not believe the administration was effective or transparent (ESA Consultores, 2003). In contrast, only 11 percent of respondents in Lenca communities opted out of community banks for this reason.

In the early 2000s, MASTA's leaders, who had turned into agents of the multicultural state, were again experiencing a period of delinking from the grassroots. A U.S.-based research team that participated in another participatory mapping project around this period noted the following about MASTA:

Although it is difficult to reach comparative conclusions with other periods, it is clear that, during the period of the diagnosis, MASTA's community-based organization has been on a notable downturn, to the point where in some places, it practically disappears. This organizational weakness is surely due to several factors, which vary from community to community and between federations. Given the relatively new establishment of the eight federations, it is possible that the problem is partly rooted in

the unfeasibility of the shift towards the federal structure (CCARC, 2003, p. 6, Volume 2).

This experience suggests that MASTA's leaders had once again begun to exhibit attributes of traditional leadership. Nonetheless, a return to the land rights agenda helped to bring the leadership back into fostering its organic connection with the communities.

Since the failed legalization proposal in 1995, MASTA had engaged in various activities to maintain the land rights agenda but with limited success and risking the cooptation of leadership. In the 2000s, funding from the World Bank and the German government provided a new opportunity to reinsert the land rights agenda in government policy. In particular, the World Bank-funded Honduras Land Administration Program (Programa de Administración de Tierras de Honduras, PATH) provided the context in which MASTA and the government negotiated the arrangements for the inter-communal property titles.⁸⁶ PATH management had begun discussing with MASTA plans to title Indigenous lands in Moskitia since the start of the program in 2004. However, the government had been slow in responding to MASTA's demands to provide titles at the level of the federations, which by this time were called territorial councils. The government continued to propose the idea of titling communities rather than territories. Pressure from the grassroots helped to ensure that MASTA's leadership did not cave into the government's proposal. This pressure came mostly from the leaders of FINZMOS, who in 2007 received support from the Ford Foundation to prepare and submit their own request to title their federation

⁸⁶ PATH's main aims were to modernize the cadastre and registry systems in line with a recently issued property law and to title urban and rural lands in areas of high economic growth (World Bank, 2004), and it did not initially consider working with Indigenous communities. Around the time that the government was working on PATH's design, the World Bank-funded, through another project, a study on land regularization in Garifuna and Miskitu communities. The study was prepared by the U.S.-based Caribbean and Central America Research Council (CCARC), and it reinstated the Miskitu demand to title inter-communal blocks (i.e., territorial councils) rather than individual communities. Using the results from this study, the World Bank persuaded the government to incorporate land regularization activities in Garifuna and Miskitu communities in PATH. Although PATH did not manage to complete any regularization activities in Garifuna or Miskitu communities during its first phase, an agreement to title the twelve territorial councils was brokered during the second phase.

(Galeana, 2020). FINZMOS's request provided the initial blueprint to create the inter-communal property titling model. Despite strong pressure from FINZMOS, the Zelaya administration (2006-09) never committed to the titling of territorial councils. In fact, he tried to attract Taiwanese investment to build the controversial Patuca III hydroelectric project, which affected Moskitia's Indigenous communities located downstream.

The turn to cultivate more organic forms of leadership within MASTA came in the shape of renewed leadership that had the chance to seize a political moment to renegotiate the titling agenda. In 2009, the Ford Foundation and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) began to provide direct financial assistance to MASTA, which allowed it to act more independently from state agencies. Then, in 2010, the Miskitu elected a new president of MASTA, Norvin Goff, who promised to achieve the titles (fieldnotes, 2017-2019). The new leadership arrived at a time when the country was experiencing the political chaos provoked by the 2009 coup. Although MASTA had limited participation in the anti-coup demonstrations, they did carry out a massive mobilization in 2011 to denounce several plans that the Lobo administration had for Moskitia, from the construction of the Patuca III hydroelectric dam to the expansion of oil palm plantations. Ironically, post-coup politics provided the space to negotiate the titles. This occurred in a context in which the Lobo administration (2010-14) faced enormous pressure to improve its legitimacy in the eyes of the international community (Galeana, 2020). As a result of MASTA's protest, Lobo agreed to invite the Miskitu leadership to the negotiation table, where he agreed to approve inter-communal titling.⁸⁷ After the titling strategy was successfully negotiated in 2011, the Miskitu constituency started seeing MASTA in a more

⁸⁷ In this plan, PATH would finance three territorial councils and the other nine would be financed by INA's budget and a German-funded project working in the Rio Platano Biosphere Reserve.

positive light. This was a symbolic victory for MASTA that validated its status as a broker with the government while maintaining a commitment to grassroots-based concerns over the defense of territories.

3.8 CONCLUSION

Between 1976 and 2011, MASTA underwent an organizational transformation that changed it from an interest-based group centered on the concerns of Miskitu professionals to a grassroots-oriented organization capable of coordinating regional initiatives. I have proposed to analyze this transformation through the lens of how MASTA's leadership gravitated between those elements commonly attributed to traditional and organic intellectuals. Following Rappaport, I argued that the attribute of organic intellectual was independent of the formal role undertaken by an individual but rather depended on how the individual used their position to advance goals related to an ethnic-based project. I proposed that leaders do not fall neatly into categories of traditional and organic intellectual but that they rather stand in a continuum. I called to pay attention to the circumstances that created the opportunities and challenges in which leaders would come to develop these different attributes.

In my own historical reconstruction of Miskitu leadership, I went back to the educational and missionary policies that favored the emergence of teachers as those that would perform the role of Miskitu intellectuals vis-à-vis external agents. I argued that this legacy contributed to MASTA first emerging as an organization that revolved around the interest of Miskitu teachers, proposing that under this modality, they were more likely to act as traditional intellectuals. Then, I explained how the circumstances of the Cold War nearly broke down MASTA's leaders but also contributed to a politicization of their cause along ethnic lines. I argued that MOPAWI's Land Legalization Program provided the setting in which MASTA was able to rework this

newfound ethnic angle leading to the creation of a geo-body, in the form of the federations, that more clearly connected the leadership with the grassroots. I observed that this geo-body helped MASTA's leaders with cultivating more organic attributes in their leadership. Nonetheless, the creation of the federations was no guarantee to maintain the organic attribute of MASTA's leaders. Their participation in social development programs, which were part of the cultural turn, made them revert back to more traditional attributes in the eyes of Miskitu constituents. MASTA's leadership realigned again towards a more grassroots-oriented program when a change of leadership coincided with a political conjuncture that favored the government's acceptance of the inter-communal property titles. Therefore, I suggested that the strategy of obtaining the inter-communal property titles required MASTA to navigate between attributes associated with traditional and organic intellectuals.

This characterization of Indigenous intellectuals offers two specific contributions to the discussion of state formation. First, it suggests that externally-driven interventions, like mapping projects, can introduce new social arrangements that, despite being foreign, contribute to the fostering of more organic forms of leadership. Second, it suggests that organic forms of leadership are never completely divorced from those characterized as traditional because cultivating a grassroots-oriented ethos involves being perceived as an effective broker with hegemonic actors.

PART II

THE MORAL ECONOMIES OF PROPERTY

CHAPTER 4: LOCALITIES

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Wampusirpi is a town of about 2,000 inhabitants on the margins of the Patuca River. It is the largest settlement in one of the three regions that I selected to carry out field research in Moskitia. When I first visited in 2015, my initial impression of the place was the “Wild West” atmosphere that made Wampusirpi different from the other larger towns that I had visited in Moskitia. The conspicuous presence of Ladinos from the nearby department of Olancho—wearing cowboy hats and belts, riding horses, and openly carrying guns—is what fed my imagination. The town’s orientation was also more similar to settlements outside Moskitia. A Catholic church and large bodegas owned by Ladino merchants surrounded a treeless central park in the densely populated downtown. Other towns in Moskitia—like Auka, Ibans, Morocon, and Raya—had a more distinct Miskitu feeling. In these towns, the Moravian church occupied the central location among a sprawl of houses, the shade of mango trees offered meeting spaces to share the day’s news, and the Miskitu language dominated over Spanish. Even larger towns like Brus Laguna and Puerto Lempira, which had been subject to the grid-like orientation of urban planning schemes, felt more Miskitu due to the absence of Ladinos openly displaying the markers of Olanchano cattle ranching culture.

I returned to Wampusirpi in 2017 and 2018 to understand how this socio-spatial configuration shaped the possibilities for collective action compared to other regions within Moskitia and what effects those differences ultimately had on MASTA’s more extensive plans for enacting the inter-communal property regime. I set out to inquire about the histories, labor practices, values, and modes of sociality that constitute what Wendy Wolford (2004) has called

“spatial imaginaries.” The intention was to mobilize this information on spatial imaginaries to develop an analysis centered on the moral economy (Thompson, 1993) that could help explain differences in collective action. In Auka, the Miskitu had already organized an uprising to evict Ladino colonists. I considered it essential to identify which factors were similar or different in other sites that had also experienced rapid colonization but where no such collective action had occurred. However, my inquiry into spatial imaginaries was soon challenged by another elemental question that I had so far neglected. What exactly constituted the places where I was supposed to be analyzing imaginaries that shaped collective behavior? An interaction I had with one of my closest contacts in Wampusirpi made me think of the importance of dwelling on this question before crafting an explanation.

Pablo was a 30-year-old who worked as a technical advisor for the territorial council of BAKINASTA, which was awarded the title to the Wampusirpi area. I met him during a trip in 2017, after which he offered to set me up at his parents’ place the next time I visited Wampusirpi. His parents lived in a neighborhood next to Wampusirpi’s downtown that felt more distinctively Miskitu: a collection of wooden houses sprawling over a grassy area without any fences and where most people were related by kinship. On my next visit, Pablo’s family kindly offered me a spare room in their four-bedroom house. Only Pablo’s youngest teenage sister still lived in the parental home. The other residents were two grandchildren, a niece, and a nephew staying with Pablo’s parents to attend school in Wampusirpi. Many times, the highlight of the day was simply spending time with the family, resting on a hammock, talking about life in Wampusirpi. Pablo and two of his brothers that lived nearby and would regularly stop by the house. Pablo worked with the territorial council, Mario with the municipal government, and Alexis was a freelancer who always seemed to be looking for the next opportunity, whether with

the territorial council, the municipality, or a company. The brothers sometimes espoused different opinions about the territorial council, which offered insights into the multiple perspectives on the territory.

One evening, Pablo and I were chatting by the kitchen table when I told him about the information I had gathered on Wampusirpi's history in my oral history interviews. All of my three sources agreed that Carmen Barahona, a Ladino from Olancho, had been the first person to settle in Wampusirpi somewhere in the early 1900s and that other Ladino families had later joined him. Pablo disapproved of the narrative that Ladinos had founded Wampusirpi. He told me how he interviewed an older woman about a year ago to prepare BAKINASTA's *Plan de Vida* [Lifeway Plan]. The Lifeway Plan was a planning framework elaborated with Indigenous communities, which was supposed to re-orient development in the territory from an Indigenous perspective. The concept was borrowed from Indigenous organizations in South America, and donors were supporting the elaboration of these plans in the territorial councils. Pablo had interviewed the elderly woman to collect information for the section on history and traditions. In this interview, he claimed to have learned that the Wampusirpi area was a place of "a strong spiritual presence" for the Miskitu.⁸⁸ However, the interviewee mentioned that everybody had to abandon the area due to an epidemic when she was a young girl. A sukhia, a Miskitu shaman, danced on burning coals to appease the spirits, but people kept falling ill. Based on this account, Pablo reasoned that the Wampusirpi had first been a Miskitu settlement, which was abandoned, and later populated by Ladinos.

⁸⁸ The Lifeway Plan is a participatory planning document for the territorial council. The document included a section on history and traditions.

In disputing Wampusirpi's origin narrative, Pablo was engaging in the logic that Elizabeth Povinelli (2011) has referred to as "the governance of the prior"—the move to claim rights based on prior occupancy. According to Povinelli, playing the authenticity game imposed by the governance of the prior leads to contradictions that do not necessarily confront the interruption created by settler-colonialism. In the case of Wampusirpi, it was undeniable that Indigenous peoples had lived on the Patuca River since time immemorial. In fact, following the logic of the governance of the prior, it would probably have been more accurate to describe Wampusirpi as a place initially inhabited by the Tawahka, who were themselves displaced by the territorial conquests of the Miskitu.⁸⁹ There were so many gaps in both of our oral histories that any attempt to fact-check them would have proved futile. In the absence of historical records, we had to rely on the memories of our interviewees. Edward Conzemius (1932), the author of the oldest published ethnography on the region, mentioned that communities resettled as a result of epidemics. However, it was unclear whether the epidemic mentioned by Pablo's interviewee had occurred before or after the arrival of Carmen Barahona to Wampusirpi. Another source based on oral histories suggested that the epidemic had taken place in the nearby community of Raya, which caused Miskitu families to move to Wampusirpi (CCARC, 2003).

Our discussion of Wampusirpi's founding was eye-opening for me, not for what it showed about the limits of conducting oral histories, but rather for the way in which history could be mobilized to support and conceal present-day organizational dynamics and what that could say about the reproduction of settler-colonialism. As Pablo's himself explained, his real concern with presenting Carmen Barahona's as Wampusirpi's founder laid in how this narrative

⁸⁹ Wampusirpi's name is considered to be in the Tawahka language (CCARC, 2003).

could legitimate the notion that we were in a Ladino town. This narrative was politically dangerous when the territorial council was trying to fight back the influence of the Olanchanos.

Pablo was right that a narrative centered on Barahona as Wampusirpi's founder was firmly inserted in the logic of settler-colonialism in Honduras: the act of "founding" could only be attributed to a Ladino who established a sedentary residence and likely, interacting with state agents who reinforced this status.⁹⁰ But this critique of foundational myths did not tell the whole picture of what was occurring in the present-day Wampusirpi area. The descendants of these earlier settlers had integrated with the Miskitu and collaborated in the present-day territorial movement. Like the *ribeirinhos* of the Brazilian Amazon, second and third-generation Ladino colonists had established modes of belongingness in the territory. Pablo himself was of half Ladino descent.⁹¹ The Miskitu, however, never have had strict rules for tribal affiliation, like blood quantum or membership rolls in the U.S. This meant that the process of claiming to belong to the territory was non-legalistic, representing a fluidity that accentuated the situatedness in the construction of ethnic identity (Brubaker, 2004).

My conversation with Pablo made me reflect more on my presuppositions for comparing spatial imaginaries across Moskitia. Not only was I struggling to straighten out basic historical facts about the communities, but I found that the blurriness of these histories could also say something powerful about the construction of identities. Before attempting to explain behavior in terms of spatial imaginaries or moral economies, I first needed to understand the composition of these geographical units that I was attributing these characteristics to. How were villages related

⁹⁰ Carmen Barahona was presumably a retired colonel from the Honduran army (Barahona, 2009).

⁹¹ Both his paternal and maternal grandfathers came from Olancho and married Miskitu women.

to territories? How did these territories relate to the property boundaries of the territorial councils? What does this fragmentation amount to when trying to consider Moskitia as a whole?

I turned to Hugh Raffles's (1999) "local theory" to understand the making of place in Moskitia. Raffles developed his outline for a local theory as part of his attempt to untangle the multiple relations that intersected places and the effects that those produced in its very making. The central question in Raffles's theory is asking "how, in all its specificity, does this place that holds our attention come into being?" (Raffles, 1999, p. 323). His answer is revealed in the elaboration of a concept for "locality," which he distinguishes from location and place in his case study of Igarapé Guariba in the Brazilian Amazon:

Locality, then, should be confused with location. It is, rather, a set of relations, an ongoing politics, a density, in which places are discursively and imaginatively materialized and enacted through the practices of variously positioned people and political economies (Raffles, 1999, p. 324).

For Guariba, "place" (which I use in a restricted sense as the site of the production of local subjects and the construction of local identities) and "locality" (which encompasses the embeddedness and locatedness of place) are anchored in narration and, specifically, in narratives of "nature." (Raffles, 1999, p. 329).

Raffles's approach to locality can be combined with an analysis that accounts for the forces of production that co-produce space (Lefebvre, 1991). A Marxist understanding of relations of production provides a lens through which we can sort the myriad of relations that constitute localities. The main difference between local theory and a Lefebvrian analysis is Raffles' emphasis on the embodiment of locality. One of the differences between place and locality is precisely the way in which the latter is embodied by actors and reproduced through their narration. I find this characteristic useful because it allows for an understanding of how the narratives of MASTA and other leaders of territorial councils contribute to the formation of emergent forms of locality that are trying to bind together Moskitia as a place.

Following Raffles, this chapter dwells on what constitutes a locality in each of the three regions that I visited during fieldwork. These three regions correspond to particular combinations of ecological formations (the coast, the river, and the savanna) present throughout Moskitia and that have defined macro socio-ecological areas—identifying these regions as distinctive areas of Moskitia dates as far back as the first scientific study on Moskitia conducted by Zuñiga Echenique (1875/1905), which divided the region into three sectors: Black River, the Patuca River, and the Caratasca Lagoon. My present-day comparison was also guided by the political divisions of municipalities and territorial councils.

In applying Raffles's method, I tried to think inductively about what constitutes locality, rather than follow the deductive logic that guided the original selection of research sites. I pay attention to the set of relations that constructs these locations. I spent time doing interviews in the main population center located in the territorial council and across villages in the territory to accomplish this task. Also, I selected one village in each territory to conduct a questionnaire that could provide a more in-depth view of these localities' social dynamics. The results of this questionnaire and participant observation are further discussed in chapters 5 and 6 based on the analysis of localities developed in this chapter.

Since some boundaries are necessary to guide the analysis, I will structure the comparison based on the three territorial councils that overlap these localities. These are the territorial council of BAKINASTA, Rayaka, and WAMAKLISCINASTA. BAKINASTA corresponded to the Patuca River sector and is characterized by its broadleaf forest. Rayaka corresponds to the Black River sector and is characterized by its coastline access. WAMAKLISCINASTA corresponds to the Caratasca sector and is characterized by pine savanna. In reference to these ecological features, I use the following pseudonyms for the

villages where I did a questionnaire: *Awala* [river] in BAKINASTA, *Kabu* [sea] in Rayaka, and *Twi* [grassland] in WAMAKLISCINASTA.

Based on the analysis of the different elements that constructed localities, I identify four trends that help guide the analysis of moral economies. First, kinship structure constitutes one of the most important elements for how people conceive localities. Territorial councils where the population has a stronger sense of shared kinship are more likely to engage in collective action, as the case of WAMAKLISCINASTA. Second, the socio-ecological landscape plays an important role in the construction of localities. Natural features, like rivers, create spatial boundaries that may not coincide with those of the territorial council and might lead to sub-territorial divisions, like in the case of Rayaka. Third, histories of migration lead to differences in the level of integration of Miskitu and Ladino populations in the construction of locality. The economic status and political participation of the Ladino population may or may not align depending on the length and spatial distribution of this migration, which explains the differences between BAKINASTA and Rayaka. Fourth, different levels of infrastructural development shape organizational dynamics in each locality, like the case of BAKINASTA where the town of Wampusirpi serves as a pole in the absence of roads. In turn, these organizational dynamics shape feelings of belonging in the territorial council.

4.2 THE SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE

i) Biogeographical Zones

Moskitia is an area of very humid tropical forest in the Holdridge life zone category (UK. Overseas Development Administration, 1981). The dry season (*verano*) runs from January to May, and the rainy season (*invierno*) runs from June to December. The region is characterized by three biogeographic zones: the coastal area, broadleaf forests, and the pine tree savanna.

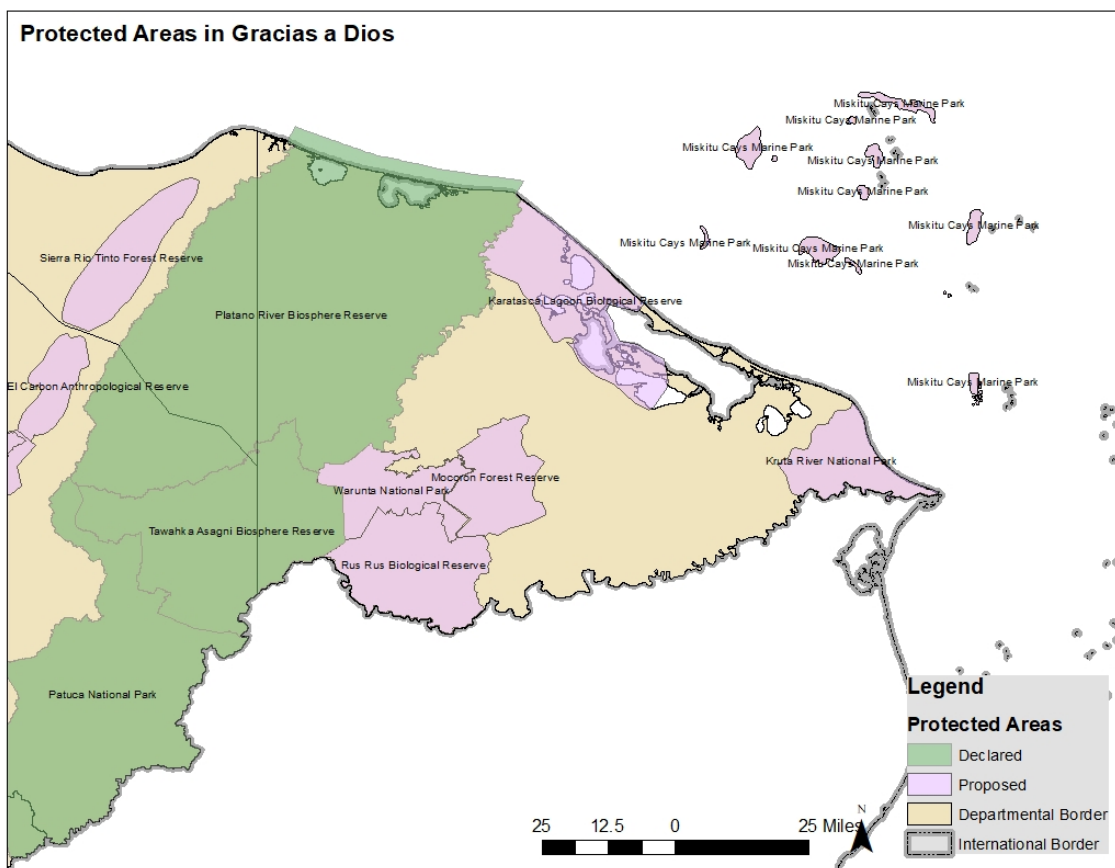
The coastline is made up of a combination of marine, freshwater, and terrestrial environments. Off the coast, the shallow coastal shelf provides a combination of coral reefs, cays, and sea grass. The coastal shelf is widest around Cape Gracias a Dios and Nicaragua and narrowest in the stretch between Cape Camaron and Barra Patuca. Marshes, lagoons, and estuaries dot the coastline. Boats make their way through a combination of natural water bodies and artificial canals that offer routes for transportation. Lagoons are covered in mangrove forests, and in other areas, the vegetation is composed of palm, reeds, sedges, ferns, and gallery forest.

Inland, in areas of higher altitude, the hilly terrains and mountainous areas are covered with broadleaf forest. The tallest mountain has an elevation of about 1,500 meters. The forest has tree species with commercial value like mahogany (*Swietenia macrophylla*), tropical cedar (*Cendrela sp.*), and the latex-producing tunu (*Manilkara zapota*). This rugged terrain created the natural barrier with the interior that Aguilar Paz (1952) had referred to in his essay “Moskitia, the Unbroken Land.”

Lowland savanna stretches from the Ibans Lagoon to south Nicaragua. The savanna extends the longest inland on the Wangki River, up to 160 kilometers inland (Parsons, 1955). The vegetation is composed of Caribbean pines (*Pinus Caribaea*), oak, sedge grassland, marshy grasslands, palms, palmettos, and other swamp vegetation. Rivers and creeks cross the savanna with riparian gallery forest. Natural and anthropogenic fires are frequent on the savanna.

Some of Moskitia’s largest tracts of broadleaf forests are included in protected areas. The Platano River Biosphere Reserve is the largest protected area in the country. It forms part of the Mosquitia Rainforest Corridor that extends from the Baltimore Mountain, close to the former Black River settlement site, to Bosawas in Nicaragua. As mentioned in chapter 3, the Platano River Biosphere Reserve was declared in 1982. In 1997, the reserve was reorganized into three

zones: The cultural zone within the department of Gracias a Dios, the buffer zone in the departments of Colon and Olancho, and the core zone in the borderland of these three departments. The other protected area in the region is the Tawahka Asangni Biosphere Reserve, created in 1996 to protect both the natural resources and Indigenous communities. The Tawahka Asangni Biosphere Reserve covers an area of 2,400 square km, and it is located on the border between Gracias a Dios and Olancho. In the 1990s, CODHEFOR planned to create other protected areas in the Warunta Mountain, the Morocon River Watershed, the Rus Rus River watershed, the Kruta River watershed, and the Caratasca Lagoon basin. However, plans faltered with the rise of Indigenous mobilization against the declaration of new protected areas.



Map 4: Protected Areas in Gracias a Dios

ii) The Geography of the Territorial Councils

The territorial council of BAKINASTA integrates sixteen communities along the mid-section of the Patuca River, Honduras's longest river. The headwaters are in the center of the country, about 100 kilometers from Tegucigalpa. Guayape and Guayambre Rivers are the main tributaries. Patuca River forms at the confluence of both rivers in the department of Olancho. The river's journey is marked by a pass from the Olancho Valley to the rugged terrain of the Cordillera entre Rios, the Patuca Mountains, and the Colon Mountains before reaching the low plains of Moskitia and emptying on the Caribbean Sea. The Patuca River crosses different cultural regions. The upper basin is Ladino territory, belonging to Olanchano cattle ranching frontier culture. Next, the river flows through Tawahka territory. The Tawahka occupied one of the most mountainous parts of the river, where white water makes navigation more difficult. This location resulted from the historical pressures for territory by both ladino and Miskitu communities. The Miskitu territory begins where the Colon mountains meet the lowland plains. The Miskitu villages have been organized into three territorial councils—BAKINASTA, BAMIASTA, and BATIASTA.

About two-thirds of the area occupied by BAKINASTA is covered by broadleaf and riparian forests, and the rest by pine savanna. BAKINASTA borders to the east with the Tawahka Asangni Biosphere Reserve. About one-third of the territory is located on the eastern side of the Patuca River and within the cultural zone of the Platano River Biosphere Reserve. The council borders with the territorial council of DIUNAT, which is entirely located within the cultural zone. To the south, BAKINASTA borders the Miskitu territorial council FINZMOS, which is separated by the Warunta Mountain. To the west, BAKINASTA borders with the

territorial council of BAMIASTA, which represents the next group of villages on the lower part of the Patuca River.

The territorial council of Rayaka is situated on the coastal front, east of the historical site of Black River. The entirety of Rayaka's territory is located within the Platano River Biosphere Reserve. Most of the villages included in Rayaka's title are situated in a narrow strip of land along the coast about 10 kilometers in length. These villages are located between the Caribbean Sea on one side and the Ibans Lagoon, marshes, and river canals. On the other side of the Ibans Lagoon, there is a small stretch of pine tree savanna on the foothills of the Baltimore mountain. The Baltimore is part of a mountain chain that continues to Colon and Olancho and forms the core of the Platano River Biosphere Reserve. The Platano River is the largest of the several rivers that flow from the mountains into this area.

The Miskitu villages are surrounded by Garifuna, Ladino, Pech, and Miskitu villages affiliated with another territorial council. In the east, along the coast, Rayaka borders Garifuna territory. Plaplaya, Batalla, and Tocamacho are the Garifuna villages within the department of Gracias a Dios, and they are grouped in the territorial council of Barauda. Rayaka's eastern border flanks the Ladino villages on the Tinto River. The largest of them is the town of Palacios, on the site of the former Black River settlement. The southeastern border is with the Pech territorial council of Las Marias. The Pech villages are accessible from the coast through the Platano River. On the west and south, Rayaka borders the Miskitu territorial council of DIUNAT. The former Land Vigilance Committee (CVT) used to group Rayaka and its neighbors.

WAMAKLISCINASTA groups sixteen Miskitu villages, which are located about 150 kilometers from the coastline. The territorial council borders Nicaragua along the Wangki River.

Waspam, the second largest town in Nicaragua's Northern Caribbean Region, is across from WAMAKLISCINASTA. Most of the villages in WAMAKLISCINASTA, however, are located in the savanna area, about 25 kilometers from the river. The only village on the river is Corinto, which serves as the border with the Miskitu territorial council of FINZMOS. This other territorial council groups the villages upstream the Wangki River and east of WAMAKLISCINASTA. On the western side, WAMAKLISCINASTA borders the Miskitu territorial council of TRUKSINASTA. The villages in the savanna area are connected to the coast by the Kruta River.

4.3 MAKING LOCALITIES

i) Kinship Structure and Access to Land

Kinship networks form the main social unit around which localities are constructed. In her groundbreaking ethnography, Mary Helms (1971) identified three conceptions of kinship among the Miskitu living on the Nicaraguan side of the Wangki River. First, the *talla*, skin in Miskitu, which could be considered as membership by sharing an ethnic identity.⁹² Second, the *kiamp*, which described the extended family network that could be spread across several communities. Third, the nuclear family group is integrated by the parents and their unmarried children. In subsequent ethnographic fieldwork, Isabel Perez Chiriboga (2002) confirmed Helms's classification for the Miskitu living in Honduras but clarified that they used the term *kiamka*, which means descendant, instead of *kiamp*, which refers to the temporary shelter built on a parcel (from the English word camp). During my fieldwork, I also heard the term *kiamka* being used to refer to the larger kin group. Also, Perez Chiriboga noted that the Miskitu used the

⁹² Chirigoba offers a different interpretation of the *talla* as the kin connected to an ancestor to the third degree. In this explanation, *kiamka* is a subset of the *talla*.

Spanish word *raza* [race] in three distinct ways, none of which were based on epidermal differences. *Raza* could refer to Miskitu ethnicity, a group of people that shared common ancestry (*talla*), or a subset of closer relatives that formed part of a *kiamka*.

The non-epidermal emphasis on the concept of race among the Miskitu could follow from the historical process of ethnogenesis that contributed to forming the contemporary Miskitu identity. Karl Offen (2002) has shown that European colonial administrators identified two distinct population groups in the Mosquito Shore in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Sambos were identified by their mixed Amerindian and Afro-descendant ancestry, and the Tawira were identified by their Amerindian ancestry. The Sambos lived on the northern part of the Mosquito Shore, between Black River and the Patuca River, and the Tawira were concentrated around Cape Gracias a Dios and Nicaragua. Eventually, the two groups morphed into one and became known simply as Miskitu.⁹³ The Miskitu have also mixed with Europeans since the colonial era, and more recently, with traders from Europe, the U.S., and the Bay Islands. Therefore, the Miskitu themselves are comfortable identifying a varied group of phenotypical characteristics with the Miskitu ethnicity. Miskitu have been known to marry outside their ethnicity, and offspring are assimilated, which is assumed to have been one reason why the Miskitu population grew compared to other ethnic groups like the Tawahka and Pech (Conzemius, 1932).

Both Helms and Perez Chiriboga argued that the *kiamka* was the most important resource for social interaction and reciprocity among the Miskitu. In particular, Perez Chiriboga's (2002) work described the importance that the *kiamka* played in defining access to land for residential

⁹³ Ladinos sometimes use the term *Sambo* to refer to the Miskitu in a derogatory way.

and agricultural plots, as well as participation in networks for the distribution of goods and credit relations. Traditionally, men have partaken in solidarity networks to work in the agricultural fields, hunt, construct houses, and lend each other cash to cover emergencies. Likewise, women in a *kiamka* participated in household chores, like washing clothes and gathering firewood, and subsistence activities, like fishing.

The *kiamka* structure still plays a major role in organizing territoriality among the Miskitu in the three areas I studied. An individual can gain access to the *kiamka* through the father or mother's side, with closer attachment to one group depending on residency. Traditionally, the Miskitu are a matrilocal society which means that *kiamkas* are preserved through the female lineage. The interactions among different *kiamkas* create a canvas of Miskitu territoriality where some areas are under the exclusive use of *kiamka* members while others are under common use (Hayes, 2007). River and creek banks are reserved for the agricultural activities of the *kiamka* members. Nuclear families maintain agricultural plots, who rotate areas every two to three years in the larger territory controlled by the *kiamka*. Common areas include the grasslands of the savanna for cattle grazing, mountainous areas for hunting, mangroves and small creeks for fish breeding, and larger water bodies for fishing. The Miskitu also maintain places for timber reserves where they know that they can obtain forest and non-forest resources.

Despite the central role of the *kiamka* in organizing Miskitu territoriality, their influence in each of the study areas is diminishing due to different degrees of colonization. The encroachment of Ladino colonists erodes the territorial base of the *kiamkas* and is bringing the system into crisis. This transformation across the three regions is further explained in chapter 5.

ii) Market Relations

The system of subsistence agriculture is similar across the Moskitia. Men cut down trees and clean the ground by burning them to create agricultural fields in patches of forests. Women participate in the planting, weeding, and reaping of the crops. Regional differences are expressed through the way that households combine subsistence and market-based activities. Most Miskitu engage in subsistence farming, but they still need cash to buy sugar, salt, lard, coffee, flour and pay for education and health expenses, equipment, clothes, and inputs. The resources that were available in each of the regions significantly shaped access to market-based activities.

The broadleaf forest has provided valuable economic resources, particularly to those living in the mid-Patuca. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, loggers have come into the area to exploit the hardwoods commercially. The first mahogany companies were from Belize, as explained in chapter 2. Later, more Americans got into the business as well as other traders from the Bay Islands. The mahogany trade was a significant shaper of geographies in this region. The upper basin community on the Patuca worked on the felling of timber; those in the lower end of the Patuca worked on collecting the timber thrown into the river and bring it in rafts to Brus Laguna, where it was put into boats. The mahogany trade, however, went into a bust period in the 1960s. Since then, no large logging company has worked in the area. Currently, there are two local forest cooperatives operating in the mid-Patuca area dedicated to the commercial exploitation of mahogany.

The other forest resource that had an important commercial value in the past was latex-based products. According to Conzemius (1932), the collection of rubber from the wild tree (*Castilla sp.*) to sell to the U.S. market began in the 1860s, but production stopped when prices dropped after the supply surge from the plantations in Southeast Asia. Also, the rubber tree

population diminished due to the practice of felling the trees to facilitate extraction (Conzemius, 1932).⁹⁴ Rubber production experienced another short boom during World War II but dropped again. The other latex-based product from the tunu tree (*Manilkara zapota*) experienced a relatively longer market that lasted until the 1980s. The latex was sold mainly to the U.S. company Wrigley's Co. that had its regional headquarters in Waspam. Some locals still have memories of how helicopters used to come into the area to take the product to Waspam. Alluvial gold was another extractive activity that attracted some attention, but the resources were not large enough to lead to permanent mining areas, as it occurred in Nicaragua.

The riverbank of the Patuca River also provided fertile land for agriculture. In the 1930s and 1940s, foreigners moved into the area to start banana plantations. Germans planted banana from Kuah to Awastigni and the Americans from Brabila to Waxma (CCARC, 2003). Bananas were shipped by steam boats to Brus Laguna and then to La Ceiba to the United States. The banana plantations attracted many workers to the Patuca. Banana production, however, stopped when foreigners left the area when the Sigatoka disease spread after a hurricane in 1942 flooded the plantations. The commercial exploitation of cacao began in the late 1980s. It suffered a major blowback when Hurricane Mitch destroyed nearly all cacao trees in 1998, but it has recovered since then, and production has reached pre-1998 levels.

The coastal area has traditionally provided more opportunities to engage in a variety of wage labor. Communities living in the coastal area used to work in mahogany and logwood camps in Belize, leaving their villages for several months from May to November or December (Conzemius, 1932). However, according to Conzemius, they stopped when more work became

⁹⁴ Huleros had to climb the tree to make the carving in the upper part of the trunk.

available in Honduras, working in mahogany camps or gold mines. Also, the population on the coast has enjoyed several market activities based on the local resources. In the 1920s, the United Fruit Company began a coconut tree plantation in Tutsi Cocal area.⁹⁵ The plantations provided labor and brought people from all over Moskitia to work there. However, the United Fruit Company left the area in the 1940s, and coconut oil has not been commercially exploited since then.

The fishing and seafood industries have also provided another source of employment for those living on the coast. Sea bass is the fish species with the highest commercial value. It is salted and sold to intermediaries that come from all over Honduras to buy the fish that is traditionally consumed during the Lent season. In the 1970s, the boom of lobster fishing began, significantly transforming the coastal region. The industrial fishing boat crews based in La Ceiba and the Bay Islands provided employment to a large number of Miskitu men to work as divers and crew members. In the 1970s and 1980s, the fishing season was opened all year long. The lobster boom brought significant economic activity to the area, symbolized in the opening of stores, canteens, and increased consumption of alcohol and illegal drugs, which often left divers and their families embedded in relations of debt (Herlihy, 2012). However, the intensification of lobster fishing has led to overexploitation and deterioration of labor conditions. Divers had to spend a more extended period and in deeper areas to meet demand. These conditions put divers at higher risk for decompression sickness, leading to many former divers disabled or dead. In the early 1990s, the Honduran government closed lobster diving for half of the year to allow stocks to replenish. Also, NGOs began to look for safer and more sustainable economic activities for the population. Although the economic importance of lobster diving has decreased, it continues

⁹⁵ This area is currently in DIUNAT's territory, but it is part of the coastal area.

to be one of the main activities. In recent years, the communities have also begun to work in jellyfish and sea cucumber extraction for Asian markets.

The economic prospects for communities living on the interior savanna have been more limited than those on the Patuca or the coast. The riverbanks in this flat area are more prone to flooding, leading to the destruction of crops. Higher variance in weather patterns, with periods of intense drought and others of flooding, have made agriculture more unpredictable. Softwood from pine trees is the resource with the highest commercial value. One of the few cash-earning opportunities has been for households to sell softwood boards to coastal communities that lack this resource. They take the timber by creating drafts and floating them down to the Kruta River until they reach the coast. The journey takes about eight days from Auka. This is a seasonal activity. They cut wood when it is time to have the cash to pay for school supplies or Christmas season and when there is an emergency. Pine softwood is the communities' wealth. However, they can only do it in small quantities. The traditional method is to use a saw with the assistance of two people. Few people own chainsaws, but people can rent them. However, they would need cash to rent it and buy the fuel. These extractions are usually done without seeking government permits, risking decommission by the military.

Logging companies based in Nicaragua cut timber in the savanna around WAMAKLISCINASTA in the 1970s. People in WAMAKLISCINASTA have memories of having wage work during the 1970s and resent the exploitation of their resources by outsiders. The only vestiges that remain of the company time are a few old trucks that have converted into ruins. In recent years, the members of WAMAKLISCINASTA have organized a producers' association. By the time of fieldwork, they were hoping to sell softwood to markets in Honduras. For a long time, the commercial exploitation of softwood from Moskitia to Honduran markets in

the interior was not considered economically viable. However, the decline of pine forests in other parts of Honduras, due to the spread of the beetle plague, has made the disease-free stocks more Moskitia more commercially attractive.

iii) Community Histories

The combination of ecology, subsistence activities, market relations, government policy, and missionary activities created the conditions for forming the present-day settlements.

Although we know that the Mosquito Shore was divided into at least three large administrative regions during the period of the Mosquito Kingdom (Olien, 1987, 1998), we know less about the organization of village life. According to Conzemius (1932), the Miskitu were not organized around clan divisions, but each village had a minor chief known as *wihta*.⁹⁶ Drawing on the anthropological theory of the time, Conzemius attributed scattered settlements and low density to lowland tropical ecology (Conzemius, 1932, p. 6).

As seen in chapter 2, the sedentarization of the Miskitu population was one of the initial activities that the Honduran government set for itself, following the example of Father Subirana among the Xicaque and Pech. We know, however, that the Honduran state continued to have a weak presence in the communities. The education mission only opened schools in a few communities, most of them located in the larger settlements along the coast. Moravian missionary activity became a more vital force for re-organizing village life, but their effects were not evenly distributed and more significant on the coast. The Catholic Church had an even lesser presence than the Moravians, but they were located in areas underserved by the Moravians,

⁹⁶ The Miskitu term literally refers to a head (body part). In contemporary usage, I heard Miskitu in both Honduras and Nicaragua translating it to “judge.”

which complemented the missionary activities. Other Evangelical Churches did not move into the region until after the 1960s when most villages had already been settled.

Under these conditions, one of the major influences in the formation of settlements was the trading posts and commissary stores opened by traders to organize local labor practices for the various commodities exploited in the area (McSweeney, 2004). The traders employed the local population by entering into “debt-merchandise contracts” (Barham & Coomes, 1996), where laborers received in-kind credit for their products. Little cash was actually exchanged in these transactions (Fieldnotes, 2018). Inter-regional trade relations, however, had a long history that preceded the appearance of these trading posts. McSweeney (2004) has argued that the debt-credit system established during boom periods in some cases was overlaid over existing trade relations, as in the example of the dugout canoe trade. Likewise, the 1843 agreement discussed in chapter 2 shows that the Miskitu chiefs were interested in promoting trade with Honduras.

Government services increased after 1957 following the creation of the department of Gracias a Dios. Some of the larger villages became the sites of schools and clinics. The concentration of these services helped build their status as the head villages in each sector. Furthermore, the local leaders living in the head villages became the main brokers with state and aid projects (CCARC, 2003).

Ladinos have been present among Miskitu villages since the early 1900s. They settled in Moskitia while working as traders and ranchers. Others came to work as labor in the banana plantations and mahogany works. They also came to work as teachers when the Honduran government started to build more schools. Until the 1970s, however, Ladino migration to Moskitia was low intensity. The term *ladino nativo* [native Ladino] started to be used in the 1990s to refer to Hondurans of mestizo descent who had integrated into the social fabric of

Miskitu communities. Native ladinos became another critical factor shaping the formation of localities, as will be further explored below.

In the 1980s, the refugee crisis provoked by the Contra conflict in Nicaragua was another force that shaped village life. It was the first time that large international agencies had arrived in Moskitia to manage everyday needs like housing and nutrition. The United Nations Refugee Agency (ACNUR) became the engine to provide food, shelter, health, and security to the refugees from 1982 to 1991 (Pérez Chiriboga, 2002).⁹⁷ ACNUR also invested in infrastructural development, like the improvement of roads. Perez Chiriboga (2002) explains that the refugee crisis profoundly impacted the Miskitu population in Honduras. The political dimensions of this crisis were already explained in chapter 3. In terms of village life, the Honduran population was overall welcoming of the Nicaraguan refugees, who were also Indigenous and shared their worldview, but that did not mean that no resentment existed. On the one hand, the local population was affected by the increase in population that put pressure on the natural resource base.⁹⁸ On the other, the assistance provided to the refugees created resentment among the Honduran population, who was also poor and lacked the services that were being provided to the Nicaraguans. According to some people I met in the field, one of the legacies of the refugee crisis was creating a culture of dependency among the Miskitu (Fieldnotes, 2018).

The creation of protected areas also had a significant effect in shaping the formation of village dynamics. The Platano River Biosphere Reserve imposed restrictions on access to natural resources. Although these restrictions were poorly enforced, they created greater awareness

⁹⁷ Assistance was delivered through the intervention of other foreign agencies: World Relief, Doctors without Borders, and the Honduran Red Cross.

⁹⁸ The Nicaraguan refugees were not supposed to work in Honduras, but ACNUR relaxed the rules to allow them to carry out subsistence activities (agriculture, hunting, and fishing), as well as engage in wage labor within the camps.

among the communities about the importance of having a more significant participation in natural resource management (Hayes, 2007). These efforts led to the sub-zonification of the reserve in 1997 that saw the creation of the Cultural Zone, where Miskitu, Pech, Garifuna, and some Ladino communities had a right to continue low-impact subsistence activities and were devolved some management responsibilities. Another of the major impacts of the 1997 sub-zonification was the implementation of a village and population census. This census became the reference point for determining the eligibility of whether non-Indigenous settlers could claim a legal right to stay in the reserve. Those who had arrived in Moskitia before 1997 were to be considered native Ladinos. Those that arrived after the cut-off date were to be considered third parties. Although this cut-off date is not legally enforced in the new saneamiento decree, it became part of a vernacular explanation for how some leaders tried to rationalize eligibility as a native Ladino.

The other impact of the sub-zonification was the start of a program to legalize land tenure within the buffer and cultural zones. As part of the process of sub-zonification, the Honduran government transferred ownership of 800,000 hectares covering the reserve to COHDEFOR. With funding from the German government, COHDEFOR began the Cadastre and Regularization Project in the early 2000s to award usufruct contracts in the reserve. This was the first time that the Honduran government was attempting a large-scale titling program in Moskitia. However, the program was controversial among the Indigenous leaders because it pretended to assign usufruct rights over individual claims rather than based on collective land rights (Mollett, 2010).

These factors that affected the development of settlements in Moskitia had a differentiated effect in each of the regions. Now, I turn attention to the differences in the making of localities in each of these regions.

The population centers around the mid-Patuca region were more ethnically diverse compared to other areas of Moskitia. The settlement of Ladinos in Miskitu villages or alongside them is one of the defining features of social life in Moskitia. As explained earlier in this chapter, many attribute the founding of the largest settlement in the area, the town of Wampusirpi, to Ladino pioneers that arrived in the early 1900s (Fieldnotes, 2017-2018). Civil conflict in Nicaragua in the 1920s and 30s also provoked a wave of displaced families, with some establishing a permanent residence in the Patuca area (Fieldnotes, 2017-2018).⁹⁹ During this period, foreign companies established on the Patuca for banana production and mahogany attracted labor that stayed in the area after these companies closed down.

After the creation of the department of Gracias a Dios in 1957, the government of President Ramon Villeda Morales (1957-1963) organized a settlement project that became known simply as *La Colonia* [the colony]. According to Marvin Barahona (2009), the stated objective was to increase the number of Hondurans living in Moskitia in the aftermath of the Mocoron War with Nicaragua. The government brought forty families from Puerto Cortes and San Pedro Sula to an area on the savanna next to present-day Wampusirpi to establish the settlement. The government provided them with equipment for a sawmill, rice miller, vehicles, generators, motors, and supplies. Lumber was to be their main source of income. *La Colonia* was

⁹⁹ During this period, Nicaragua claimed territory as far as the village of Mocoron, which is about 25 kilometers from the present-day border in the Wangki River. Mocoron is another 25 kilometers to Wampusirpi. Sandino forces were active along the Wangki River between 1927 and 1933. Even if colonists arrived downriver from the Patuca using a different route, it helps to know that during the early 20th century, this sub-region was much closer to the border with Nicaragua than what it is now.

the only government-sponsored colonization project in Moskitia, which followed the recommendations Aguilar Paz (1952) had made after his visit in 1950. The settlement, however, was short-lived. Most colonists decided to return to their places of origin only after two years (Barahona, 2009). Only three families stayed behind and integrated as Ladinos to village life in Wampusirpi (Fieldnotes, 2017-2018).

In later years, many other Ladino families from Olancho came downriver to colonize the area. These Ladino families, who later became identified as native Ladinos, adopted many agricultural and cultural practices of Miskitu. Some married into Miskitu families and learned the language. In a way, their status as native Ladinos was reinforced with the more recent wave of colonists. However, this condition of social integration does not mean that there were no other social differentiation processes at play. The native Ladinos brought with them new ways of relating to the land that began a process of enclosure. The details of this process are explained in chapter 5.

Through a combination of land purchases and expansion into new areas, some native Ladinos became large landowners, owning large herds of cattle. However, the critical difference with the land accumulation practices of those so-called third-party colonists is that the land they possessed was not necessarily more than what other Miskitu large landowners had. Third-party colonists that grabbed land at the height of the drug boom had accumulated exorbitant amounts of land. This type of land accumulation was incompatible with Miskitu social norms, and as a result, third-party colonists were not considered part of the territorial councils.

The population makeup of the coast is highly diverse—with Garifuna, Pech, and Ladino communities—but Miskitu villages have largely remained ethnically homogenous. The spatial distribution of different ethnic groups in the coastal area has been more spatially segregated than

in the mid-Patuca region. Historically, Miskitu and Garifuna villages maintained cordial relations yet separate identities. Ironically, tensions between Miskitu and Garifuna villages were spurred by the titling process that required them to demarcate fixed boundaries between them (Mollett, 2006). A strong anti-Black sentiment sometimes unites the Miskitu and native Ladino population against the Garifuna (CCARC, 2003; Mollett, 2006).

Palacios, the former Black River colony site, is one of the towns in Moskitia with a higher proportion of Ladino inhabitants. Many of them trace their ancestry to those workers that came to work in the banana plantations of the United Fruit Company on the Black River and stayed after the company left at the end of the 1930s (Fieldnotes, 2019).¹⁰⁰ Overall, the Miskitu recognize the descendants of these families as native Ladinos (Fieldnotes, 2018). Settlements on the Black River have a similar history to those on the mid-Patuca, where their founding is often attributed to a Ladino pioneer family (CCARC, 2003). However, these settlements remained spatially segregated from the Miskitu village on the coastal strip.

The coastal area near the Ibans lagoon is contiguous to the department of Colon and has experienced one of the most intense migratory pressures. The Miskitu village of Claura, located west of Palacios, was one of the first places abandoned by Miskitu as more colonists arrived (Fieldnotes, 2019). Nonetheless, the Miskitu villages on the coastal strip have remained a bastion of Miskitu territoriality. Few Ladinos live in these villages—for example, a few own small shops or married into Miskitu families. Most of the Ladino migration to this stretch of the coast started in the 1980s, not as old as in the Wampusirpi area. Therefore, Ladinos do not have the same level of historical attachment to these areas.

¹⁰⁰ The plantations were mostly in the area known as the Sambita Valley.

The Caribbean Central America Research Council (CCARC) conducted fieldwork in the area in 2002 while preparing participatory maps to document the land tenure situation of Miskitu and Garifuna communities. The research team suggested that the Ladinos on the coast were socially segregated even when they lived within the villages on the coast (CCARC, 2003). The researchers also noted that many of the Ladino merchants became large landowners themselves after reinvesting the profit from the shops and canteens that sold products to divers, but that due to their social segregation from the Miskitu communities, there was a disconnect between their economic power and their positions of formal leadership in the villages. This mismatch between economic power and political representation represents a significant difference between the native Ladino population on the coast compared to the Patuca region.

WAMAKLISCINASTA has remained ethnically homogenous, with little historical connection with other ethnic groups. People believe that Auka, the head village in the area, was founded by Waylan. This legendary figure is believed to be a hunter that arrived in this area looking for game and decided to establish a permanent settlement.¹⁰¹ Although there is no formal clan structure, the historical connection to Waylan is strong. People from WAMAKLISCINASTA are recognized throughout Moskitia as being more belligerent and united, a characteristic that is attributed to Waylan (Fieldwork, 2018). Common ancestry with Waylan descendants is also shared with some populations currently residing in Nicaragua, which is why they continued to access their agricultural lands on the Honduran side.

The Wangki River that divides Honduras and Nicaragua has also been another important gateway for colonization in the region. However, until recently, Ladinos had not settled on the

¹⁰¹ The research team that prepared the participatory mapping project in Auka in 2002 estimated that the town must have been established seventeenth or eighteenth century. However, the oral histories with two respondents who claim to be Waylan's great-grandsons would suggest that the settlement was established in the nineteenth century.

areas claimed by the villages affiliated to WAMAKLISCINASTA. This contrasts with the river areas located in what is now considered the territorial council of FINZMOS, where several communities have mixed ancestry, similar to the social structure in the mid-Patuca. In fact, BAKINASTA and FINZMOS are the two territorial councils where native Ladinos have played a fundamental role in territorial defense. The most likely reason is that FINZMOS's area provided more attractive conditions for settlements. Located upriver from WAMAKLISCINASTA, the riverbanks are on higher ground, which protects them from flooding. Also, the area is closer to Wangki Bila, an overland passage between the Patuca and Wangki Rivers that traverses hilly terrain.

iv) Infrastructure

Access to communities is another important factor that has shaped and continues to influence localities in these three regions. Overall, the entire region of Moskitia has poor connectivity with the rest of Honduras. However, there are major differences across these three regions.

For the Wampusirpi area, the Patuca River has served as the main gateway for communication with the exterior. The river connected the communities upstream with Olancho and downstream to the coastal communities of Ahuas and Brus Laguna. Although the Patuca offered a direct route for Ladino colonists to enter Moskitia, the journey was not easy. When the river leaves the Olancho Valley and enters rugged terrain, there is a stretch of the white water known as *el Portal del Infierno* [the gateway to hell]. The rapids put peoples' lives and personal property at risk. For example, one of the cacao cooperatives ruined their cargo in 2017 because it got wet during the boat trip (Fieldnotes, 2018). Regular transportation service between Olancho and Wampusirpi only began in the late 1980s (Fieldnotes, 2018). It was linked to the activities of

Ladino merchants. The owners of the bigger bodegas have large, typically nine-foot *pipantes* [dugout canoes], that they use to transport their merchandise. They also take passengers. In 2018, this service was offered regularly by two merchants (Fieldnotes, 2018). The typical route is to travel to the settlement of Nueva Palestina in Olancho, where a *baronesa* [cattle truck] awaits to make the overland journey to the city of Catacamas. This city is a popular destination, particularly among young students that pursue higher education. The nursing school and agricultural university in Catacamas offered two of the most coveted careers for young people in the Wampusirpi area. It is also possible to travel to alternative destinations on the river that connect passengers to cities in the department of El Paraiso, which is closer to Tegucigalpa. Passengers can also travel downriver from Wampusirpi to reach Puerto Lempira (via Ahuas) or La Ceiba (via Brus Laguna). However, there is no regular transportation taking passengers on this route. The fastest way to reach Puerto Lempira or La Ceiba is by air service, but the price is considerable.¹⁰²

BAKINASTA's remoteness becomes more pressing when there is a medical emergency. Wampusirpi only has a small health center that specializes in maternal health. The nearest hospital is in Puerto Lempira. One way to cover the ticket cost is to request the municipal government for support. This is a miscellaneous item in the budget and one of the main ways the mayor cultivates relations of patronage with the population.

Road-building projects are among the most contentious issues in the region. Many people in the Wampusirpi area demand better roads to access health, education, and market opportunities. For example, cacao shipments to markets in San Pedro Sula are not only risky but

¹⁰² It costs about U.S. \$100 for a round trip from Wampusirpi to Puerto Lempira.

expensive. Many local producers believe that the region could only become more competitive once they can find a more cost-effective way to take their products to markets. In 2018, there were three road-building projects under consideration. The most controversial is a road that would link Wampusirpi with Olancho. For many, this road would finally end Moskitia's geographical isolation, but there were contrasting opinions on whether this is good or bad for the region.¹⁰³ In 2020, it was reported that the road had reached the Tawahka community of Krausirpi. This road was privately funded by Ladino ranchers, allegedly with the blessing and financial support of Wampusirpi's mayor. Krausirpi is only about a 25-kilometer distance from Wampusirpi. The other two road-building projects involve connecting Wampusirpi to other population centers in Moskitia to expand the inter-municipal road networks. The first of these projects consists of building a road between Wampusirpi and Puerto Lempira. The government included this proposal as part of the Alliance for Development of Moskitia, and it was discussed during the Platform for Territorial Governance in 2017 and 2018. MASTA vehemently opposed this project because it would cut through the Warunta area, one of the areas of rapidly expanding colonization.¹⁰⁴ The second of the projects for an inter-municipal road network involves connecting Wampusirpi to Ahuas. Villages on the Patuca River are already connected through a series of foot paths that are used to transport animals and access agricultural areas, and the idea would be to expand them to allow for vehicle circulation. This project is less controversial than building the road to Puerto Lempira but also less desirable because a connection to Ahuas is not as attractive.

¹⁰³ The government had plans to open this road in the 1970s, but they halted in later decades when protecting the region's natural resources became a priority (UK. Overseas Development Administration, 1981).

¹⁰⁴ The details of the Warunta area are discussed in chapter 5, and the controversy over the road project is further discussed in chapter 7.

The coastal area has a more developed transportation network. Boats offer daily service linking the villages on the coastal area with Batalla to the west, and Brus Laguna, to the east. Vehicles wait for passengers at Batalla to take them to the city of Tocoa in Colon or La Ceiba in Atlantida. A trip from La Ceiba to this area of Moskitia can be made in about six hours. The improvement in road access decreased the demand for air travel to the coast.¹⁰⁵ If passengers want to travel to Puerto Lempira, they need to arrive first at Brus Laguna, where they have the option to continue the journey by river or air. Either way, the journey can usually be completed in a single day. Sea transportation is not really an option on this part of the coast. Cargo ferries connecting La Ceiba to Brus Laguna or Puerto Lempira offer passenger services, but they are located on lagoons with ports. Moskitia does not have natural ports along the coast. Palacios, the historical Black River settlement, has an estuary that serves as the port. However, Palacios is right across from Batalla, which already has road access. The easiness of travel by road means numerous Ladino colonists use this transportation system to access their homesteads in the Platano River.¹⁰⁶ The Ladino colonists might stay the night in one of the Miskitu villages while they wait for transportation to take them to their next destination, but as mentioned, they do not tend to settle on the coastal area.

The Miskitu villages located on the coastal strip are connected by a path that can accommodate vehicles. Vehicles can also circulate on the beach. However, few cars circulate because boats are still required to move them across the mouth of the Black River. Therefore,

¹⁰⁵ Some of the landing strips were used for drug shipments which could have also contributed to the decline of commercial flights.

¹⁰⁶ They also use a road that connects the Tinto River valley with the vicinity of the Ibans Lagoon. Also, people continue to use logger roads to reach destinations in the headwaters of the rivers.

most of the traffic is made up of pedestrians, bicycles, and motorbikes. It is large enough for vehicles, but there are few vehicles in the area.

Auka, the main population center in WAMAKLISCINASTA, is connected by road to Puerto Lempira and the border checkpoint with Nicaragua on the Wangki River. This road network was built during the political crisis unleashed by the Contra War in Nicaragua in the 1980s. Thousands of Indigenous Nicaraguans, both Miskitu and Mayagna, were forced to leave their communities to avoid the conflict between the Sandinista forces and the Indigenous rebels supported by the U.S. government and the Contras. Auka hosted one of the largest refugee camps and also a training base for the Indigenous rebels. The road connection to Auka expanded on a previous road that was built to connect Puerto Lempira to the Wangki River in the aftermath of the 1957 conflict between Honduras and Nicaragua. Regular vehicle transportation is offered between Puerto Lempira and Auka. The distance is only about 100 kilometers. It takes about four hours under normal circumstances, but it can take much longer if there are problems with the road.

Comparing this road to the ambitions for building a new one to Wampusirpi is a reminder of the difficulties of traveling when maintenance is not constant. Clay soil becomes very muddy during the rainy season. On the road to Auka, the *caja-puentes* [small wooden bridges] that cross the many streams along the road are in a poor state, as is the bridge that crosses over the Nakunta River. The dirt road is also ridden with potholes that, during the rainy season, provide significant obstacles. It is also possible to reach Auka by taking the road from Puerto Lempira to Leymus, but this is a 7-hour journey, and the road can be in bad shape. Flooding on specific stretches of the road is the main problem. Bicycles provide a cheaper and more reliable form of

transportation to travel to Puerto Lempira. Cutting through parts of the savanna, people can reach Puerto Lempira in three hours. They even take lumber with them.

The construction of a new road along the Wangki river around 2010 caused a major conflict between WAMAKLISCINASTA and the government authorities. The mayor of Puerto Lempira built the road, and it connected the village of Corinto with new grazing land and homesteads downstream on the Wangki River. The mayor used the municipal budget to build the new road, and it was not part of a project sanctioned by the national government. Allegedly the mayor had a personal interest in building the road because he had properties in this area. The controversy began when the mayor sold land to new colonists and provided them with municipal titles. WAMAKLISCINASTA's territorial authorities reacted to contest the infringement of their property rights, leading to the auto-saneamiento mobilization that will be further described in chapter 5.

v) Land Grabbing Pressures

One of the most critical factors in the making of localities in the contemporary period is the increase of Ladino colonization and concomitant land grabbing that has occurred alongside it. As explained earlier, the long-term settlements of native Ladinos are a different type of social organization compared to the more recent waves of migrants identified as third-party colonists.

The rise of drug trafficking activities has also created new dynamics of capital accumulation and land control in a phenomenon that has been identified as a form of narco land grabbing (McSweeney et al., 2017). Drug trafficking in Moskitia peaked between 2006 and 2012, but narco activity is still ongoing (McSweeney et al., 2014). Narco land grabbing is enabled by the political economy of rentier capitalism that facilitates mixing illicit activities with mainstream economic activity (McSweeney et al., 2017). As a supply chain, the process of

transporting drugs draws and reconfigures existing social relations creating new structures of inequality (McSweeney et al., 2018). In other regions of Latin America, narco land grabbing has also indirectly increased the violence toward Indigenous peoples by legitimizing more state intervention and militarization (Kelly & Ybarra, 2016; Mollett, 2018; Ybarra, 2017).

Third-parties colonists fall under a continuum of access to land as a bundle of power. Some are capital-poor homesteaders pushed out of their native communities in other regions of Honduras due to landlessness, insecurity, and other factors. If they had arrived by the 1990s, they might have been as well integrated as native Ladinos. However, their later arrival already occurred in a landscape where land was already scarce, and colonization attitudes had turned more negative. Therefore, they do not participate in territorial councils like the native Ladinos. They also do not have the means to buy influence. Nonetheless, they rely on their racial superiority as Ladinos, another facet of Whiteness, to reinforce their status as petit bourgeoisie who can make the land more productive than the Miskitu ever could.

Some of the homesteaders with more capital constitute a more proper rural bourgeoisie. They can invest in the larger herds of cattle and pasture areas. They are actively looking for new business opportunities to diversify agricultural-based investments. Their material wealth reinforces the racial ideology linking race and productivity. Some of the ranchers may not live full-time in Moskitia, splitting their time to attend to their other investments in places like the department of Colon and Olancho. They may bring along other Ladinos as foremen and workers, who themselves may also have land ambitions of their own. They avoid visiting Miskitu communities, preferring to keep to their ranches. They do not tend to participate in local politics and keep an arms' length with MASTA and the territorial councils. Some of these clusters of ranches have grown into communities of their own.

The Ladino merchant class that owns businesses in the larger towns of Moskitia makes up another type of third-party colonists. They control commerce and transportation. They have the means to participate actively in local government politics and meddle with the territorial council's affairs (see chapter 7). Merchants have invested their earnings and use their political capital to accumulate land. Some of them have become a new kind of rentier class that derives power from selling land to incoming colonists.

The drug trade exacerbated the dynamics of colonization. Some of the third-party colonists came to Moskitia with the explicit purpose of participating in the logistics of the drug trade, while others became involved after their arrival. Those that came to be directly involved in the drug trade are reported to establish ranches in isolated areas where they can maintain landing strips (Fieldnotes, 2017-2018). Others were already in Moskitia before the drug boom happened and took advantage of their established positions to increase participation (McSweeney et al., 2018). For example, many merchants did not arrive in Moskitia to be involved in the drug trade. They were part of a long history of entrepreneurs that have operated in trading posts and became involved in commodity boom cycles (McSweeney, 2004). The drug trade, however, allowed them to capitalize. This embeddedness suggests no fixed classification between the third party and native Ladino colonists regarding accumulation and land control practices.

Some of the local merchants also seemed to have gotten a hold of drug cargos serendipitously. I heard from multiple sources that one story served as a fable of the different luck struck by a Miskitu man and a Ladino family. The story says that a Miskitu man found a wrecked airplane in a distant location in the savanna with the cargo still there. Not knowing what to do with the shipment, he contacted a well-connected Ladino family that paid him information about the cargo. The Miskitu man lived a king for a few years until his fortune dwindled to

nothing. Meanwhile, the Ladino family invested in their business, bought more land, and started selling it to newcomers. The story reproduced the trope of the Indigenous person as lacking the vision for the business and the Ladino as the entrepreneur. Hearing this story from Miskitu sources, however, also seemed to point to a type of curse resulting from ill-gotten money (See: Taussig, 1980).

The presence of these three types of third-party colonists varies significantly in the three regions I studied. In the Wampusirpi area, some of the third-party homesteaders have their settlements on the Patuca River along with the villages of the Miskitu and native Ladinos. They most likely bought these lands from other Miskitu or native Ladino families in the area. These land sales cascade into multiple problems for villagers. The details of this phenomenon are explained in chapter 5. Apart from land sales, large herds of cattle near communities also become another source of conflict. Cattle herds damaged the footpaths, particularly during the rainy season, and can destroy cultivated areas if not properly fenced.

Colonization has also taken place in more remote areas of BAKINASTA's territory. The largest settlement has sprung on the river and hilly area known as Warunta. This area is about a 4-hour horse ride southward from Wampusirpi. When land was abundant on the Patuca River, the local residents used this area mainly as a hunting ground and forest reserve. Since the broadleaf forest was well-maintained, CODHEFOR considered declaring a protected area in the 1990s. After Hurricane Mitch destroyed crops and deposited silt on the agricultural areas on the Patuca River in 1998, some local residents began to use the area for agriculture and cattle ranching. The area became highly attractive for third-party colonists because, compared to the Patuca River, land was still abundant, and they could clear large swaths of forest to claim property. The colonization process accelerated when one of the Ladino merchant families based

in Wampusirpi got involved and began to sell land for more recent arrivals. Some of these arrivals were presumed to be families from Olancho who received compensation after they were displaced by the hydroelectric project Patuca III.

The Warunta colonization area extends into the territory of FINZMOS. Therefore, it is a concern for both territorial authorities in both BAKINASTA and FINZMOS, and it has become one of MASTA's main agenda items. MASTA's main reason for opposing the road between Wampusirpi and Puerto Lempira is because it would facilitate access to this area. MASTA wants Warunta to be one of the priority areas for saneamiento. The exact number of families settled in the area is unknown, and MASTA has pressured the government on several occasions to conduct a census of the colonists. The Division of Ethnic Affairs in the Attorney's Office, the public defender of Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities in Honduras, has conducted field verification of some of these settlements, but in a piece-meal fashion. According to local sources, the colonists in Warunta pay a teacher to provide classes in a privately-run school. The colonists come to Wampusirpi to buy supplies, sell their dairy products, and travel to other areas.

Third-party colonization has also been prevalent in the coastal area, but there are no third-party colonists on the coastal strip per se. The coastal strip is densely populated and offers no opportunities for agricultural or cattle ranching, making it less attractive to colonists. Instead, colonization is occurring on the watershed of the south shore of the Ibans Lagoon, the Black River, and less on the Platano River. Ladino colonization around the Ibans Lagoon has practically displaced all inland Miskitu villages. The displaced areas include those settlements along the Black River. Third-party colonists have taken over the Miskitu settlements of Limonales, Banaka, Il Bila, and Paru. Compared to Wampusirpi, no Ladino merchant class

settled on Miskitu villages to organize the land markets for recent arrivals. Instead, colonists rely on well-established inter-regional networks to find opportunities for settlement.

On the Platano River, most of the landholdings are still under the possession of Miskitu and Pech families. The number of third-party colonists, however, continues to increase. The areas of most intense colonization include the settlements of San Miguel and El Carrizal. San Miguel is located between the Ibans Lagoon and the Platano River. The area was originally settled by a Ladino family that had peaceful relations with the Miskitu neighbors. However, the original settlers moved out, and the new ones that came in had ambitions to control more extensive territories. El Carrizal is an area between the Platano River and the pine savanna that stretches into Brus Laguna. In fact, the settlement is located between the territorial boundary of Rayaka and DIUNAT. El Carrizal was allegedly settled by colonists more directly involved with the drug trade that used cattle operations as a front cover. Eventually, the settlement grew into a larger community that now boasts its own privately-run school.

In WAMAKLISCINASTA, third-party colonization has concentrated on the Wangki River along the stretch of new road opened by the mayor around 2010. The Ladino families that settled in this area were mostly cattle ranchers. The area was also an active corridor for the shipment of drug cargo from Nicaragua to Honduras. This area has fertile lands for agriculture and cattle ranching. As mentioned earlier, most Miskitu villages in this territory are settled in the savanna, about 30 kilometers from this area. The area has been more the traditional cultivation grounds of the Miskitu communities residing on the other side of the Wangki River in Nicaragua. As it is the case with other binational Indigenous peoples, the international border is even more of a colonial fiction for the Miskitu living on both sides of the Wangki River. Without active border surveillance, the Nicaraguan Miskitu continued to enjoy access to their agricultural lands

until it was interrupted by third-party colonists. Although most of the villages in WAMAKLISCINASTA were not affected, colonization in this area was a future threat to the entire territory.

4.4 BOUNDING LOCALITIES

In the previous section, I attempted to describe the factors contributing to the shaping of localities in these three regions. I referred to the territorial councils mainly as a convenient way to refer to these regions. However, the territorial councils are a new socio-territorial formation that only came about in the 1990s, as explained in chapter 3. This section will explain how the territorial councils have tried to bound these localities into territorial jurisdictions. Also, I will explain how communities have managed relationships with the municipal governments, the other form of institutionalized effort to bound these localities into jurisdictions.

i) The emergence of the Territorial Councils

BAKINASTA was one of the original seven federations declared by MASTA in 1994. At that time, the federation was called *Federación Indígena Zona Wampusirpe* (FIZWA). The name changed occurred in the mid-2000s as part of MASTA's restructuring from federations to the territorial councils. The territorial composition remained relatively the same. The fieldwork for the demarcation of the borders took place in 2012. The northern border with DIUNAT, within the limits of the Platano River Biosphere Reserve buffer zone, followed creeks that marked the ancestral territories of the kiamkas. The southern border with FINZMOS was negotiated based on the recognition of Gallo Hill as the historical boundary between the Wampusirpi and Mocarón areas.¹⁰⁷ The eastern border with BAMIASTA was more contentious because the

¹⁰⁷ Mocarón is the largest and most important village in FINZMOS.

village of Brans had historical connections to both Wampusirpe and Ahuas. The municipal division created in 1996 served as a point of reference. The Solomonian decision was to split the village area into two, which is why it appears in both BAKINASTA's and BAMIASTA's titles.

The western border with the Tawahka territory was uncontroversial during the demarcation phase but proved to cause wrongdoing to the Tawahka. It was generally agreed that the Asangi Tawahka Reserve should be the boundary between the Tawahka and Miskitu areas. Although this point was clear on the Patuca River, the surveyors from the National Agrarian Institute made the mistake of including areas within the Asangi Tawahka Reserve when they closed the polygon in the GIS. This overlap represented a problem since the Tawahka hoped to one day be able to have an inter-communal title that coincides with areas of the Asangi Tawahka Reserve within the department of Gracias a Dios. BAKINASTA's title also included a thin strip of land that reached toward the Wangki River. This strip was purely prospective-looking strategizing, as the communities in the Patuca River did not have territorial claims in the area.

BAKINASTA's title included sixteen villages in the collective title (Table 4.1). Of these, eight were considered predominately Miskitu, two with a mixed population of Miskitu and Ladino, and six predominately Ladino. Two of the Ladino-majority villages that appear in the collective title are referred by the Miskitu name rather than the Spanish name that is more commonly used.¹⁰⁸ However, not all Ladino-majority villages were included in the title. At least four villages were excluded because their populations were considered to be third-party colonists.¹⁰⁹ BAKINASTA has two titles. The first title was issued by INA in 2013 and covered

¹⁰⁸ These are the communities of Tasba Prana and Auhya Pihni which are more commonly referred to Bella Vista and Arenas Blancas by locals.

¹⁰⁹ These settlements include Siksa Yari, Walpatanta, Planh Yari, and Gocen.

the area outside the Platano River Biosphere Reserve. The second title was issued by ICF in 2016 and covered the portion claimed by BAKINASTA inside the Cultural Zone.

Table 4.1. Communities in the BAKINASTA title

#	Name	Ethnic Majority
1	Panzana	Native Ladino
2	Pimienta	Miskitu
3	Tasba Prana	Native Ladino
4	Auhya Pihni	Native Ladino
5	Nueva Esperanza	Native Ladino
6	Tukrun	Miskitu
7	Kurpa	Miskitu
8	Raiti	Native Ladino
9	Bodega	Mixed
10	Raya	Miskitu
11	Wampusirpi	Mixed
12	Kuah	Miskitu
13	Brabila	Native Ladino
14	Bilalmuk	Miskitu
15	Kahmi	Miskitu
16	Brans	Miskitu

Rayaka's split from the former CVT, as explained in Chapter 3. For a brief period, Rayaka included the whole Miskitu area inside the Cultural Zone. Rayaka's power base was concentrated in the coastal area. This situation was resented by Brus Laguna's leaders, who mobilized to create their own territorial council during MASTA's restructuring in the mid-2000s. Eventually, the village of Barra Patuca, on the mouth of the Patuca River, also lobbied to have their council independent from Brus Laguna. Therefore, Rayaka split into three, Rayaka proper, DIUNAT, and BATIASTA. The demarcation process took place around 2015, with intense negotiations with DIUNAT, over the southwestern border, and with the Garifuna village of Plaplaya, over the northeastern border. Like the Tawahka, the Pech territorial council got the short end of the stick and lost territories to both Rayaka and DIUNAT.

The title awarded to Rayaka recognizes 24 villages. The settlements along the coast are fully-formed villages where people establish residence year-round. Some of the villages mentioned in the title that are located inland correspond to areas where families have agricultural fields and may only reside temporarily. Rayaka also received two titles. One from the ICF for the areas formerly titled to them and another from INA for the areas that were still considered national. It should be noted that the villages on Black River were culturally distinct from the ones on the coast. They shared overlapping agricultural areas with the coastal villages, which explains their inclusion in the title, but otherwise, they were already more influenced by Ladinos.

Table 4.2. Communities in the Rayaka title

#	Communities	Ethnic Majority
1	Lasa Pulan	Miskitu-Garifuna
2	Piñales	Miskitu-Garifuna
3	Betaña	Miskitu
4	Tasba Raya	Miskitu
5	Ibans	Miskitu
6	Coyoles	Miskitu
7	Kukubila	Miskitu
8	Sikia	Miskitu
9	Raista	Miskitu
10	Banaka	Miskitu-Ladino
11	Limonales	Miskitu-Ladino
12	Paru	Miskitu-Ladino
13	Il Bila	Miskitu-Ladino
14	Belén	Miskitu
15	Paya Bila	Miskitu
16	Nueva Jerusalén	Miskitu
17	Mirasol	Miskitu
18	Kury	Miskitu
19	Utlá Almuk	Miskitu
20	Tasba Pauni	Miskitu
21	Rasta	Miskitu
22	Palmeras	Miskitu
23	San Miguel Wapni Yari	Miskitu-Ladino
24	Pisma	Miskitu

WAMAKLISCINASTA used to belong to the federation of *Auka, Laka, Tipi Asla Takanka* (ALINASTA), and the other territorial councils downstream of the Kruta River, TRUKSINASTA, and LAINASTA. The main motivation to create ALINASTA was to defend their rights against COHDEFOR. They feared that COHDEFOR would impose restrictions on the local population and give permission to outsiders to cut their natural resources. They were valuing this experience based on the experience of COHDEFOR's office in Dursuna near the community of Mocoron, where it was considered a negative influence (CCARC, 2003). Auka, Tipi, and Laka were the main population centers included in ALINASTA, but they were considerably distant. According to an official in MOPAWI, the leaders from the three communities decided to split because communication among these three areas was extremely difficult. When I visited the territory, however, one of the elders told me that they broke because the leaders from Tipi and Laka were interested in signing a contract for timber with COHDEFOR, something which the leaders in Auka refused (Fieldnotes, 2018). The leaders in Auka posted signs on trees that said: "Waylan's land: No Trespassing" from the headwaters of the Nakunta River to the Wangki River.

The demarcation of WAMACLINASTA's borders took place in 2013. The international boundary with Nicaragua defined the southern border, but the others were less precise. The border between WAMAKLISCINASTA and FINZMOS had been previously discussed as part of a participatory mapping project funded by the Ford Foundation.¹¹⁰ The border between WAMAKLISCINASTA and TRUKSINASTA was negotiated during the demarcation process. Even though WAMAKLISCINASTA's territory is more extensive, some of the leaders believed

¹¹⁰ Joe Bryan's article "Walking the Line" provides rich ethnographic detail of the complicated nature of demarcating a boundary between FINZMOS and WAMACLINASTA.

that some of the forest areas that belonged to villages of Cayu Sirpi and Wiswis were titled to TRUKSINASTA (Fieldnotes, 2018).¹¹¹

WAMAKLISCINASTA's title included sixteen communities. The total territorial extension is 115,844 hectares. Auka is the head community of the other communities included in the title. All communities are in the savanna region, except for Corinto, which is on the Wangki River. The entire territory was under national lands, which allowed INA to issue a single title. There is evidence that the structure of the community councils has been operational since the WAMAKLISCINASTA was founded in 1997.

Table 4.3: Communities in the WAMAKLISCINASTA title

#	Name	Ethnic Majority
1	Auka	Miskitu
2	Wiswis	Miskitu
3	Kurintu	Miskitu
4	Kayu Sirpi	Miskitu
5	Liwakuria Pura	Miskitu
6	Srumhlaya	Miskitu
7	Kalun	Miskitu
8	Lysanya	Miskitu
9	Yulu	Miskitu
10	Sihnak Kriwan	Miskitu
11	Yulu Tara	Miskitu
12	Krahbani Pura	Miskitu
13	Karshira	Miskitu
14	Kaurhatara	Miskitu
15	Warbantara	Miskitu
16	Yabal Tara	Miskitu

¹¹¹ The leaders said they realized this error when they conducted the mapping of community resources with Kansas University in 2015.

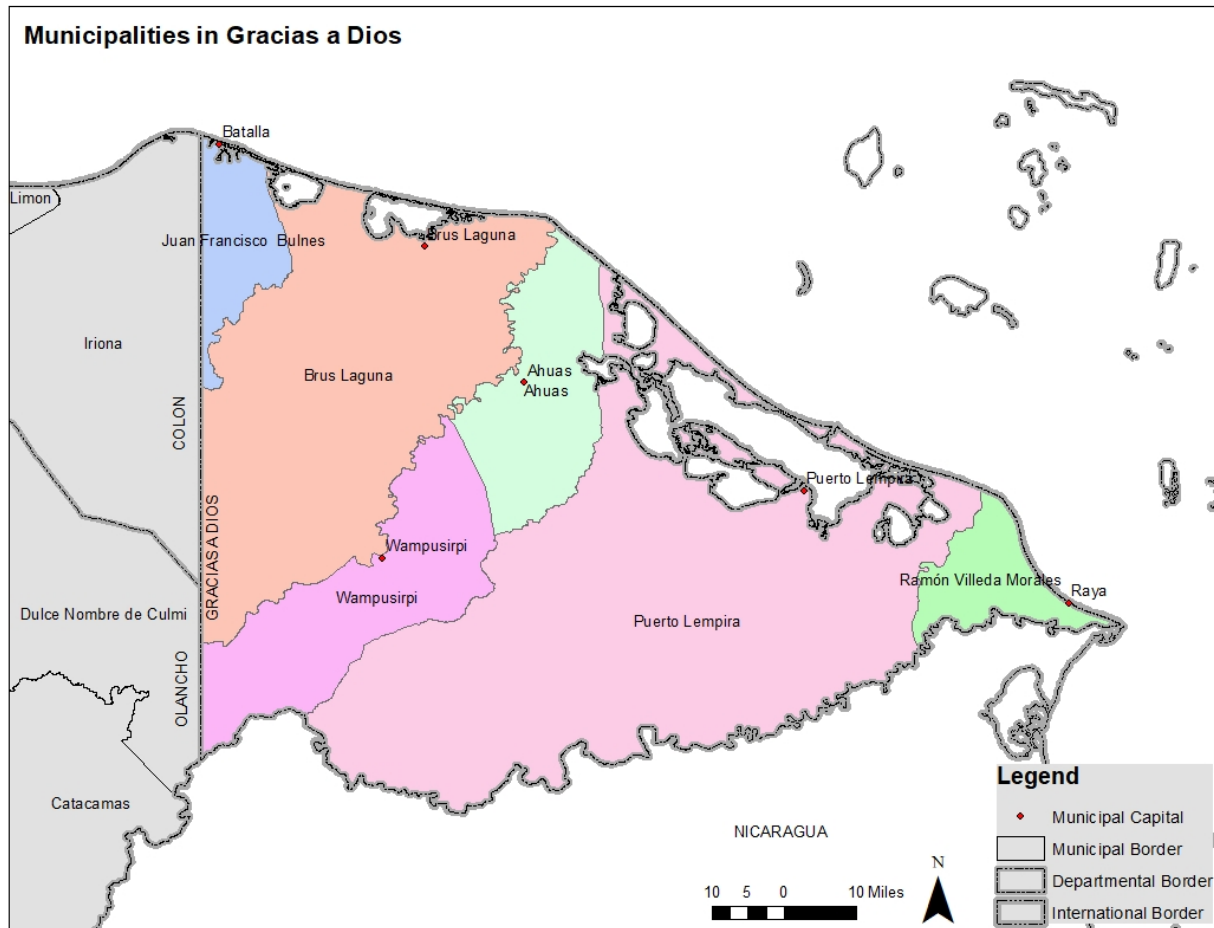
ii) Relations with Municipal Governments

The other type of bounding with a significant effect on how that local population experienced locality is the political division of the municipal governments. Before 1957, the entire territory of Moskitia depended on Iriona. After the creation of Gracias a Dios, two municipalities were created. The municipality of Puerto Lempira covered from the Patuca River to the Wangki River, and the municipality of Brus Laguna from the Patuca River to parallel 85 that marked the border with the department of Colon.

In 1996, Congress approved the creation of four new municipalities. These included the municipalities of Ahuas, Juan Francisco Bulnes, Villeda Morales, and Wampusirpi. This municipalization effort brought local administrations closer to the population. It was not a coincidence that the municipalization occurred when MASTA was claiming territorial rights in Moskitia. As seen in chapter 3, municipalization was itself a response to acquiesce to the demands of the population for more autonomy. Therefore, there is even more reason to see the territorial councils and the municipal governments as two competing forms of bounding for these localities.

One of the major sources of conflict is between the territorial councils and municipalities is over the assignment of property rights to the population. Under Honduran law, a municipality can register usufruct rights on lands held under the municipal title, known as *ejido* land. However, except for Puerto Lempira, none of the other five municipalities in the department of Gracias a Dios have ejido land. Without municipal title, local authorities cannot assign usufruct rights or convert land to private property. This type of right assignation is an important source of finance and political patronage for local authorities. Municipalities have lobbied to create, or in

the case of Puerto Lempira extend, municipal title over the areas already titled to the territorial council.



Map 5: Municipalities in Gracias a Dios

From the three regions, the territorial council of BAKINASTA is the one that is seen as more directly competing with the new municipality of Wampusirpi created in 1996.¹¹² Almost the totality of BAKINASTA's territory coincides with the jurisdictional boundaries of the

¹¹² There had been an earlier attempt to create the municipality of Policarpo Bonilla along with the creation of La Colonia in 1957. The municipalization project was tied to the colonization one, but when the colonos left, the efforts to consolidate the municipality were abandoned (Barahona, 2009).

municipality of Wampusirpi.¹¹³ BAKINASTA and the municipal government have a complicated history. Both emerged around the same period out of demands by the local population to have more control over their local affairs. Some of the same leaders were involved in both the creation of BAKINASTA and the municipality. BAKINASTA's longest-serving president, Nacel Kiapa, at one point also served as the acting mayor.

Before 2018, three Miskitu and one native Ladino had been elected as mayors. Dora Silvia Rodriguez was the first publicly elected mayor in 1998. She had mixed Miskitu and Ladino ancestry. The native Ladino, Luis Castro (2002-2006), was from Olancho. He opened one of the first bodegas in Wampusirpi in the 1980s. He was one of the largest landowners in the region prior to the period identified with narco land grabbing. However, he was removed from his post after the community staged a protest in 2004. The main grievance was that Herrera spent more time in Olancho and Tegucigalpa than he did in Wampusirpi (Fieldnotes, 2018). The vice-mayor, Nacel Kiapa, completed the term as acting mayor.

Ironically, the same community rose again in 2015 under a similar grievance to remove Bertrand Gonzalez (2014-2017). Gonzalez was a Miskitu native of Wampusirpi, who had served as the school's principal for a long time. He also served as MASTA's president from 1989 to 1992. In 2015, local residents organized to stage a protest against the mayor. The main grievance was that the mayor had done nothing to help the community. Although the mayor was a Miskitu native to Wampusirpi, he had barely spent any time in town since assuming office. Allegedly, he only came once a month to pay salaries. During one of these trips, the community occupied the municipal building and made their grievances known to the mayor. The mayor, however, was

¹¹³ Scarcely populated areas within the BAKINASTA territory are within the municipalities of Brus Laguna, Ahuas, and Puerto Lempira.

able to mobilize a local base that still supported him. Therefore, he was not removed, as it happened with Luis Castro. Nonetheless, Bertrand lost his party's ticket for reelection in 2017.

In 2017, the ticket for the National Party went to Marcelo Herrera, a Ladino, who won the election. Herrera was the owner of one of the large bodegas in Wampursirpi and offered transportation services to Olancho. Some people in the communities identified him more with the third-party colonists and saw this mayor as promoting a pro-development agenda that favored more colonization (Fieldnotes, 2017-2018). For example, Herrera openly supported new roads and the expansion of market-based agricultural activities (Fieldnotes, 2017-2018).

Although members of BAKINASTA should have been opposed to Herrera, party affiliation breached this divide. Alliances were more dynamic on the ground. Some of BAKINASTA's fervent advocates openly supported Herrera's campaign as members of the National Party, even when his agenda was clearly at odds with theirs. My fieldwork coincided with Herrera's first term in office, and the tensions with BAKINASTA and MASTA were rising. The mayor purportedly offered support to Ladino cattle ranchers to open an unofficial road to connect Olancho to Krausirpi, which is within the municipal boundaries of Wampusirpi. The road was already opened to traffic in 2020 (Mukpo, 2021).

The population in the Rayaka area has had a less contentious relationship with government authorities, but one of the characteristic features of the coastal area is that it is divided between the municipality of Brus Laguna and that of Juan Francisco Bulnes. As mentioned earlier, Brus Laguna was one of the original municipalities, but it was dismembered to create Juan Francisco Bulnes in 1996. Although there is a clear division in the villages that belong to each municipality, residents would sometimes seek the assistance of the other mayor. This case happened mainly with those who resided on the side of the Brus Laguna municipality

but who regarded the mayor of Juan Francisco Bulnes as more sympathetic to their plights. Antonio Villalta, the mayor of Juan Francisco Bulnes, would be considered more open to requests for financial assistance or employment than Teonela Paisano, the mayor of Brus Laguna (Fieldwork, 2018). At the time of fieldwork, both mayors belonged to the same political party, which implies that residents' strategies were not primarily guided by party affiliation. The main difference, however, is that Villalta had been in this job since 2002, compared to Paisano, who became mayor in 2014. Therefore, Villalta seemed to have cultivated a well-organized system of patronage that maintained his popularity.

In contrast to BAKINASTA, Rayaka's authorities did not seem to have any salient conflicts with the municipal authorities. Both mayors were seen as collaborating effectively with MASTA and Rayaka. Paisano was of Miskitu origin and had occupied MASTA's vice-presidency until she became mayor. Villalta was a native Ladino from the town of Palacios. He was on good terms with both MASTA and the territorial council. He had even expressed an interest in organizing a territorial council for the native Ladinos in Palacios to defend against the encroachment of more recent arrivals (Fieldnotes, 2019). Native Ladinos also have problems obtaining legal documentation to protect their land rights.¹¹⁴ At the time of the Cadastre and Regularization Project in the early 2000s, Villalta had openly supported the titling of individual rights (CCARC, 2003). However, after complaints from Indigenous leadership, COHDEFOR put the project on hold. In the end, individual usufruct rights were only assigned to the Ladino communities in the buffer zone, in Colon and Olancho. In the cultural zone, the project only supported the collective land rights, which left the Ladino communities in Palacios and the Black

¹¹⁴ Although the use of an inter-communal title to protect the individual land rights of the native Ladinos is paradoxical, this option is made more attractive by how it would offer protection against third-party claims.

River watershed in legal limbo. Fifteen years after the Cadastre and Regularization project, it seemed that Villata was reconsidering whether the model of inter-communal titles might offer some protection.

A previous study provides another glimpse at the interactions between Rayaka and the newly created municipality of Juan Francisco Bulnes. The CCARC (2003) study mentioned earlier noted that the Miskitu population had provided little support to Olegario Lopez, the first elected mayor of Juan Francisco Bulnes (1998-2002). The lack of support was explained not so much in terms of political party affiliation (Lopez was from the Liberal Party) but rather on an inter-ethnic alliance. It seemed that the Miskitu and Ladino in the coastal zone were concerned about a Garifuna presiding over the municipality. The main concern was that Garifuna leadership would concentrate the government programs on the Garifuna areas and favor their land claims over others. This situation led to the Miskitu supporting Villalta when he ran for mayor the first time in 2002. The Miskitu-Ladino alliance against the Garifuna candidate is part of a broader anti-Black sentiment that is reproduced to gain preferential spaces under unequal relations of power created by the logic of settler-colonialism (Mollett, 2006, 2011).

Interviewees did not comment on any recent mobilization against municipal authorities in the coastal area. Although there were complaints about the absence of municipal programs, particularly on the Brus Laguna side, people did not launch into protests. In fact, there is interest in the coastal area to lobby for the creation of a new municipality that would only include the Miskitu villages. This situation would mean that Rayaka would share the same space with this new municipality, as is the case in the Wampusirpi area. The most salient conflict against the municipal authorities was by the Garifuna community of Tocamacho. This community was located right next to the border with the department of Colon. Tocamacho had a close historical

relationship with the town of Iriona. Even though the village was located in a different department since 1957, they continued to depend on the services provided by Iriona municipality. However, with the creation of the municipality of Juan Francisco Bulnes, the new local authority began efforts to tax the population of Tocamacho, which created conflict (CCARC, 2003). The conflict has not been entirely resolved. In 2018, parents occupied a school in Tocamacho demanding to be serviced by the offices of the Education Ministry in Colon rather than Gracias a Dios (Fieldnotes, 2018).

The territorial council of WAMAKLISCINASTA is located in the municipality of Puerto Lempira. This municipality covers most communities in the department and has one of the largest territorial extensions in the country. Like in the coastal area, people in Auka and nearby communities have entertained creating their own municipality to be closer to government services. In fact, Morocon, the head village in FINZMOS, was considered a municipal seat but they lost their bid to Ahuas and Wampusirpi (Fieldnotes, 2018). Although the population is fairly supportive of the territorial council, their interest in having their own municipality is also sprung by the recent conflicts they have had with the local government in Puerto Lempira.

In 2015, they came into conflict with the then-mayor of Puerto Lempira, Eduardo Chow, due to the construction of a road along the Wangki River that expanded access to colonists. The leaders of WAMAKLISCINASTA complained about the increase of homesteaders that had moved into the area since the road was built. The municipality had allegedly issued them documents to validate their possession. The interactions between local communities and the colonists led to conflict, as explained in chapter 5. To stop this aggression, the Miskitu leaders proposed that the government prepared a census of the colonists in the area and sent the army to evict them. The government, however, failed to act upon the leaders' demands. In the face of this

state inaction, the Miskitu organized their own self-defense movement that became known as auto-saneamiento.

As mentioned, the Miskitu themselves explain the belligerence of WAMAKLISCINASTA's population due to the warrior ancestry. A more immediate explanation, also articulated by the locals, is the higher proportion of men who are *reservistas* or part of the Honduran Army's reserve guard. During the Contra conflict and the threat of communist expansion, the Honduran Army emphasized recruiting Miskitu to serve in the armed forces. After their obligatory period of service, men who joined the army were allowed to take their leave and joined the ranks of the reserve guard. The *reservistas* had the training, discipline, and access to weapons. Perez Chiriboga (2002) explains that people from the Auka region showed little proclivity to join the army before the Contra Conflict. However, Auka became the base for one of the three Contra bases. Observing the Miskito Contras fight against the Sandinista regime inspired them to gain military training of their own to defend their rights. More and more main men started to join the army after this experience.¹¹⁵

However, this newfound proclivity for military service did not mean that the people in WAMAKLISCINASTA were any more affable to the institution of the Honduran military. The local population still holds negative perceptions about the military, particularly for their role in the confiscation of softwood timber that was carried out of the territory without permits (Fieldnotes, 2018). Also, it is reported that the residents of Auka had a riot to expelled the military from their area after a young man from the community was shot in the early 2000s (CCARC, 2003). Therefore, it can be assumed that the army offered an attractive employment

¹¹⁵ Forty men from the community joined the Miskitu Contra rebels (Perez Chiriboga, 2002).

alternative in a place where there were few other economic prospects and also the social status of returning home as a reservista. The reservistas were well-organized and led the efforts for the establishment of a community patrol, as will be discussed in chapter 5 (Fieldnotes, 2018).

These tensions between territorial councils and municipal governments reached a new high level in 2019. In this period, MASTA started a campaign to fight the government's interference, national and municipal, on the Indigenous territories. This mobilization grouped many of the grievances that each of these territorial councils had and were shared by others. The context and outcome of this regional mobilization is explained in chapter 8.

Despite the tension between territorial councils and municipal governments, some Miskitu still believe that the solution is to create additional municipalities. Some people in Rayaka and WAMAKLISCINASTA believe that the lack of attention to their communities stems from having to depend on municipal authorities that are based in other areas. The simple logic is that municipal authorities would tend to favor the community in which they were based. However, the example of Wampusirpi shows that having a territorial council that coincides with the boundaries of the territorial council does not necessarily fix any problems. Another long-term solution articulated by some of MASTA's leaders was to create Indigenous municipalities in Moskitia (Fieldnotes, 2018). In theory, this arrangement will solve the current overlap in jurisdictions and allow Indigenous authorities to receive fiscal transfers. There is no formal proposal, and therefore, a lack of clarity on whether the proposed Indigenous municipalities

would coincide with the territorial councils. Also, the creation of this legal figure would most likely require an amendment to the constitution, which is more difficult to happen.¹¹⁶

4.5 FROM LOCALITIES TO SPATIAL IMAGINARIES

This chapter began with the proposition that to understand the spatial imaginaries that informed individual and collective behavior, we first needed to identify what bounded the place that was supposed to be imagined. I used Raffles's concept of locality as a heuristic to guide this inquiry on the production of the spatial. The objective was to read the present-day boundaries of the territorial councils not as a teleological manifestation of territorial formation but rather to inquire about the contingencies involved in the process. I propose that the appearance of municipal governments represented the other alternative for how people tried to make sense of locality. Based on the analysis of the different elements that constructed localities, I identify the four trends.

First, kinship structure, centered on *kiamka* as extended family, constitutes one of the most important elements for how people conceive of localities. *WAMAKLISCINASTA* is the most salient example of how multiple villages share a strong sense of attachment to each other, in great part because of the perception that they belong to the same *kiamka*. This sentiment of attachment is felt in neither *BAKINASTA* nor *Rayaka*. In these other territorial councils, the practice of reciprocity networks continues to operate at the level of individual *kiamkas*. For the villages that formed *BAKINASTA*, there is a strong desire to have organizational structures that more closely resemble the *kiamka*. One example is in the form of sub-divisions where the ancestral territories of each village/*kiamka* would be demarcated, and the other is in associations

¹¹⁶ The figure of Indigenous municipality exists in the 1982 Constitution, but it is not well-specified. The concept refers to the right that Indigenous communities have had since the colonial era to elect their own municipal authorities. By the 1980s, only the Lenca communities of Yamanraguila and San Francisco de Opalaca maintained this tradition.

where the interest of cacao producers would be represented by heads of family groups. In Rayaka, I did not hear of any particular plan or vision to recenter territorial organization around kiamkas. However, a village subdivision like the one suggested in BAKINASTA, would be difficult to replicate on the coast. The reason is that for the villages in Rayaka there is a considerable spatial separation from where people reside (on the coastal strip) and where they maintained their fields (on riverbanks). This composition leads more to a mosaic of land use that would be harder to bound.

Second, the socio-ecological landscape plays an important role in the construction of localities. Although the villages on the mid-Patuca River did not share a strong kinship bond, they were linked by the river, which provided an axis to articulate their co-existence. The river had brought Miskitu and Ladino populations together where they still co-existed in a socio-spatial order that followed the principles of territoriality of the kiamka. In contrast, the villages that made up Rayaka may have been intricately connected on the coastal strip, but they shared different spaces inland. They did not have the same territorial boundness. They were a collection of kiamkas without the privilege of having a spatial axis that articulated them. There were those coastal villages with agricultural land on the Platano River and those that had land on the watershed of the Ibans Lagoon and the villages located on the Black River. In the case of WAMAKLISCINASTA, the villages were relatively distant from each other, like islands in a sea of savanna grassland. Still, they shared strong kin bonds that already bind them together.

Third, histories of migration led to differences in the level of integration of Miskitu and Ladino populations. In the mid-Patuca, where early migrants came with the boom of the banana plantations and escaping war in Nicaragua, there was greater inter-ethnic integration. When pressure from more recent Ladino migrations increased, native Ladinos joined the Miskitu in

forming BAKINASTA. Native Ladinos have also accumulated land assets that distinguished them from the Miskitu population. However, their ethnicity and material wealth did not necessarily exclude from the structures of representation in the territorial council. Likewise, the creation of the municipality provided an additional opportunity for wealthier Miskitu and native Ladinos to represent the population of the Wampusirpi area. In contrast, in the coastal area, the Miskitu and native Ladino populations were spatially segregated. Although there were a few native Ladinos living on the coastal strip, they were still considered outsiders and did not participate in the territorial council. Therefore, their economic power did not necessarily translate into a more considerable influence on the territorial council. Likewise, the Miskitu formed alliances with the native Ladinos to control municipal politics, but the boundaries of the municipality of Juan Francisco Bulnes and Rayaka were not as integrated as in the Patuca. In WAMAKLISCINASTA, the Ladino population was recent and clearly outside the territorial council. Also, the municipal government was further away from the territory, which implied less representation of this region on the municipal government in Puerto Lempira.

Fourth, different levels of infrastructural development shape the construction of localities. In the mid-Patuca, the relative isolation of the region has led to the centralization of functions in Wampusirpi. As people from the nearby villages travel to Wampusirpi, the sense of shared locality is reinforced. Similarly, the villages in the savanna are relatively disconnected from other places. Although Auka lacks many of the services available in Wampusirpi, it plays the role of a head village in the territory. In contrast, there is not necessarily one village on the coastal strip that serves as the single head. The villages of Ibans, Cocobila, and Belen equally compete in many respects. More importantly, the coastal strip is easily connected to Brus Laguna

and the north coast corridor via Batalla. Therefore, the locus of services is more deconcentrated from the coastal strip, which weakens the sense of shared locality.

In sum, we can observe that locality is experienced as a continuum across the scale. In the coastal area, locality may be thought of as operating at a lower scale given the weaker connection to shared space. In the Patuca, villages shared a greater sense of union, but they still defend their interests as villages. In the savanna, villages have a strong sentiment of unity around the territorial council, resulting in an interpretation of locality at the territorial level.

4.6 GROUNDING KNOWLEDGE IN VILLAGES

Any construction of locality is always grounded in “place.” For this reason, I also spent time in villages where I could get a deeper look at how the dynamics shaping space manifested in specific sites. The main research instrument to access this knowledge was a household questionnaire that I applied to avoid half of the households in each of these villages. I did not select these villages to represent an “average” unit in each of the regions. In a way, each village in the territory offers a unique combination of factors that shape social interactions. Nonetheless, these villages are not outliers either; they are fully integrated into the economic and organizational dynamics that characterize these territories. These villages received the names of Awala (BAKINASTA), Kabu (Rayaka), and Twi (WAMAKLISCINASTA) in honor of the geographical features that defined them. The household questionnaire, interviews, and participant observation in these three villages are the main source material for chapters 5 and 6.

Awala is located on the banks of the Patuca River, like the rest of the other fifteen communities in BAKINASTA. The village is divided into three neighborhoods. The oldest, called *centro* (downtown), is about 5 kilometers from Wampusirpi. Awala is one of three villages connected by a dirt road to Wampusirpi. The road connection was possible after the construction

of a bridge in the 1990s with funding from FHIS. Most houses are built of Santa Maria hardwood and have metal roofing. A foreign company used to have a warehouse at one of the extremes of the community.

Kabu is one of the villages located on the coastal strip. It is on the side that is under the jurisdiction of the Brus Laguna municipality. The village is located behind a wall of sea grape bushes that protects the houses from the sea. On the other side, there is an artificial canal on the marshland that links Ibans Lagoon with the Platano River. Kabu's population grew significantly after Hurricane Mitch forced people from the nearby village of Rio Platano to relocate. The houses in the area are a combination of hardwood and cement, with metal roofing. The higher quality construction materials are the result of higher income from diving

Twí is one of Auka's newest neighborhoods. The settlement is dispersed and on hilly terrain. A creek crosses the community, and it is where people bathe, wash clothes, and water their livestock. Twí takes part in the vibrant collective life of Auka. In the evening, people come together to share the day's news under a mango tree known as Parque Waylan, which is supposed to be the site where the heroic chief had his house. Even though the neighborhood I call Twí was about half a kilometer away from this location, I could hear the drums in the evening when people were playing music. In Twí, most houses are made of pine wood. The roofing can be metal or thatched palm, *swita* (*ahtak*) or *tique* (*papta*).

As explained in the introduction, these villages were selected based on agreement with the territorial and communal authorities. These villages were close to the head or larger village in the territorial council in the three regions. In the case of WAMAKLISCINASTA, the site is one of the neighborhoods in Auka. About a decade ago, it used to be considered a satellite community, but with the growth of the population, it became integrated as one of the

neighborhoods. I worked in Auka rather than a secondary village because the territorial authorities considered it more appropriate to work in an area with easier access and where more people were bilingual (Miskitu and Spanish). In a way, working in one of Auka's neighborhoods made the case more comparable to suburban-like Awala and Kabu than it would have been working in a more remote location in WAMAKLISCINASTA.

Table 4 shows some basic statistics about the three villages. Official statistical data at the community level hard to find. The Table shows data from the survey prepared by INA in 2013 during the titling process. INA's procedures require the preparation of a socio-economic study before a land reform beneficiary can be adjudicated land rights on national land. When dealing with collective landholdings, INA complied with this procedure by doing a population census. Local enumerators trained by INA collected the data. The census for the first territorial council, KATAINASTA, took place in 2011. The other territorial councils were surveyed in 2013. Although INA was only responsible for titling areas under national lands, which excluded most areas within the Platano River Biosphere Reserve, the census was conducted throughout the territory.

It should be noted that the main motivation for conducting the census was to comply with the procedural requirement and not with research purposes in mind. Therefore, planning and quality control procedures were not as stringent as would normally be in a population census (Fieldnotes, 2016). The results of the census are not published, but INA staff agreed to share them with me for the purpose of planning my own questionnaire strategy. The census data had some obvious inconsistencies, like missing villages, which raised additional suspicious about data quality. I found missing villages in the three territorial councils. There were four missing villages in BAKINASTA, seven missing villages in WAMAKLISCINASTA, and fifteen missing

villages in Rayaka.¹¹⁷ The inconsistencies were more notorious in Rayaka, where the population data defied common sense. Rayaka's coastal area is one of the most densely populated areas in Moskitia, and yet, the census suggested a lower population. With these caveats, Table 4.4 shows the comparison between the villages and the territorial councils for selected variables.¹¹⁸

Table 4.4: Comparison of selected variables for sampled villages

	BAKINASTA		WAMAKLISCINASTA		Rayaka	
	Average	Awala	Average	Twi	Average	Kabu
Number of Households	42.54	46.00	47.00	49.00	28.69	52.00
Total Population	222.77	234.00	257.33	315.00	158.15	281.00
Illiteracy (%)	3.31%	1.71%	12.92%	9.36%	0.76%	3.56%
Higher Education (%)	2.16%	0.85%	0.47%	1.03%	1.04%	0.36%
Latrine (%)	57.62%	77.78 %	13.96%	30.15%	80.66%	59.18 %
Landless (%)	1.45%	2.17%	2.45%	3.02%	10.27%	11.54 %
Rice (100-pound quintal per household)	0.55	0.93	0.59	0.79	0.35	0.29
Bean (100-pound per household)	0.83	0.87	0.64	0.86	0.39	0.60
Cattle (heads per household)	6.24	4.35	1.49	1.86	1.19	0.31
Non-Agricultural Employment (%)	13.11%	12.77 %	19.11%	10.20%	20.76%	12.50 %

The number of households in the selected villages ranges from 46 to 52, and the population ranges from 234 to 315. Twi's illiteracy level is five-fold higher than Awala, but both communities have about the same (albeit low) percentage of individuals with higher education. The possible reason is that Auka concentrates the highest number of professionals in WAMAKLISCINASTA. For example, the percentage of the population with higher education in

¹¹⁷ In BAKINASTA, the census was taken in thirteen communities, but one of those was the Ladino community excluded from the title. In RAYAKA, the census was taken in thirteen communities, but four of those are excluded from the title.

¹¹⁸ For WAMACLICINASTA, the territorial data represents the average of the nine communities, which included a single observation for Auka. Then, I use Auka's observations to estimate the data for Twi.

Wampusirpi is 8.95 percent, significantly larger than Awala's rate of under 1 percent. Therefore, Twi's higher education rate is significantly lower compared to Wampusirpi's. The percentage of households with latrines is an indicator of the quality of infrastructure in the villages. Compared to other services like electricity or running water, latrines are the only basic service that can be realistically found in any community in Moskitia. The comparison suggests that Awala has a more advanced infrastructure than Kabu and Twi. The percentage of households that reported not having access to land is three to five times higher in Kabu compared to Twi and Awala, respectively. Likewise, Kabu has lower levels of basic grain production and heads of cattle. The data suggest that non-agricultural employment makes a higher proportion of income for households in Kabu, where many men work in industrial fishing. In Twi, the main source of non-agricultural income is timber cutting and salaries for teachers and public employees. In Awala, the main source of non-agricultural income is salaries for teachers and public employees.

CHAPTER 5: ENCLOSURES

5.1 INTRODUCTION

From the 1980s to the 2010s, MASTA fought for the inter-communal property titles in an effort to stop the advancement of the Ladino colonization. After they obtained the titles, attention shifted to saneamiento as the critical action to consolidate their property rights. In conventional legal theory this kind of remedy is considered a measure to perfect the right, reinforcing the character of possessive individualism in property ownership (Macpherson, 1978). In the Honduran legal system, saneamiento literally means removing any imperfections in a property title that could give reason to a third party to contest the right holder. However, scholars who have studied property from a political ecology lens have remarked that the enforcement of property rights does not simply depend on its *de jure* properties but also on the broader conditions that determine the *de facto* capacity to access a resource (Ribot & Peluso, 2003) or exclude other from it (Hall et al., 2011).

In this chapter, I apply the lens of moral economies to explore the conditions that might shape the enactment of saneamiento in the Honduran Moskitia. During the fieldwork period, saneamiento had not yet begun. After substantial pressure from MASTA, the government had finally approved a saneamiento decree in 2019.¹¹⁹ The decree named a commission to coordinate saneamiento integrated by government agencies and the Indigenous organizations in Moskitia, but there were no concrete plans for when and how it would be implemented. While MASTA waited for an official response to saneamiento, the Miskitu had to deal with a variety of land

¹¹⁹ Chapter 8 explains MASTA's actions to demand the saneamiento decree.

conflicts that the authorities of the territorial councils had to attend. I argue that understanding how people interpreted these conflicts and sought out the collaboration of the territorial authorities to address them can inform the prospects for saneamiento. The analysis identifies how the uneven influence of Ladino migration contributed to sub-regional variations of a Miskitu moral economy. I suggest that there is a dialectical relationship between enclosures and moral economy that would likely shape the conditions for saneamiento in each of these localities. This analysis implies that the success of saneamiento will not only depend on whether the Honduran government implements the saneamiento decree, but also on the local conditions for collaboration.

I motivate this research inquiry by starting with the example of a specific land conflict in the territorial council of BAKINASTA that caught my attention for what it revealed about the dynamics of enclosures in this locality. The Hernandez family lived on a bluff overlooking the Patuca River. Nelly, my research assistant, had recommended that I speak with them about the land conflict that had forced them to flee their community upriver. Nelly and I had to cross two fenced plots from the main road to arrive at the Hernandez's home. Their home was simple: a metal-roof wooden structure on stilts with a kitchen and two bedrooms connected by a veranda. Down below, two pigs rested their bellies on the mud inside a wooden fence. They invited me to sit on a wooden bench on the porch. From there, I admired the young fruit trees around the house. The location right next to the river ensured a pleasant breeze to appease the hot and humid weather of Moskitia, but the house was dangerously close to the bluff's edge. The plot was a subdivision within a larger area that belonged to Ms. Hernandez's family. They came to live in this place three years ago after they lost their farm.

The story of how the Hernandez family obtained and lost their farm showed the changing landscapes of values toward land in Moskitia. Ms. Hernandez was born in Moskitia, and her father was a Ladino who married a Miskitu woman. Her husband is also a Ladino from Olancho. They met when he came to Moskitia in 1984. They started their family in Olancho, but Ms. Hernandez explained that they decided to return to Moskitia in 2008 in an effort to improve their economic prospects.

Life in Olancho was hard because the land was more expensive. We were poor, and I feared that one of my sons might even become a thief. That is why I told my husband that we better return to Moskitia, where I am from, and where we would be available to find land (Fieldnotes, 2018).

Ms. Hernandez was worried about her children and not having enough land to bequeath to them. They sold the plot that Mr. Hernandez had inherited in Olancho, and with that amount of money, the family relocated to Ms. Hernandez's village.

Most of the families that lived in Ms. Hernandez's village were native Ladinos who had arrived in the area two or three generations ago. Many of them were Ms. Hernandez's relatives. All land around the village was claimed, and the only way to access some of it was by buying it from someone else. Ms. Hernandez recalled how they purchased their plot:

We were at my mother's house when my brother told my husband, 'brother-in-law, I will sell you the hill over there,' pointing his finger to the forest area in front of us. My brother had not blazed a trail to mark the property lines, nothing! He only told him that he would sell him the whole property, which covered about 50 manzanas. My husband accepted and gave him the money without drafting any papers (Fieldnotes, 2018).

For six years, they were happy on their new farm. They grew subsistence crops and started raising pigs for sale. Ms. Hernandez gave birth to her twelfth child on the farm. However, their luck changed when her brother did not honor the original transaction and decided to offer the plot to others. As is the case with land sales in Moskitia, there were no legal documents

validating ownership. People tried to make up for this situation by drafting private contracts or obtaining tax receipts from the municipality, but these documents were not a guarantee either. The claim to ownership still depended largely on the individual's ability to protect it and the recognition by other members of the community.

The brother had some trouble convincing others that the land was available. He offered it to four potential buyers, other Ladinos already living in the area, but they walked away when they found out about the Hernandez's claim. Another buyer became more interested in the land. Ms. Hernandez told me that he came to their farm one day to ask them directly about their situation. Although they explained that they had bought the land, the Ladino man went ahead with the purchase. It seemed that he had come to assess the situation to understand the risk he was taking and plan his move for claiming the property.

Violence had become a common practice to assert property rights in a region that used to be characterized by land abundance and peaceful co-existence. In the case of the Hernandez family, the new owner waited for a time when the husband was away from the farm to carry out the plan to take possession of the land. Ms. Hernandez and her children were on the farm when a group of five men arrived. They circled the house and made loud noises. Ms. Hernandez knew that they were issuing threats. She became frightened and convinced her husband that they should leave.

I remember that day well. It was December 12, 2015. Since that day, I count the days that I've been away from my home, where I was happy, I had my land, my animals. Now, I ask myself, what land am I going to leave to my twelve children? (Fieldnotes, 2018).

Ms. Hernandez was on the brink of crying while telling this story. She could not believe that her own brother had done this to them. When they ran into each other at their mother's house, she

brought up the incident. The interaction, however, resulted in more threats. The brother told her she “better shut up unless you want to end up dead.” At that moment of the interview, her husband went into the bedroom. He took out a woven basket that contained inside a few small-sized transparent plastic bags containing documents. After inspecting the bags, he opened one and showed me a document. A report was filed with the peace judge, a local government official, against the brother. This report was the only document that they had to support their claim. They had also asked the president of the territorial council to hear their case, but they had been unable to get him to travel to the parcel to have a mediation.

The conflict experienced by the Hernandez’s family had taken place in the context of a dynamic of enclosure in BAKINASTA in which a family member had been identified as the agent of dispossession. Different dynamics of enclosure were present in other sub-regions of Moskitia. For example, the Indigenous communities in WAMAKLISCINASTA identified Ladino colonists as the only agents of dispossession. Considering how these dynamics of enclosure were understood in relation to community relations, I refer to the type of enclosure in BAKINASTA as being more *internal* and the one in WAMAKLISCINASTA as being more *external*. This distinction between internal and external is to highlight the role that community members themselves played in the making of these enclosures. However, what I called an internal enclosure is not separate from an external enclosure. They both occurred from the pressure to commodify land that resulted from Ladino colonization. These types of enclosures also generated different interactions with the territorial authorities. The Hernandez family in BAKINASTA pursued an *individual* strategy to get the territorial authority to mediate the conflict, whereas villagers in WAMAKLISCINASTA pursued a *collective* strategy that led their leaders to organize auto-saneamiento to evict the colonists.

In this chapter, I apply the lens of moral economy to understand the connection between the dynamics of enclosure and the interactions with territorial authorities across three localities in Moskitia. Drawing on Thompson (1993), I focus on moral economy to develop a phenomenological analysis of dispossession. In other words, I use peoples' own interpretations of these land conflicts as the point of departure for the analysis. I use data from interviews with key informants, participant observation, and a household questionnaire to identify patterns. I refer to these patterns as narratives to highlight that they are vernacular explanations that emerge from an interpretation of the specific dynamics of land enclosure affecting a locality.¹²⁰ Therefore, these narratives combine both material and discursive elements and should not be seen as only existing in the subjective realm of these individuals. Furthermore, I use these narratives to help me analyze how people interacted with the territorial authorities to address land enclosures.

Based on this analysis, I show that these narratives of enclosures have scalar properties. A macro narrative that operates at the level of the Moskitia region interprets land conflicts as resulting from Ladino colonization and offers the saneamiento of third parties should be the solution. This macro narrative helps to animate the inter-communal property regime as a whole, but it simplifies some of the enclosure dynamics occurring at the local level. At the sub-regional level, people hold different narratives to interpret these enclosures, which represent variations to the Miskitu moral economy. I find that the main driver of this variation is the length of exposure to Ladino colonization. Those that were exposed the longest had adopted elements of private property that led to the dynamic in which the Miskitu identified each other as the agents of the

¹²⁰ The decision to call this mode of explanation as a narrative is inspired by Carol Rose's (1994) idea that property are a form of storytelling.

enclosures. Ladino colonization by itself was not enough to create this change in the Miskitu moral economy, but the shift occurred because of the rise of drug trafficking activity that increased land speculation.

By attending to these narratives, I identify three outcomes in the responses to these conflicts based on the way that the population interacts with the territorial authorities. First, the population can reach out to the territorial authorities in an effort to seek mediation. This outcome is more likely when Miskitu identified other Miskitu as the other party in the conflict, and the territorial authority is more present in the area. Second, the population can decide not to seek out the assistance of the territorial authorities, which suggest more acquiescence to the conflict. This outcome is more likely when Miskitu identified both Miskitu and Ladinos as the other party in the conflict, and the territorial authority is more absent from the area. Third, the population can organize collective action to protest the land enclosures. This outcome is more likely when Ladinos are identified as the other party in the conflict and the population demands that their authorities act belligerently. I suggest that a future process of saneamiento will not only face the external challenge of securing the protection of the Honduran government but also the internal challenge of organizing collaboration.

The chapter will first describe the common elements of the traditional land tenure system among the Miskitu by drawing on secondary sources and my own field observations. Then, I will draw on my own observations to explain how interactions with Ladino colonists have transformed the traditional land tenure system by introducing ideas about private property. With this historical context in mind, I will use responses from a household questionnaire to identify narratives of enclosures in each of the localities. Drawing on more interviews, I will establish a

connection between these narratives and observed responses to land enclosures. I will conclude with some reflections about what this analysis suggests for the future process of saneamiento.

5.2 CHANGES TO THE LAND TENURE SYSTEM

The Miskitu have a clear sense of the elements that constitute the traditional land tenure system, even if, in practice, many of these customs are rapidly changing. In this section, I will first describe the main elements of the traditional land tenure system in their idealized form. Then, I will explain some of the ways in which the system has been changing as a result of interactions with Ladino colonists.

i) The Traditional Land Tenure System

Kinship structures have played a central role in defining access to land among the Miskitu. The following description of the traditional land tenure system draws primarily from Helms (1971), which I confirmed when I was in the field. In the traditional Miskitu land tenure system, the original source of the *kiamka*'s right to an area emanates from the labor a common ancestor. Within the larger territory controlled by the *kiamka*, each nuclear family has an exclusive usage right over its agricultural plots. Members of the *kiamka* participate in reciprocity networks to carry out some agricultural tasks like sowing and planting, but it is not common to share crops. Inheritance is the main mechanism to access land, which is usually bequeathed upon marriage. The Miskitu are traditionally a matrilineal society, which means that land is typically passed along the mother's lineage. It is common for families that do not belong to a *kiamka* established in the area to borrow land from others. No money is exchanged for borrowing land, but the tenant may be required to share part of the crops. The right to use the land is temporary, and there is an understanding that the land continues to belong to the *kiamka*. The norm for families that borrowed land is that they could only plant annual crops.

Traditional Miskitu agriculture is based on the swidden system that characterizes many Indigenous societies living in lowland tropical areas. The practice of swidden agriculture creates a landscape of agricultural plots and secondary forests in different stages of succession. The following description of the swidden agriculture draws from field observations, which I checked for validity against secondary sources (Cochran, 2008; Dodds, 1998; Hayes, 2007). Forest is cleared to create agricultural fields (*insla*). The location of the agricultural plots corresponds to the agroecological conditions required for each crop. For example, rice requires the fertile lands of alluvial soils, whereas beans grow better in the higher ground that is not prone to flooding; manioc can grow in rocky and sandy soil. Miskitu use their plots for periods of two to three years, alternating different types of annual crops. They return to fallow lands (*unta swampi* or *insla prata*) in cycles extending from five to thirty years. They also maintain plots with perennials such as plantain and cacao trees. The Miskitu also maintain some areas in common. Forest areas (*unta disang*) have open rights of access and exclusion that often include members of different villages. Primary forest (*unta disang*) provides a variety of timber and non-timber products and hunting grounds. These common areas are shared on the principle of *pana pana laka* [reciprocity law], where each family respects the right of the others to access the resources.

During my time in Miskitu villages, I observed how the geographical location shaped their access to agricultural land and natural resources. The villagers in Awala got to live close to their agricultural fields and have relatively easy access to timber resources. However, families in Kabu and Twi had to travel outside their communities to access agricultural lands and forest resources. Sometimes, they had to travel distances of more than 30 kilometers to reach their farms. Without an outboard motor, travel upstream could take more than eight hours of arduous paddling and poling. When plots were far from the villages, men usually went for days at a time

for the preparation of the terrain, planting, and harvesting. They slept in temporary shelters made out of wood and thatched palm. The women joined them for the sowing and harvesting.

ii) The Landscape of Property

Miskitu ideas of property are interpreted through the cultural lens of agricultural practice and kinship relations. Scholarship on Moskitia confirms that the mixing of labor and land is what grants exclusive rights over agricultural products in the traditional agricultural system, where the planting of perennials, like fruit trees, is one of the markers of exclusive rights over the land (Cochran, 2008; Dodds, 1998; Helms, 1971; McSweeney & Coomes, 2011). The family who first farms an area retains the rights of exclusion, management, and alienation (Hayes, 2007). Other secondary rights, like the right of way and the collection of non-timber products, are maintained. Fences play a different function in the traditional agricultural system than they do in a Western-based property system. Fences do not symbolize exclusion but are there to keep animals out of vegetable gardens or enclose pasture lands for the purposes of feeding cattle (CCARC, 2003).

I argue that this traditional conception of property continues to mold expectations about land tenure relations among the Miskitu, but population growth and Ladino colonization have put pressure on this system. In the recent past, families were able to freely expand into the primary forest to obtain more land. With land as an abundant factor, the main constraint for expansion was the scarcity of labor power (Cochran, 2008).¹²¹ However, the combined effects of population growth and Ladino migration have made land scarcer. Due to high fertility rates and lower

¹²¹ The conversion of forest into agricultural land requires a substantial investment. Swidden agriculture was a labor-intensive process that required many hours for clearing, planting, weeding, and harvesting. Cutting mature trees with an ax and saw was no easy task. Traditionally, families depended on relatives or neighbors to help in a reciprocal manner to complete these tasks. This form of reciprocal exchange is still practiced in Twi, but in Awala and Kabu, people have to hire day laborers to help them (Fieldnotes, 2017-2018).

mortality rates, Indigenous peoples in Moskitia have experienced a population resurgence (Arps, 2007; McSweeney, 2002). Although population growth exerts pressure to land tenure systems based on swidden agriculture, it has been proven that Indigenous peoples have the ability to adapt to maintain resilience (McSweeney, 2005). The problem arises when there are other factors present that put constraints on these adaptations. In the case of Moskitia, it is possible that in the absence of pressure from Ladino colonization, the Miskitu would have been able to adapt the system of customary land tenure to accommodate population growth. However, Ladino colonization distorted the possibility for this endogenous change. This colonization affected the ability to maintain resilience both directly, by increasing the population, and indirectly, by introducing ideas of private property among the Miskitu. The funding provided by the drug trafficking made this situation even worse by adding significant more pressure.

Ladino colonization has primarily begun to change conceptions of property among the Miskitu by introducing ideas of private property. Land sales were not part of the traditional land tenure system (Cochran, 2008; Dodds, 1998; Hayes, 2007; Helms, 1971; Herlihy, 2012; Herlihy & Leake, 1997; Mollett, 2010). Yet, land sales are now a conspicuous feature of everyday life in some regions of Moskitia. In particular, territorial councils that are the frontlines of the agrarian frontier, such as BAKINASTA and Rayaka, have experienced greater disruptions to the traditional land tenure system than regions where colonization has been more recent, such as the case of WAMAKLISCINASTA. Next, I will summarize what I learned during fieldwork about how Ladino colonization has influenced the traditional land tenure system.

Ladinos shared the Miskitu view that the mixing of land and labor conferred property rights, but they believed that these rights were alienable. They migrated from other agrarian settings where the transaction of *mejoras* [improvements] was considered a legitimate practice to

transfer one's claim over the land to another. When Ladinos arrived in Moskitia, they sold these improvements among each other, but the Miskitu did not participate in these transactions for the most part. Despite the introduction of a new form of property relation, the impact on the traditional land tenure system was minimal until about the 1980s. With conditions of land abundance, the Ladinos could claim land by expanding on primary forests, as the Miskitu did. However, as the number of migrants increased, purchasing improvements from the previous owner became more imperative. Land was getting scarcer, especially around preferred locations like the riverbanks of the Patuca River. Under these conditions, Ladinos preferred to purchase rights not only to secure access but also to legitimate their presence in the area. However, the Ladino colonists did not stay put in the areas that they had purchased. They continued to exploit the cultural logic of an open frontier by expanding their claims around the areas that they purchased.

The Ladino practice of purchasing improvements and expanding land claims took advantage of the Miskitu land tenure system. As mentioned, Miskitu families only maintained exclusive rights over relatively small areas of land where they had their agricultural plots, which were between 1 and 5 hectares. The rest of the area consisted of fallow land that belonged to the family group or primary forest that could serve for future expansion. When Miskitu individuals began to participate in the transaction of improvements, they would be selling their rights to these exclusive areas and not necessarily the surrounding fallow land or primary forest. However, Ladinos interpreted the lack of visible improvements in the surrounding areas as a sign that the land was available. This amalgamation of Miskitu and Ladino conceptions of property rights led to the practice of accumulation whereby a Ladino colonist would buy rights over an area and significantly expand their claim over the surrounding areas.

Cattle grazing practices became one of the most important levers of change for the land tenure system. The Miskitu conceived of cattle grazing in different terms than the Ladino. The Miskitu kept cattle herds as a form of savings that they would use when they needed cash, whereas the Ladino kept cattle as a means of accumulation (Cochran, 2008; Helms, 1971). The Miskitu did not consume dairy products and only ate beef on special occasions. In contrast, Ladino families were dairy farmers and had access to external markets to sell their herds of cattle. While the cattle of the Miskitu roamed free in the savanna and communities, the Ladino invested in converting and fencing pasturelands to protect and grow their investment. Cattle grazing provided the impetus for the Ladino families to increase their 'property' to make more pasturelands.

The rise of drug trafficking activity in the region, which started around 2006, accelerated this practice of property making. Transnational criminal organizations subcontracted local traders and merchants to move the drugs across their territories (McSweeney et al., 2018). These *transportistas* [shippers] used the windfalls from the drug trade to invest in land and agro-businesses, which served the dual purpose of laundering and reinvesting the capital (McSweeney et al., 2017). There is a clear association between the massive conversion of forest to pasture lands and the rise of drug trafficking activity in places like Moskitia (McSweeney et al., 2014; Sesnie et al., 2017). As mentioned in chapter 4, Ladino colonists who engaged in this form of narco land grabbing settled in places far away from Miskitu villages. Nonetheless, they continued to disrupt access to agricultural lands and forest areas.

Although the political rhetoric among MASTA's leaders is to reject all forms of Ladino colonization, I find that in the villagers' attitudes toward Ladinos are shaped by a more dynamic process. The Miskitu use the traditional land tenure system as a benchmark to assess how

Ladinos gained access to land and evaluate the legitimacy of their presence in the region. Those Ladino families that work the land like the Miskitu—by practicing swidden agriculture, keeping moderate amounts of pastureland, and respecting secondary rights—are more likely to be accepted. This category includes those Ladinos that bought improvements but did not abuse their position by seeking to claim larger areas. In most cases, the purchase of the improvement from another Miskitu is reason enough to acquiesce to Ladino land ownership. However, the attitudes toward the presence of Ladino colonists also depend on a broader set of cultural and material conditions that constitute a moral economy in each locality. In the rest of the chapter, I incorporate this lens of moral economy by grounding the analysis of the land tenure system in land conflicts experienced in the three villages that were part of the study.

5.3 NARRATIVES OF LAND ENCLOSURES

I used the questionnaire as an opportunity to ask households questions about their experience with land conflicts in the localities of Awala (BAKINASTA), Kabu (Rayaka), and Twi (WAMACKLICINASTA). I selected these communities in part because of their differences. The differences, however, turned out to be starker than I had imagined. I asked respondents to tell me if they had experienced a land conflict in the last five years. Table 5.1 shows the results. While in Awala and Kabu most of the households have had a land conflict, this was the case only for a fraction of households in Twi. The fact that the number of land conflicts was so low in a village that had participated in the auto-saneamiento mobilization against Ladino colonists requires an explanation. In the questionnaire, I asked households about the conflicts over their own lands. As will be explained below, the households in Twi did not have agricultural land in the areas invaded by the Ladino colonists. They participated out of solidarity to defend the integrity of the territory.

Table 5.1. Distribution of land conflicts

Household has experienced a land conflict?	Awala	Kabu	Twi	Total
Yes	18	14	3	32
No	5	9	20	14
Total	23	23	23	46

The differences across localities became clearer when I coded responses to create a typology of land conflicts. Table 5.2 shows the result of the inductive coding. In Awala, the most common types of conflict involved descendants contesting an inheritance or Miskitu neighbors trespassing. In Kabu, the most frequent response concerned trespassing by colonists. In Twi, which only had three cases, two responses concerned conflict between neighbors and another the of a household that was instructed by the Institute of Forest Conservation to remove their cattle from a water source.

Table 5.2. Typology of land conflicts

What was the type of land conflict?	Awala	Kabu	Twi	Total
Descendants contested inheritance	7	2	0	9
Miskitu neighbor trespassed	5	1	2	8
Miskitu neighbor sold land to a colonist	4	4	0	8
Colonist trespassed or forced a land sale	2	7	0	9
Conflict with government agency	0	0	1	1
Total	18	14	3	34

When I planned the household questionnaire, I was expecting to find more responses that concerned conflicts between Miskitu and Ladino colonists. Instead, I found different dynamics operating in each of these localities. Asking households directly about their land conflicts provided a micro perspective that needed to be reconciled with the broader picture at the

territorial level. As mentioned in chapter 4, each of the localities had outstanding conflicts that concerned land invasions by recent colonists. In this section, I try to reconcile the responses from the household questionnaire with other information that I obtained about land conflicts in the localities. I find it useful to refer to the concept of narrative to develop this mode of explanation. I use narrative to approximate a phenomenological explanation of how these households interpret the conditions of land conflicts around them. I acknowledge that the topic of land conflicts was controversial to discuss and that many of the respondents may not have wished to reveal the details to a researcher. This possible bias in the information is another reason why I find the concept of narrative useful because it accounts for how respondents chose to respond to my questions about land conflicts.

i) Land Conflicts in Awala

Awala, like the rest of the communities in the mid-Patuca, had been exposed to Ladino migration for a long period. Although the population was Miskitu-majority, native Ladino families lived within the village. People in Awala also had connections to other native Ladino villages on the river. The case of the Hernandez family in the introduction exemplifies the diverse makeup of the population. As part of this long-term migration, people have also been exposed to the selling of improvements. For decades, villages were able to accommodate native Ladinos while maintaining the principles of the traditional land tenure system. However, the system destabilized when new colonists began to claim larger swathes of land, in many cases financed by proceeds from the drug trade. The enclosure of the area around the Warunta mountain and watershed exemplified this trend. Warunta became the symbol of enclosures by Ladino colonists.

The enclosure of Warunta resulted from a combination of land sales and invasions. Although many of these land sales were made under coercion, some Miskitu families gained a bad reputation for selling land to the colonists in Warunta and then moving to other areas to claim new land. Most Miskitu look at this practice with reproach. “It is like they have the vice to sell land,” one Miskitu man told me during an informal chat in Wampusirpi. People might be more sympathetic to families that had to sell part of their land to attend to an illness or another emergency, but this type of land sale is seen as different from the one done for pure profit motivation. Although the enclosure of the Warunta mountain was the most salient form of conflict, when I talked to the households during the questionnaire, most of their responses had to do with land conflicts that have occurred on the riverbanks of the Patuca. Part of the reason is that people in Awala used the Warunta area as a common ground for timber, hunting, and fishing, but few had agricultural land in this mountain.

The conflicts over agricultural land located on the Patuca River were, in most cases, among people in the village. The most salient form of conflict was over inheritances. During the interviews, families narrated the land conflict from their perspective. In all cases, the family claimed to own the land when another relative made a new claim. One typical example is the conflict that Fatima’s family had with a close relative (HH #119, Interview, 13 September 2018). Fatima, who is in her early 30s, and her husband obtained a teacher’s diploma, a marker of distinction, and a leverage of social mobility. However, they could not find a position in a school and had to move in with her parents. Fatima mentioned that a cousin came to claim a plot of land that her mother had been occupying for years. “He said that the land belonged to him; that it was an inheritance from his father,” Fatima said. Her family did not dispute that the uncle had worked the area when he was alive, but for many years now, her mother had occupied the field.

In Fatima's mind, the mother's labor clearing the field gave her the right to own it. Nonetheless, they acquiesced to the relative's demand and did not report their problem to any authority. The family continued to have access to land on the riverbank, and they recently purchased new land in the savanna.

As in the case of Fatima's family, most households involved in inheritance disputes acknowledged that the other party might have had a claim at some point as a relative. However, these claims got more complicated when they involved multiple generations. This is the case of doña Teresa, one of the few female-led households in Awala. Doña Teresa was a sturdy Miskitu woman in her late seventies, the daughter of one of the first families to settle in the area (HH #117, Interview, 12 September 2018). Since Doña Teresa's father was one of the pioneers, he left large swaths of fallow land around the riverbank near the community on both sides of the river. The land around her house, a fertile riverbank, and the most extensive agricultural plot within the settlement limits were fenced. Her son-in-law cultivated on this land provided her with the supplies that she needed. The land on the other side of the river, however, had been more difficult to monitor. Over the years, other families intruded on lands that her father used to work and that she claimed as her own. Doña Teresa was eager to reclaim these lands, and she counted on the support of her son-in-law, who was well-connected with the Indigenous and government authorities. They went to the mayor, the peace judge, and the president of the territorial council. The judge came to assess the situation, but when he interviewed the intruders, they told him they also had the right to inherit from doña Teresa's father because they shared the same last name. Doña Teresa, however, did not refer to them as relatives in the same way that Fatima did with her cousin. She could not evict them, and the other 'relatives' continued to work on this land.

Another source of conflict was between long-term tenants and the descendants of the original owner. Families would allow relatives and neighbors to use part of their fallow land, at no cost and without any contract. Just a few decades ago, land was plentiful, and families might let tenants keep using the land for extended periods. Under the current land crunch, however, descendants might feel different about the tenants. On the other hand, tenants that have cared for the land for many years may have come to view it as their own. In some cases, tenants had made investments, such as planting cacao trees. These improvements would make the land more attractive to the descendants but a more significant loss to the tenant. Don Olegario and Don Geronimo are two Miskitu men who are facing a similar situation with other Miskitu families demanding the riverbank that they cared for for many years and which now have valuable cacao trees.

Don Olegario, a man in his 70s, came to Awala from another community (HH #108, Interview, 10 September 2018). He claimed to have worked the same plot of land by the river for decades. About ten years ago, he planted about 150 cacao trees when the crop was making a comeback after the massive flooding in the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch in 1998. Tending for these plants has represented a considerable investment for him. Still, now another Miskitu man was claiming that the land belonged to his father, who had only lent it to Don Olegario, and that he was going to seize it. Don Olegario spoke with the territorial council president but could not get the other man to retract his claim. Although Don Olegario said that he could not work as much as he used to because of problems with his eyesight, he was still strong and could slice a coconut with one blow from his machete. "I would rather dump fuel on those trees and burn before letting him have them," said Don Olegario defiantly.

Similarly, Don Geronimo had a similar situation when the grandchildren of the man who initially allowed him to work in the area came to claim the land where he had his cacao plantation (HH #109, Interview, 10 September 2018). Don Geronimo, who was 57 at the time, said that he had worked the land without interruption for forty years. “The land was free when I started working there in my teenage years. The true owner [*mero dueño*] never complained. He was now dead, and the grandchildren were the ones complaining.” He seemed to admit that the grandfather had tacitly conceded to his occupation without formally giving him any rights. However, in Don Geronimo’s eyes, only the grandfather had the legitimacy to say something. The grandfather had watched him tend the land for decades and said nothing.

As the cases of Doña Teresa, Don Olegario, and Don Geronimo show, conflicts over land inheritances seem to be more intense in the riverbank. These are areas of higher value due to their fertility and ease of access. These are also areas that have been in use for decades, separating the original workers of the land from the descendants by two or three generations. In their fifties and seventies at the time of the interview, these respondents had personal memories of the original land arrangements. These memories sustained rights that younger generations hoped to reverse.

Land conflicts involving relatives or neighbors occurred within a more horizontal field of power where an economy of sharing and ideas of labor shaped land access. In the cases of Don Olegario and Don Geronimo, the legitimate ‘owners’ of the land, the ancestors who had first cleared the fields did not seem to have an issue sharing the land. Over the years, tenants like Don Olegario and Don Geronimo believed that their labor invested in the land had granted them the right to ‘own’ it. Their descendants, however, thought that the original labor of the ancestor was what counted. They dismissed the occupation of the tenants over decades as an only temporary

use. The way that the labor of the original occupant was invoked to claim property rights in the present constituted another example of what Povinelli (2011) referred to as the governance of the prior.

The tension over shared land arrangements could still happen within a generation and involve multiple parties. The Zelaya family has had conflicts with relatives, neighbors, and colonists (HH #102, Interview, 10 September 2018). Mr. Zelaya, a 57-year old man who identified himself as half Miskitu and half Ladino, had worked in agriculture since his teenage years. He managed to secure land on the riverbank. However, in recent years he has had many conflicts in an area of land that he admitted having abandoned. This period was related to him getting a government job that paid him a salary, which reduced the time and incentive to work in agriculture. A brother-in-law came into the land and cut hardwood trees that he had been reserving. Hardwood trees, which take decades to grow, are valuable investments as they can be sold for cash or used to make a dugout canoe or a house (McSweeney, 2004). Mr. Zelaya was mad at his brother-in-law, who gave the excuse that he needed the money because he was unemployed.

Mr. Zelaya has also experienced how trespasses and shared agreements could turn into obligations to sell the land. Around the same time, a family who had always worked next to his land but further inland from the river started to encroach into his plot on the riverbank. According to Mr. Zelaya, they knew well what the limits were, but they crossed over as a strategy to bolster their offer to buy the land. The idea is that the owner would be more inclined to sell the land once they saw that the other party was already cultivating it. In this case, the land purchase was less a sale and more compensation for the foregone rights. Something similar

happened with a colonist from Olancho who had asked to borrow land from them a few years ago. Mr. Zelaya told the story of the encounter.

My son-in-law was planting the beans when a man from Olancho approached him to ask to borrow land to feed his family. I told him that the man should only plant [annuals] and share some of the harvests with us. The man planted the next year too. He even planted cacao trees! Now, he insists that we have to sell him the land, but I don't want to do it because I have many children (HH #102, Interview, 10 September 2018).

Mr. Zelaya seemed to have rationalized the colonist's claim for land as part of a shared moral economy where any household should have the right to access land to feed their family. Mr. Zelaya did not refer to the colonist as being wealthy or more powerful. However, the conflict with the colonist is the only one that he approached the authorities to find a solution. He went to the peace judge on two occasions, and the official allegedly issued a warrant for the colonist's arrest. They also went to the territorial council president, but he said that he did not have time to attend to the case. Meanwhile, the colonist was still on their land growing rice and plantains and waiting for the cacao trees to mature.

Some families in Awala also mentioned that their conflicts were related to colonists buying land either directly from them or another Miskitu who had trespassed on their land. These conflicts were more common in the Warunta area, where colonists have large cattle ranches. Although the respondents identified the third-party colonists as the actors behind dispossession, they also derided the Miskitu individuals who had facilitated their entry by selling the land.

Blass, a man in his forties who identified as a Ladino, mentioned that "one should have principles when working in a distant location" [*hay que tener principios para ir a trabajar largo*] (HH #116, Interview, 11 September 2018). He pointed to the reality that the land tenure system relying on extensive fallow might mean that some land was too distant to be monitored

continuously. The agricultural calendar marked the visits to these remote plots. They went when they had to prepare the soil, plant, or harvest. They may spend from days to a few weeks in these locations, depending on the work that they had to do. Therefore, they had to trust that whatever work was done was respected by the neighbors. Blass had a problem with another Miskitu who encroached on his land in Warunta. He did not mind as much that the man had used part of this area, but the problem was that he sold his improvements to a Ladino. The Ladino took possession of the property, and Blass has been afraid to return since then. "Today, people no longer have respect. They come to work in someone else's land without asking for permission." He still has land in the riverbank, closer to Awala, and another plot in the savanna. Blass, who used to work as a pastor, noticed an overall decay in social values in Awala when it came to the respect of personal property. Four years ago, he had problems with the wife's relatives living in the same housing plot. He moved his family to a new plot in the center of the community he bought, but he felt restrained. He saved money to build himself a house in the savanna, fenced with wire, where his crops and livestock would not be disturbed by others.

Accounting for the individual responses and the regional context, I suggest that what emerges in Awala is a narrative that combines both external and internal enclosures. People recognize the major problem provoked by the enclosure of the Warunta area, but they also experience a more proximate form of conflict with their own family members and neighbors. I suggest that one of the reasons why respondents in Awala were more likely to blame each other for land conflicts has to do with the way in which the practices of Ladino colonists have infiltrated into the community. Awala experienced an enclosure from within as well as from without. It seemed that the long history of migration had already accustomed people to the practice of selling improvement. Many of the native Ladinos that have settled on the mid-Patuca

bought their land but co-existed peacefully with the Miskitu population. An increase in migration, however, increased pressure on the land. Land investment related to capitalization from the drug trade only made it worse. These changes in the political economy created the conditions for the enclosure from without those local residents associated with the takings in the Warunta area, but it also catalyzed an enclosure from within, as local residents responded to these changes by adopting more of the elements of the Ladino land tenure system to protect their interests.

ii) Land Conflicts in Kabu

Kabu is one of the many villages located on the coastal fringe, close to the mouth of the Platano River. Most households in Kabu have their agricultural lands on the Platano River watershed. Few Ladino families live in Kabu. The residents of Kabu have experienced enclosures by Ladino colonists in some areas of the Platano River. These enclosures, however, were less severe than those that had already occurred on the Black River and the south margin of the Ibans Lagoon. Although these other areas were included in the same territorial council, they represented a different space for the families that lived in Kabu. These other areas were the agricultural lands of those villages that were in the eastern part of Rayaka. Ibans is the largest of these villages on the coastal area, and Banaka the largest on the Black River area. The Miskitu population of Ibans and Banaka had purportedly lost a large amount of land through a combination of land sales and invasions. I suggest that the experience of these other villages served as a frame of reference for how the residents of Kabu interpreted their own land conflicts.

Conflicts with Ladino trespassers were one of the main categories identified by respondents in Kabu. Jerry, a 37-year old Miskitu man, was born in Cocobila, a few miles east by the dirt path, but moved to Awala when he married (HH #309, Interview, 12 December 2018).

He used to work his family's fields in the area known as Paru, where many families from Cocobila have land. Colonists linked to the drug trade took control of the area to expand cattle ranching and control airstrips. His family wanted to retain the land, but they were forced to sell it when his uncle sold it to a colonist. "It became impossible to work there," Jerry said. "They bring cattle that destroy the fields, and you cannot complain. We felt an enormous pressure to sell, and we did before they killed us." Jerry's uncle probably faced the same pressure to sell, but to his family, he was the pariah who had allowed the colonists into the family area and forced others to sell. Jerry still has land in Paru, and he is aware of the danger of working there. Some families have lost all of their land after a relative, usually a male relative, sold it to colonists.

Families in Kabu are either afraid or feel discouraged from approaching state and Indigenous authorities to solve their problems. This is understandable considering that families in Kabu are directly confronting violent colonists involved in the drug trade. These actors are also present in the Warunta area near Awala, but families in this region tend to access other lands in the riverbank. Therefore, they experience the conflict with colonists indirectly through the competition for land that causes other Miskitu to grab land.

Only one of the 23 households I spoke with in Kabu mentioned an act of defiance against a colonist. Don Alberto, a 70-year old Miskitu man, spent the early part of his life diving for lobster. He was lucky not to have injured himself in what could arguably be the most dangerous job in the region. In the 1970s, the lobster population was not depleted, and divers could retrieve them in shallow waters. Now, divers have to go deeper and for more extended periods to catch lobster, increasing the risk of decompression sickness. Don Alberto had to pay someone to tend the fields for him. He has been working in agriculture full-time for over three decades. However, I could see that he still embodied the boldness that characterized men who worked as divers.

When I asked him if he had had any land conflicts, he told me the story of one Ladino he caught in his land a few years ago.

I saw the Ladino going about my land, and I asked him, ‘what are you doing?’ He turned to me and said that he had a right to be there because it was national land. I said to him, ‘no, this is not national land; it is Miskitu land!’ I told him that I would notify the [Miskitu] mayor that he had encroached into Miskitu land. The man continued to stay in the area but further inland (HH#321, Interview, 13 December 2018).

Kabu appears to be in a relatively better position than the other communities closer to the colonization front on the eastern side. Most Miskitu families have sold or fled places like Paru to the east of Kabu, but they have maintained control over their landholdings in the Platano river area. Nonetheless, this area was quickly becoming the new hotspot of dispossession. Colonists and landless Miskitu families were also expanding in this area. Ladinos have had homesteads in this area for decades, but in the last decade, they grew the size of their pasture lands. Some of this expansion was related to the activities of drug traffickers who used homesteaders to protect the airfields and guard the territory. These homesteaders made their own land claims too.

Some of the most violent land conflicts have been among colonists. This is the case of San Miguel, which started as a Ladino settlement with three to four households. One of the households got involved in drug trafficking and bought out the other families. They consolidated the land and expanded the grazing pastures. Some of the local leaders I interviewed said this process of land consolidation was violent and that the other families were forced out. Another area on the Platano River, Siksa Yari, has also been identified as a site of conflicts between colonists and between colonists and Miskitu.

Some of the respondents also mentioned land conflicts among family members and Miskitu neighbors that were similar to those in Awala. Tomas, a 24-year old Miskitu man who recently established his own household, complained that the relatives on his mother’s side were

taking his family's land (HH #319, Interview, 13 December 2018). The mother, who had inherited the land, approached the peace judge in Brus Laguna, but they were still waiting for her to verify the parcel. It was vital for a young man like Tomas to keep access to the family land, as it was almost impossible to find new land unless one bought it. Other disputes concerned the stealing of produce by other relatives. In another interview, Emecia, a 45-year old Miskitu woman, told me of a cousin who also had land in the same area, who always went into their plot to steal (HH #323, Interview, 13 December 2018). They went to the auxiliar [*alcalde auxiliar*], but he did not listen to their case. Emecia's brother was angry and decided to take matters into his own hands. He went over to the cousin's house and fired three warning shots. "But he continued stealing," Emecia said. There was no clear end to this conflict.

The responses from Kabu addresses some of the elements of internal enclosures identified in Awala, but the narrative of enclosures was overwhelmingly about the invasion by Ladino colonists. I suggest that one of the reasons for this difference is the Kabu's location of agricultural lands on the Platano River, which has seen more recent colonization compared to other areas of Rayaka's territory like the Black River and the south margin of the Ibans Lagoon. The Black River area, in particular, had a long history of Ladino colonization, like the mid-Patuca, but there the presence of Ladino colonists became even higher after the 1980s. I suggest that the Miskitu on the Platano River observed this experience and used it as a lens for what could happen in their agricultural areas. Although there are some conflicts among Miskitu families in Kabu, their lower prevalence within household responses does point to a less intense process of internal enclosures.

iii) Land Conflicts in Twi

Twi is one of the villages located in the savanna, a considerable distance from the coast and the Wangki River. Twi is one of the neighborhoods of Auka, which is considered the cultural center of the territorial council of WAMAKLISCINASTA. People in this territorial council considered themselves to be descendants of Waylan, a legendary warrior figure who founded Auka. There is no history of Ladino migration to this area. The population has been belligerent about their land rights, even putting up signposts to demarcate a property line, as explained in chapter 4. For this reason, land enclosures are rigorously experienced as external to the community dynamics.

The household questionnaire helped to confirm that the situation of land conflicts in Twi followed a different dynamic from the cases in Awala and Kabu. Only one of the three reported cases was over agricultural land. One household reported a conflict that involved another Miskitu that wanted to appropriate part of the family land (HH #211, Interview, 20 November 2018). The other conflict between Miskitu was over a housing plot inside the village (HH #216, Interview, 22 November 2018). As the population of the village increased, houses became closer together. A neighbor claimed that the family I interviewed had erected their house on land that belonged to his father. Since the house was built of wood, the family opted to take it apart and move it to another location to avoid having problems. The third case concerned a conflict that a family had with the Institute of Forest Conservation, which asked them to remove their cattle from an area because it was close to a water source (HH #203, Interview, 16 November 2018).

The absence of land conflicts over agricultural land in Twi spoke to the way that the community had been able to maintain the traditional land tenure system. In fact, the conflict reported over agricultural land appeared to be an anomaly. It concerned a plot of land that was

about six hours from the village. The household was composed of an elderly couple in their sixties and seventies. Therefore, they could not visit the area often to assert their claim. However, the absence of other conflicts indicated that families operated closer to the conditions of the traditional land tenure system as described above.

Twí had a bolder narrative against land enclosures by Ladino colonists. Twí is one of the villages that participated in the auto-saneamiento mobilization in 2015. Twí is located in savanna, and their agricultural areas had not been affected by the colonists. Nonetheless, they took strong action to contest the encroachment of land that belonged to the territory of WAMAKLISCINASTA.

The area under conflict in Twí is located on the riverbank of the Wangki River. Two Ladino families arrived in the area in 1992, a significantly lower number than in other parts of Moskitia. The villagers did not report having problems with these two families. Problems started when more colonists started to arrive in 2008. This migration occurred during a period of rapid expansion of the drug trade. The area is located on the border with Nicaragua, which provided a strategic location for the transport of drugs. The leaders of WAMAKLISCINASTA claimed that no one in the territory sold land to these families. Instead, the land was allegedly sold by Miskitu from Nicaragua, who kept their agricultural lands on the Honduran side of the Wangki river. The mayor of the municipality allegedly had provided the colonists with legal documentation to validate their land transactions. Also, some of the colonists reported having documents from the former president of MASTA and the former president of the Council of Elders authorizing the transfer of land.

The expansion of the area for colonization was associated with the construction of a new road along the Wangki River that connected with the existing road from Puerto Lempira to

Leymus, a village that served as the border crossing with Nicaragua. The dirt road was built with funds from the municipal government and was not part of a national-level program. It is believed that the mayor built the road to be able to access his ranch and the profits from issuing documents to the new colonists. About nineteen Ladino families settled by the river near the Miskitu village of Corinto, and another twelve settled in an area closer to the Kruta River near the Miskitu village of Yulu. They had pasture lands and sold their dairy products to the market in Waspam, a large town that is located on the Nicaraguan side of the river.

The agricultural areas on the Wangki River were traditionally occupied by Miskitu families from Nicaragua, who had been using the north banks of the river for cultivation for their higher elevation crops. WAMAKLISCINASTA authorities recognized the traditional right of these families to cultivate the area. The Nicaraguan Miskitu, however, ran into trouble with the newcomer Ladino colonists. The colonists began to enclose the area with grazing pastures, which prevented the Nicaraguan Miskitu from accessing their agricultural areas. There were reports of violence against the Nicaraguan Miskitu, including murder, between 2012 and 2014. This situation is said to have forced many of the Nicaraguan Miskitu to sell their lands to the colonists to avoid problems.

The Honduran Miskitu, for the most part, avoided contact with these colonists. The Honduran Miskitu do not work in the ranches of the Ladino colonists. One of the leaders said that “it would be like betraying their own people.” The Ladino colonists hire workers from Nicaragua who do not have connections to the authorities in WAMAKLISCINASTA.

The enclosure of common forest areas is more responsible for the conflict in WAMACLICINSTA than the appropriation of agricultural lands. More direct confrontation with the residents of WAMAKLISCINASTA resulted when a group of colonists deforested an area

that the communities considered a forest reserve around 2011. The territory had few areas with broadleaf forest, and this was one of the reserves where the communities could obtain hardwood to build their dugout canoes. After converting the forest into pasture, the colonists also laid claims to the standing forest areas. They prevented the Miskitu from accessing these sites. One of the direct antecedents to the auto-saneamiento mobilization occurred in 2015 when Ladino colonists issued threats to men from the village of Yulu that had come into an area to fell timber to carve dugout canoes.

In sum, Twi maintained the traditional agricultural system of swidden agriculture with no land enclosures within the community. Land enclosures in WAMACLINASTA were experienced primarily in the form of loss or potential loss of access to common forest areas. Also, the increase of Ladino colonization in their territory was experienced as a threat even though it had not yet affected their agricultural areas directly.

5.4 RESPONDING TO LAND ENCLOSURES

At the regional level, there is a macro narrative that has framed Ladino colonization as the main threat to Miskitu territoriality. The protection of the Miskitu land tenure system is considered the central element in this macro narrative. To be like a Miskitu (*Miskitu baku*) is to only clear small patches of land for subsistence farming surrounded by fallowed areas that are safely kept for future generations. The clearing of large swathes of forest to create and sell pastureland is the antithesis of this Miskitu ideal on the right order of things. Acting on this macro narrative, the Miskitu mobilized claims on property rights to prevent further encroachment on the traditional land tenure system. This narrative animated the transformation of MASTA's leaders into organic intellectuals, as described in chapter 3, which ultimately resulted in the inter-communal property regime. Each of the territorial councils received a

property title in fee simple, which was registered in the Property Institute, as any other private parcel would be. From the perspective of this macro narrative, the saneamiento of the territorial councils symbolized not only the perfecting of the property title but also the defense of a Miskitu moral economy.

In the previous section, I showed that the three localities visited in this study have sub-regional variations of this macro narrative. These local narratives were informed by how people interpreted the dynamics of land enclosure in each of these localities. A central factor in explaining these dynamics was the length of time that the localities had been exposed to Ladino colonization. I argued that Awala had been exposed the longest, which led to an internalization of the values of private property. For this reason, many of the respondents identified enclosures as both an internal and external process. Apart from the Ladino colonists, they also blamed other family members or neighbors for these problems. People in Kabu that been exposed to Ladino colonization more indirectly, and therefore appeared to have internalized less the values of private property. They viewed internal and external actors as being involved in land enclosures, but they were more likely to blame Ladino colonists than those in Awala. Twi's land tenure system was the closest to the traditional version, and the respondents viewed enclosures as being driven by external actors. Only the Ladino colonists were to blame.

Next, I use these observations on narratives to analyze how the population in each of these localities has responded to enclosures. I argue that, in Awala, the narrative built on internal enclosures that blamed other community members has led people to pursue individual strategies with the hope their territorial authorities would help them mediate these conflicts. In Kabu, the narrative that combined internal and external enclosures and blamed colonists also led people to pursue individual strategies but with less hope that their territorial authorities would help them

mediate these conflicts. For this reason, I suggest that the overall outcome in Kabu was acquiescence. In Twi, where the narrative clearly identified the Ladino colonists as the problem, the population followed a collective strategy that resulted in their territorial authorities organizing a resistance. These relationships are summarized in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3 Relationship between narratives of enclosure and responses

Village	Exposure to Ladino Colonization	Narrative of Enclosure		Response to Enclosure	
		Dynamic	Interpretation	Strategy	Outcome
<i>Awala</i>	High	Internal/External	Ladino colonists and community members responsible	Individual	Mediation
<i>Kabu</i>	Medium	Internal/External	Ladino colonists primarily responsible	Individual	Acquiescence
<i>Twi</i>	Low	External	Ladino colonists only responsible	Collective	Resistance

My analysis on the relationship between narratives of enclosure and their responses draws from the responses to the household questionnaire, interviews with leaders, and participant observation in these localities. During the household questionnaire, I asked respondents what they did to try to resolve their land conflicts. After coding their responses, I identified four strategies: they could go to the president of the territorial council; they could go to a government functionary, which could either be the peace judge or the municipal cadastre officer; they could go to both the president of the territorial council and the government functionary, or they could try to resolve the conflict on their own. Table 5.4 shows the different strategies pursued by the respondents in each of the localities. I use these responses, combined with interview data and

participant observation, to analyze strategies and outcomes for responding to land enclosures.

Next, I will describe these responses in each locality.

Table 5.4. Authority consulted

Who did you talk to about the conflict?	Awala	Kabu	Twi	Total
Only Territorial Council	6	0	1	7
Only Government	4	4	0	8
Both	3	1	0	4
None	5	9	2	16
Total	18	14	3	35

i) Awala

BAKINASTA's president was a well-respected individual who lived in a village about thirty minutes upriver from Wampusirpi. At an earlier point in his life, he had acted as the Catholic church's delegate of the word in his village. He was known for maintaining peaceful relations with the Ladino community in Wampusirpi. I was able to observe him a couple of times interacting with Ladino. On one occasion, I witnessed his affectionate disposition with a Ladino family that had moved to the area in the early 1990s. The children were now adults, but they all lived around the parents' household. He still used the diminutive form to address the grown-up children, and one of them called him godfather. Likewise, I saw him a couple of times at the bodegas owned Ladino merchants in Wampusirpi, where he was treated with deference. On one occasion, they brought him coffee while he waited for his dugout canoe to go back to his village. He was popular among the Miskitu too. Whether at the bodega or on the street, hardly a minute would go by without someone coming to greet or ask him a question.

I describe the leader's interactions with Ladinos because I was surprised at how polite and sometimes affectionate they seemed. Narco land grabbing in Warunta was a serious deal.

The BAKINASTA area was not a conflict-free area by any means. Some of the Ladino merchants that the president frequented were accused of being involved in land grabbing in this area. The leader openly supported MASTA's agenda for saneamiento, which surely must have put him at odds with these actors. Wampusirpi was the town with the Wild-West character that I described in chapter 4 and where I had the unfortunate encounter while revealing my identity as a researcher at one of the bodegas described in the introduction. Yet, the leader had the ability to navigate this complex social scenario where he acted as a community member, on the one hand, and MASTA's spokesperson on saneamiento, on the other. The sad truth is that he had little choice but to maintain a cordial relationship with the Ladinos. If he wanted to live in the area, talk about saneamiento, and stay alive, he had to find a way to maintain cordial relations. The leader took MASTA's official position that any saneamiento would require the intervention of the Honduran security forces. Neither MASTA nor the territorial president was going to have blood in their hands.

There had not been a collective response to try to resolve land conflicts. Instead, people attempted to resolve each of their conflicts by pursuing individual strategies. This was the case for the people that I interviewed for the household questionnaire. People in BAKINASTA sought after the president of the territorial council to help them resolve their land conflicts. He would travel to the site, meet the parties, and engage in mediation. Sometimes they would bring elders who knew about who had worked the area in the past to serve as witnesses. However, it was not easy to get a hold of the leader. Most times, he would only be passing through Wampusirpi while in transit from his village to Puerto Lempira. There was no cellphone coverage in his village either. Even if they managed to get a hold of him, they needed to arrange for transportation to

take him to the area. Next, I will explain how this context matters for the interpretation of the household questionnaire.

Of the 18 households that experienced a land conflict in Awala, six households consulted with the president of the territorial council, three consulted him along with a local government official, four went to the local government official only, and five decided not to approach any authority. The number of cases was too small to make any definite claims about patterns. Nonetheless, I will make some observations about these responses to highlight some of the elements that went into consideration when deciding what to do about the conflict.

Table 5.5. Authority consulted by type of conflict in Awala

Who did you talk to about the conflict?	Type of Conflict			
	Descendants contested inheritance	Miskitu neighbor trespassed	Miskitu neighbor sold land to a colonist	Colonist trespassed or forced a land sale
Only Territorial Council	3	2	1	0
Only Government	2	0	2	0
Both	1	0	1	1
None	1	3	0	1
Total	7	5	4	2

In the other four cases where the respondents accused another Miskitu of selling their land to a colonist, the respondents also were more likely to involve the government official than the territorial authority. Two respondents decided to speak to only the government official, and another spoke to both the government and the territorial authority. Only one respondent went to the territorial authority without speaking the territorial authority. Respondents were more likely to go to the territorial authority in the case of disputes over inheritance and trespasses by other Miskitu neighbors. Also, 3 out of 5 people that reported trespass by a Miskitu neighbor decided

not to pursue the claim with any authority. They felt they could do it without the intervention of authority.

For the cases that I considered the most severe—those that involved trespass by a colonist—one household chose to consult both the territorial and the government authority, and the other chose to do nothing. The family that consulted both authorities had several land parcels and was relatively wealthier than the rest of the households in the community (HH #113, Interview, 12 September 2018). On the other hand, the family that did not go to any authority was a relatively young household, which implied that they did not have many means, and they opted to acquiesce to the land invasion (HH #122, Interview, 14 September 2018).

Despite these efforts to resolve the conflicts, many of them were still without a resolution or the solution had been unfavorable to the household. The two households that had problems with the Ladino trespasser had been unable to reach any kind of solution despite having consulted both the government and territorial authorities. Households that consulted the territorial council were the only ones that involved solutions that required either paying for the land or receiving payment. Families that consulted with the government authority or negotiated directly with the other party either recuperated the land or had to relinquish their claim.

Table 5.6. Resolution to conflict by authority consulted in Awala

What was the solution?	Authority Consulted			
	Only TC	Only Gov't	None	Total
Paid money for the land	1	0	0	1
Sold the land	1	0	0	1
Recuperated the land	1	1	2	4
Relinquished the land	0	1	1	2
Demarcated boundaries	0	0	0	0
Total	3	2	3	8

Overall, I suggest that what these results show, in light of the social context in BAKINASTA, is a tendency toward favoring conflict mediation. Two factors influenced this outcome. First, many of the conflicts described involved family members or neighbors, which implied less inequality among the parties setting better terms for a mediation. Second, the president of the territorial council was considered to be an approachable leader in serving conflict mediation. However, conflict mediation had its limits. The territorial authority was not always available, which might explain why half of those with conflicts did not even consider consulting with him. Also, mediation did not only bring resolution to the case. Of the nine cases in which the territorial authority was involved, only three reached an agreement. It should be noted that those cases brought for mediation were not the most explosive land grabbing situations in the Warunta area.

ii) Kabu

Like Awala, territorial authorities in Kabu favored saneamiento, but they followed MASTA's official strategy of demanding the government's protection. Therefore, the people in this locality ended up pursuing individual strategies to resolve their land conflicts. However, they seemed less inclined to see the territorial authorities as mediators for their conflicts. Rayaka's president was one of the most seasoned leaders in MASTA. He participated in high-level positions in MASTA and the national-based Indigenous movement. However, his multiple commitments implied that he got to spend less time in the area. In a way, I suggest that his extra-local residency affected his role as a mediator of conflicts in Kabu compared to the territorial authority in Awala, who spent more time in the area.

Another difference between Kabu and Awala is that in the former, the narrative suggested that Ladino colonists were to blame for land conflicts. Relationships between Ladino colonists

and Miskitu were likely to be in less equal terms, discouraging mediation. The responses in the questionnaire suggested that most of the respondents did not trust that any authority would have been able to provide them assistance to resolve their conflict: 9 out of 14 households said that they did not consult with any authority. Looking at the type of conflict involved, it is revealing that the households that decided not to consult with any authority had the most severe conflicts—those involving complaints about a Miskitu neighbor that sold land to a colonist and those of direct trespass by a colonist.

The five households that did consult an authority went to a local government official, and only one of them also consulted with the territorial authority. It is notable that none of the respondents mentioned having consulted the president of the territorial council as the sole instance. Even the respondent that consulted both the government and the territorial council only went to the territorial authority after they were unable to pay the expenses for the municipal cadastral officer.

Table 5.7. Authority consulted by type of conflict in Kabu

Who did you talk to about the conflict?	Type of Conflict			
	Descendants contested inheritance	Miskitu neighbor trespassed	Miskitu neighbor sold land to a colonist	Colonist trespassed or forced a land sale
Only Territorial Council	0	0	0	0
Only Government	1	1	0	2
Both	0	0	0	1
None	1	0	4	4
Total	2	1	4	7

Most of the households interviewed in Kabu acquiesced in the face of the land conflict. Only 6 out of the 14 households reported that they had been able to reach some kind of a solution to the conflict. The two cases that had a resolution after consulting with a government agent

involved the participation of the municipal cadastral officer, who managed to clarify the boundaries of the parcels. Of the four cases that reached a resolution without consulting any authority, two involved a win for the interviewed household and the other two a loss. The two cases with a win involved the two strong-willed men who were able to stop the encroachment; in one case, it was against a relative (HH #317, Interview, 13 December 2018) and in the other against a colonist (HH#321, Interview, 13 December 2018). The two cases that involved a loss included Jerry's household that opted to sell the land to the colonist (HH #309, Interview, 12 December 2018) and another household that opted to relinquish their claim (HH #314, Interview, 12 December 2018).

Table 5.8. Resolution to conflict by authority consulted in Kabu

What was the solution?	Authority Consulted			
	Only TC	Only Gov't	None	Total
Paid money for the land	0	0	0	0
Sold the land	0	0	1	1
Recuperated the land	0	0	2	2
Relinquished the land	0	0	1	1
Demarcated boundaries	0	2	0	0
Total	0	2	4	6

Overall, I suggest that what these results show is a tendency toward acquiescence in their land conflicts. Two factors influenced this outcome. First, Ladino colonists were considered the perpetrators of these conflicts. Since these conflicts were more likely to turn violent, people were less likely to consider mediation by the territorial authority or the demarcation of a boundary line by a government official. Second, the territorial authority had a shorter permanence in the area, which contributed to him being perceived as less available. Although the leader enjoyed high social status, most people did not consider him to resolve their land conflicts.

iii) Twi

The questionnaire responses are less useful to describe Twi's experience with land conflict, but I will describe the three cases that reported a conflict to have a more comprehensive look. In the case of the household that had a conflict over agricultural land, they managed to consult with the territorial authority and recuperate the land. In the case of the household with the conflict over the housing plot, they resolved it on their own by moving the house to a different location in the village. Finally, for the case of the household that had the problem with the environmental agency over their cattle, they did not consider that it was resolved. They had to remove the cattle, but they still considered that they had lost their right. They did not pursue it with any authority.

Although Twi had few cases of individual conflicts, the main response from this locality came in the way that they organized collectively to defend their right to the land in the whole territory of WAMAKLISCINASTA. To discuss the auto-saneamiento mobilization, I will refer to Twi as part of the larger community of Auka. As mentioned earlier, Auka's agricultural areas were not directly affected by the advancement of the colonization front in the Wangki River. However, people in the entire territory of WAMAKLISCINASTA had been particularly concerned about the enclosure of forest reserves since more colonists arrived around 2010. In 2014, there was a specific grievance by the community of Yulu, which was directly affected by the enclosures. In this case, a group of young men was threatened by Ladino colonists when they were deep in the forest cutting a tree to carve a canoe. The colonists told them that they were on their private property. This event seemed to have indicated to WAMAKLISCINASTA's leaders that a limit has been reached.

The auto-saneamiento mobilization came into being through a series of events. In September 2014, there was a change in the presidency of the territorial council. The new president was elected with the mandate to prioritize saneamiento. The problem of the enclosures was discussed again in the course of a workshop organized by UNDP when the villagers were discussing the Lifeway Plan for the territorial council. The UNDP project was able to provide the logistical support for the territorial leaders to conduct a census of the colonists who had settled on their territory. The census took two weeks, and about 80 people from the community acted as enumerators to collect the information. After the census took place, the territorial authorities issued eviction notices to the Ladino colonists. However, the colonists did not take them seriously. The territorial authorities showed the results of the census to the government authorities in January 2015. According to one of the leaders, they showed the results to the national government in Tegucigalpa and the military authorities in the department in an effort to get their attention to do something about saneamiento. This same leader also interpreted these actions as giving previous notice to the authorities that if they did not do something, then the people themselves would have to take matters into their own hands.

Tensions continued to rise, and the government failed to respond to the community. The communities had another opportunity to discuss the matter in the course of an ecclesiastical conference organized by the Moravian Church in their territory. The conference involved four days of prayer. According to one leader, they made the final plans for the auto-saneamiento during the conference. As he put it, “we put it on God’s hands, and we asked Him to bless us.”

The auto-saneamiento took place on March 12, 2015. The villagers organized two brigades, each composed of about 100 volunteers. The objective was to visit each of the homesteads of the Ladino colonists to carry out the evictions. One of the brigades went to the

colonization area near Yulu (Kruta River) and the other to the colonization area near Corinto (Wangki River). The brigade that went to Yulu was able to visit 9 of the 12 homesteads. They could not go to the rest because it became dark. When they arrived, the adult men were out, and so they mostly encountered women, children, and elderly men. They took 27 people as hostages. The brigade that went to Corinto tried to do something similar. They put up a checkpoint on the road next to the Wangki River. They captured two Ladinos, but the military heard about the checkpoint and arrived on the scene. The brigade had to release the hostages and disbanded. As a result, they could not complete the evictions of the 19 homesteads identified in this area. The brigade and the military unit did not engage in an armed confrontation. However, one of the main points of contention was that the military wanted the members of the brigade to disarm, and the Miskitu refused.

The events on March 12 caused great controversy. The leaders of WAMAKLISCINASTA followed up two days later with an official communication that clarified the position behind the auto-saneamiento. They described events as following the mandate of the Council of Elders in the territory who “informed the community leaders, after extensive reflection, to take actions of auto-saneamiento” after the government authorities had failed to respond to their complaints (WAMAKLISCINASTA, 2015, p. 1). The purpose was to gain the government’s attention:

[T]he actions we have taken are based on the law and our only interest is to ensure the welfare of our people, our natural resources, so we are urgently requesting the President of the Republic to send a high-level commission to provide a solution to this problem because we do not trust the authorities of the Department (WAMAKLISCINASTA, 2015, p. 2).

Therefore, the territorial authorities were conveying that the auto-saneamiento had not been a mob but rather the result of a deliberate effort to defend their property rights. The Honduran

press, however, reported the events very differently. The national newspaper *El Herald* presented it as a “presumed invasion of heavily armed Nicaraguan citizens” that sacked, burned houses, and kidnapped people (Redacción, 2015). Their main source for the news’ article was Puerto Lempira’s mayor, Eduardo Sinclair Chow, who reported the destruction of property and cattle theft from his property. WAMAKLISCINASTA’s leaders refuted the claims that Nicaraguan Miskitu had participated in the movement or that any cattle had been stolen.

The government sent a commission on March 20 to negotiate the release of the hostages. The hostages had been taken to the Baptist Church in Auka, where they stayed for 18 days while negotiations were carried out. The military surrounded the church compound, but they did not enter to take them by force, which indicates that the government was also trying to prevent the situation from escalating. The United Nations accompanied the government and WAMAKLISCINASTA during the negotiations. An agreement was reached in which the government committed to investigate and sanction the environmental crimes and property violations of the colonists and conduct the saneamiento in exchange for the release of the hostages. The parties also agreed to invite the United Nations’ Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous peoples, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, to monitor the situation.

The Special Rapporteur conducted her visit in November 2015, after which she validated the grievances made by WAMAKLISCINASTA’s leaders:

Owing to the outsiders’ ranching or drug trafficking activities, the Miskito lands have been deforested and members of the community can no longer reach traditional agricultural or hunting lands. This has given rise to food insecurity and health problems and death threats have been directed at community leaders (United Nations, 2016, p. 9).

The Special Rapporteur also noted that some of the settlers had left the area and that the government had conducted some preliminary investigations. The report also noted that the Public

Prosecutor had decided to prosecute the colonists and issued arrest warrants and eviction orders against them. However, WAMAKLISCINASTA's leaders complained that no actions had been taken following the original agreement, apart from her visit. Although some colonists left the area after the auto-saneamiento, some decided to stay, and six more families arrived since the incident.

The auto-saneamiento mobilization may not have resulted in the total eviction of Ladino colonists, but it helped to organize action against the encroachments. The members of WAMAKLISCINASTA organized vigilance committees in each of the communities to patrol the areas. I interviewed one of the members of the vigilance community who lived in Twi. He mentioned that they monitor the entrance of colonists as well as environmental destruction in the form of deforestation and fires. In Auka, they started with 19 volunteers, but more people joined. In particular, young men were eager to offer support. However, he complained that the position required to do rounds of three to five days, which was difficult to do without any budget to provide meals and supplies to the volunteers. When the vigilance committee started, they had the intention of carrying it out round every fifteen days. However, when I interviewed in November 2018, he mentioned that they were occurring less frequently.

The government continued to address WAMAKLISCINASTA's concerns as part of the process of saneamiento that should eventually take place all over Moskitia. Therefore, no special actions were taken to honor the agreement with the territory. In fact, the president of the territorial council faced legal action for the event. The Public Prosecutor also decided to press charges against him for aggravated kidnapping. The charges were made in 2015, but the police did not act on them until November 2019. Meanwhile, the territorial leader was able to continue working as a nurse in the Departmental Office of Health. It seemed that the deliberate order to

proceed with his arrest was connected to events that occurred in 2019 that pinned MASTA against the government, which are described in chapter 8. The charges and the delay in ordering the capture showed how the government used the justice system to criminalize social protest rather than advance the goals of saneamiento.

5.5 THE PROSPECTS FOR SANEAMIENTO

The concept of moral economy refers to the norms and values that guide individual and collective behavior. Moral economies are based on practices aimed at maintaining a proper order of things. The regime of inter-communal property titles reflected MASTA's efforts to defend the moral economy of the Miskitu: the right to continue reproducing the traditional land tenure system. However, I have argued that Ladino migrations resulted in variations to this moral economy across Moskitia. Awala had experienced the longest contact with Ladino migration, and in this location, the population already perceived enclosure dynamics as being driven by relatives and neighbors. Kabu had experienced less Ladino migration compared to other areas that were part of the territorial council. Although they identified some dynamics of internal enclosure, they were more likely to identify Ladino colonists as the source of the conflict, which party responded to the situation that had already been experienced in other areas of the territorial council. The population in Twi maintained a version of moral economy that was more directly aligned with the traditional land tenure system and identified the Ladino colonists as the sole agents of land conflicts.

The analysis based on these narratives suggested three outcomes for the responses to land enclosures in these three localities. In Awala, the internal enclosure dynamics and availability of the territorial authority led the population to seek out mediation. In Kabu, the internal and external enclosure dynamics and the relative absence of the territorial authority led the

population to acquiescence to conflicts. In Twi, the external enclosure dynamics and the social expectations on the territorial authority led the population to protest the conflict.

Based on this analysis, I suggest that a future process of saneamiento will not only face the external challenge of securing the protection of the Honduran government but also the internal challenge of organizing community participation. Community participation is essential to the success and legitimacy of any future process of saneamiento. The experience with land titling suggests that criteria for saneamiento prepared by the commission will likely simplify land tenure relations in the villages (Bryan, 2011; Wainwright & Bryan, 2009) and perpetuate an essentialist understanding of identity (Mollett, 2013). The macro narrative will present the conflicts occurring between Ladinos and colonists, but the reality on the ground will be more complicated. The higher the degree of community participation, the better the chance that local knowledge will be used to adapt any externally-imposed criteria to address land conflicts in their communities.

A particular challenge for internal collaboration arises from the dialectical relationship between enclosures and moral economy. Those places where the process of enclosure has been more gradual have begun to change the Miskitu moral economy by installing notions of private property. In contrast, those places where the process of enclosure has been more recent have been able to maintain more elements of the traditional Miskitu moral economy. MASTA's leadership uses the auto-saneamiento in WAMAKLISCINASTA as a symbol of Miskitu resistance, but this kind of collective action was only made possible by the particular conditions of enclosures and moral economy in this locality.

The dialectic between enclosures and moral economy suggests that the conditions for internal collaboration will be less favorable in places that have experienced the most variation in

the Miskitu moral economy. This is not reason enough for saneamiento to fail in these areas, but the chances of success are higher if these differences are accounted. For example, people in BAKINASTA express a strong desire to demarcate boundaries between villages to control this process of internal enclosures. MASTA has opposed any kind of internal boundaries out of concern that it will change the dynamics of the traditional land tenure system where villages share common areas. But in BAKINASTA the land tenure system has already changed. Recognizing these changes might give the authorities and the population a better chance to adapt a saneamiento strategy that adapts to their needs. In the case of Rayaka, the low trust that people seem to place on the traditional authorities to resolve land conflicts suggests that more efforts are needed to improve the fundamental sense of what it means to belong to the territorial council.

CHAPTER 6: AUTHORITY

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In four decades, MASTA had undergone a transition from a network of Miskitu professionals to the coordinators of the inter-communal property regime. MASTA's claim to authority was constituted through this regime, which was assembled to seek recognition from the Honduran state. This new regime, however, could only function if MASTA could also exercise its authority inside Miskitu communities. For this task, the community and territorial councils, as the first and second tier of MASTA's structure, were the key sites for the exercise of authority. However, this authority was perceived differently in different places. The following exchange will exemplify the tension in exercising this authority.

In November 2017, I was invited to participate in a workshop in one of the territorial councils I had selected for in-depth research. The objective of the two-day workshop was to discuss strategies for conflict management as part of a program sponsored by UNDP to improve territorial governance. I met the participants at the training site on a Friday afternoon. Although we were all gathered, the facilitator sent us home because we could not start without the president of the territorial council. The next day, the president arrived one hour late. Only six of the ten participants that had shown up the day before returned. The president thanked them for their presence. "Saturday is the day to cut firewood, to go out and hunt armadillo," the president said. "So being here shows a commitment to your people." He complained about the lack of interest shown by those who missed the event. "This is what always happens; people ask to participate, but they don't keep their promise," he mentioned with a sigh.

One of the most active participants in the workshop was Douglas, a sixty-year-old man with grey hair and a wrinkled face, who looked very much the part of a community elder. He had taken a serious interest in the topic of conflict mediation. The second most active participant was Pablo, a thirty-year-old man who worked as the territorial council's technical advisor. After working for NGOs in Tegucigalpa for a couple of years, he had returned to his hometown. His position with the territorial council was *ad honorem*, but he made a living by consulting for NGOs that supported the territorial council. He also made some extra income by receiving stipends for participation in training events such as this one. The other participants included two men and two women. The female participants talked little during the workshop. At one point, the president pulled the two women out of the meeting to help serve lunch, a responsibility that was not shared by the male participants.

After discussing the types of conflicts in Miskitu communities, Douglas and Pablo, the oldest and youngest participants, engaged in a lively conversation about the traditional structures for conflict resolution in the communities. Pablo proposed that the objective should be to recover the ancestral figure of the *cuatmas* as the authority in Miskitu villages to replace the *alcalde auxiliar* [deputy mayor] (hereafter "auxiliar"). His position was influenced by his recent participation in the preparation of the territorial council's Lifeway Plan, a planning instrument that aimed to promote grassroots development in the territory. This document identified the *cuatmas* as one of the organic leaders.

Douglas, the elder of the group, was not entirely clear on what Pablo, one of the youngest, was proposing. Douglas argued that they already had an auxiliar in every village. It took me a while to realize that part of the controversy was that many Miskitu individuals, like

Douglas, used the term *cuatmas* to refer to the *auxiliar*. Therefore, it was reasonable that Douglas would be confused by Pablo's proposition to replace the *auxiliar* for the *cuatmas*.

The president of the territorial council intervened once again to explain Pablo's point:

Auxiliares and patronatos are not what we are looking for in the [Indigenous] territory. They are part of the government structure. We want to work with the *cuatmas* and the communal council, the Indigenous equivalents. A *cuatma* should have no salary, no [financial] incentive. They have to do it for their love for the people (Fieldnotes, 2018).

With this statement, the president remarked that the authorities linked to the territorial councils should behave differently from those in government. His proposal was to reinstate the *cuatmas* as a figure of authority to replace the *auxiliar*. The main function of the *auxiliar* was to address minor offenses in the villages, such as cases of theft and public disorder. Although the auxiliaries did not receive a salary, some of them charged fines to compensate for their time and effort. The president of the territorial council did not agree with this practice, which he referred to as "financial incentives." He had the vision that the *cuatmas* should reinstate the traditional forms of punishment, which included clearing the grounds of common areas and forcing the thief to undertake a walk of shame around the community wearing the stolen goods.

I suggest that this conversation over *cuatmas* and auxiliaries pointed to how confusing it was to define the jurisdictional boundaries between the territorial councils and state agencies in the inter-communal property regime. The inter-communal property titles granted the right to ownership of the land in fee simple, but it did not grant any other jurisdictional attributions. However, MASTA and the territorial councils had been trying to use the property titles as the basis for recreating self-government. Reinstating the figure of the *cuatmas* was one example of this political project. Apart from the lack of clarity in the legal framework, the other challenge in defining the jurisdictional boundaries of the territorial councils involved convincing the

population about their legitimacy as instances of self-government. People knew that MASTA and the territorial councils had fought to obtain the property titles, but this awareness did not necessarily translate to their acceptance as authorities with more expansive jurisdictional attributes.

The jurisdictional ambivalence created by the inter-communal property titles is central to an understanding of Indigenous state formation. According to Christian Lund (2016), rights do not only flow from an authority but rather authority is also formed through the recognition of rights. These insights have been keen to an understanding of how property contributes to the constitution of the state. I suggest that this same analytical lens should be used to examine how the inter-communal property regime attempts to constitute new authorities based on claims over ancestral ownership. Since indigeneity is a relational claim that is formed in the context of settler colonialism (Radcliffe, 2017), it becomes important to understand the claims made on the basis of ancestral ownership from the situatedness of a particular locality. For this reason, I turn to a phenomenological analysis of authority to “investigate the configuration of recognition that arises when competing institutions structure interaction according to cultural and legal norms” (Lund, 2016, p. 1218)

For the analysis, I combine interviews, participant observation, and a household questionnaire to understand the process through which Miskitu people perceive the formation of authority. The analysis is grounded in the three localities selected for the study, but the interviews with leaders and participant observation bring a broader perspective of how different actors are thinking about this process. The chapter starts by describing the different forms of authority that existed in the villages and explaining how territorial and community councils

operate. Next, I will use primary data to analyze the three dimensions that informed views on authority. These dimensions are participation, aspirations, and attributes of leadership.

6.2 FORMS OF AUTHORITY

Forms of authority in Miskitu villages fall into a continuum ranging from those that are informal and organic to the villages to those that are more formal and part of the state structure. One of the key arguments in chapter 3 is that the titling of the territorial council created a new structure of authority in Moskitia. Before discussing the territorial councils, I will review some of the forms of authority that preceded MASTA and the territorial councils.

Elders are considered the traditional authorities in these organic structures. As discussed in chapter 4, *kiamkas* have played a central role in the organization of Miskitu sociality. The patriarchs associated with these *kiamkas* performed their role as elders. But there was no formal relationship or structure. Kinship relations create strong bonds among members but without constituting formal clan structures. Community life operated under norms of solidarity and reciprocity reproduced in the traditional land tenure system. When more Miskitu started to move to villages to access government services, family groups continued to live close to one another, constituting neighborhoods. Conzemius (1932) noted that the Miskitu showed deference to their elders but noted that the Miskitu did not have a supreme chief in the village. Conzemius described Miskitu political organization at the village level as egalitarian. During oral histories, I also heard accounts of how people went to the elders to ask them for advice. According to one informant, the elders did not impart punishment but rather gave counsel to the person and their parents so they could make better decisions (M. Allen, Interview, 2 June 2018).

On the formal end of the spectrum, the more visible forms of local authorities in the villages were the municipal government and the military. As described in chapter 2, municipal

functions were centralized in Iriona until 1957. During that period, most encounters that the Miskitu had with the agents of the Honduran state were most likely military personnel that maintained law and order. Various accounts describe that the Miskitu were not confrontational with the military authorities but also tried to avoid them as much as possible (Aguilar Paz, 1952; Conzemius, 1932). In particular, the military was known for forcing Miskitu men to accompany them on trips so they could serve as a workforce for the paddling of canoes (Barahona, 2009). With the creation of the department of Gracias a Dios, the municipalities of Brus Laguna and Puerto Lempira were created, and the Miskitu population started to experience another phase of integration with the Honduran state. The creation of four new municipalities in 1996 put the state authorities and villagers even in closer contact. The mayor became increasingly recognized as the government authority in the locality. It was a position that ambitious men and women in the community could aspire to serve in formal leadership roles.

i) Alcalde Auxiliar

One unique form of authority that blended features of organic and formal leadership was that of the *cuatmas*, later known as the *alcalde auxiliar*. As mentioned in chapter 2, the position of the *cuatmas* came directly from the Mosquito King's quartermaster. The *cuatmas* were in charge of enforcing government orders and administering justice. The Honduran government agreed to ratify these local positions of authority to maintain law and order in the villages.

In his ethnography of the Honduran Moskitia, Conzemius describes the *cuatmas* as a legacy of the Mosquito Kingdom. It is unclear how much he was actually able to observe the practices of the *cuatmas* during his visit because most of the accounts that he provides about them are based on the writings of Charles N. Bell, a British man who grew up in the court of the Mosquito King. According to Bell (1899/1989), the *cuatmas* accompanied the Mosquito King

during his annual visitations to the villages, during which they taught lessons to the young and executed sentences. For these lessons, the *cuatmas* used a combination of corporal punishment, which involved flogging the backs of young men and women that were protected with bark cloth to minimize the damage and reciting sermons about morality. The *cuatmas* also carried out sentences for offenses, which included fines, flogging, and death by hanging. The figure of the *cuatmas* eventually transitioned to that of the *auxiliar*. One of the key changes was that the authority of the *cuatmas* became tied to the Honduran state and not to the Mosquito King. The other change is that the *cuatmas* was no longer an extra-local authority but resided in and was a member of the community.

One of the oral histories with the elder Mendiola Allen in the Rayaka sector was instructive in situating this transition from *cuatmas* to *auxiliar*. According to the informant, local leaders started to be appointed as auxiliaries around the 1940s when a military commandant from Trujillo came to the region to make the appointments (M. Allen, Interview, 2 June 2018). From that moment on, she remembers that every village started to get an *auxiliar*. These auxiliaries served as a liaison with the military and were coordinated by another civilian who performed the role of *cabo cantonal* [cantonal corporal]. Nowadays, the *cabo cantonal* continues to report the activities of the auxiliaries to the municipality, the military commander, and the police chief.

The *auxiliar* acted as the main authority figure in the village. Although they represented the authority of the Honduran state, they were also embedded in the organic structures of the communities. For example, Ms. Allen described one of the auxiliaries she remembered for her childhood in this way:

Here in the village, there was a man named Celeron Castillo. His father was Nicaraguan, but he lived with my aunt. He was an *auxiliar*. I watched what that man did when there was a problem in the community. He would always arrive by himself,

enter the house, talk to one person, and then the other. They talked peacefully and settled things, without any fighting. But now it is a different situation. (M. Allen, Interview, 2 June 2018).

The informant described the role of the auxiliar as one of a mediator with high status and was respected by both parties. This view was confirmed by Andres Angulo, another elder I interviewed in the Wampusirpi area. Mr. Angulo had worked as an auxiliar for many years himself, and this is he described the role:

I worked very calmly with the people. I never had any problems with them, because people rather loved me, because I didn't go around telling them 'do this or do that'. When we were going to do a job, I would tell them, 'such and such a day we are going to do this,' and they would all go calmly (A. Angulo, Interview, 19 March 2018).

The jobs that Mr. Angulo refers to included work to keep the community clean. It was up to the auxiliar to organize brigades to clear the grounds of the common areas in the community, like the streets, the landing strip, the pier, the cemetery, etc. These clearing brigades served an important function to keep vermin and other poisonous animals under control as well as maintain a proper sense of decorum in the village.

Mr. Angulo also mentioned that the auxiliar played an important role in mitigating the violence of the military against the local population. He remembers one man by the name of Regino Gonzalez, who was an auxiliar in the 1960s. Gonzalez promptly followed the instructions that the military commander in Brus Laguna gave him. For example, he would have dugout canoes ready for the military rounds, etc. Mr. Angulo said that one day he asked him why he was so compliant, and he answered that he did it so the military would not “*fregar*” [hurt] the community. For example, the military could physically punish the men in the community if their orders were not carried out. In other words, Gonzalez’s diligence served to keep the community safe from potential abuses.

Although the *cuatmas* or *auxiliar* had been a central authority figure in Miskitu villages, they appeared to be losing status. This erosion in status could be part of the reason why some members of BAKINASTA wanted to recuperate the figure of the *cuatmas*. This erosion in the authority of the *auxiliar* appeared to be linked to two factors. First, interference of political parties was possible in the selection of *auxiliars*, which might alienate some villagers. The *auxiliars* were elected in a community assembly, and their period coincided with the administration of the mayor. Second, and probably more pressing, is the fact that crime and violence in some of the communities have increased over the last decade. In particular, the Wampusirpi and coastal area experienced high levels of criminal activity during the rise of drug trafficking activity in the region, which coincided with the periods of President Zelaya (2006-2009) and President Lobo (2010-2014). Although most of the violence was among criminal organizations, some of it spilled to the communities and contributed to a feeling of impunity. Reflecting on these changes, Ms. Allen shared about a recent encounter that she had with a neighbor who, despite having a problem with another person in the village, decided against seeking the *auxiliar*'s assistance:

Nowadays, people no longer respect the auxiliaries. I told a neighbor who had a problem, 'look, what they did to you is not right, I think you have to say something to the *auxiliar* so he can help you.' But you know what he said to me? 'Oh, the auxiliaries are no longer useful.' In past years, the *auxiliar* counseled, people listened, and conflicts were settled peacefully. But now, son, the *auxiliars* are rather afraid themselves. They get frightened because people start fighting in front of them. Our times are sad; only God can help us. (M. Allen, Interview, 2 June 2018).

Victoriano Zelaya, a man that has served as *auxiliar* in Ibans for many years, agrees that it is not what it used to be, and he blames the rise of drug addiction among the youth.

Many of the auxiliaries have already lost respect because of the increasing number of drug addicts in the villages. Many young people have become drug addicts, and they no respect their elders. They talk back at us, and when they are drunk, they make fun

of us. But we are the leaders, and we have to set an example. (V. Zelaya, Interview, 7 June 2018).

This rise in drug addiction is itself linked to the drug trade, with drug traffickers paying in kind or making drugs like crystal meth widely available. Even in the face of this adversity, leaders like Victoriano are trying hard to continue with the functions.

ii) The Patronato

The other form of authority that also represented a mix of organic and state attributes is that of the patronato. A patronato is a neighborhood association created with the purpose of serving as a liaison between the community and the municipal government. Patronatos varied in their level of influence in community affairs. In general, the patronatos that were created to manage a single community investment project, like the construction of water taps, were short-lived and became inactive once the works were finished. The general perception among the broad range of leaders that I interviewed during my time in the field was that patronatos have not proven to be an effective form of community organization among the Miskitu. In contrast, the patronatos have been one of the main axes for the articulation of grassroots action among the Garifuna communities (Anderson, 2009; Brondo, 2013). According to the CCARC (2003) study, two factors also contributed to the loss of influence for patronatos in Moskitia. The first is that government programs began to channel financial assistance through the Indigenous federations in programs like Nuestras Raices. The second is that the creation of new municipalities displaced some of the functions that the patronatos had in the communities. However, during my interviews, I never got the sense that the patronatos had a strong presence in the villages I visited.

iii) The Territorial Councils

The history of MASTA's establishment and transformation is explained in chapter 3. In this chapter, I will concentrate more on the relationship between the territorial councils and the community councils, which are the two structures that operate at the local level. The transition from federation to territorial councils took place from 1998 to 2011. Before the titles could be issued to the territorial councils, each had to obtain legal personhood established the governance norms for the organization, including the 10-member board led by a president, three members of a transparency committee, and three members of a council of elders.¹²² The members of the board must be elected every two years based on the standard legal personhood that was used for all the territorial councils. The elections take place in general assemblies. This process has been controversial and has resulted in some of the most consequential dynamics for how grassroots democracy is sustained. The details of this process will be explored in chapter 7.

Each of the villages in the territorial council is supposed to be represented by a community council. These community councils have the same board structure as the territorial councils. Since my first research visit to Moskitia in 2015, I had heard that the leaders of the territorial councils had problems mobilizing the community councils. Each of the villages mentioned in the property title was supposed to have its own community council. However, not even the territorial council of KATAINASTA, the first to receive the inter-communal property title in 2011, had all of its community councils under operation by 2015.

One reason for the delay in the establishment of the community councils was the logistical challenge of organizing meetings in each village. Without the community councils,

¹²² The board is composed of a president, a vice-president, a secretary, a treasurer, a prosecutor, and five representatives.

however, the territorial council was literally disarticulated from its base. This disarticulation was a major problem for the organization of the general assembly to elect the new board of the territorial council. The schema required that each village had its own board for the community council to select the delegates that would participate in the general congress to elect the new board of the territorial council.

Apart from the legal personhood of the territorial councils, the *Bio-Cultural Protocol* is the other document that governs relations among the three levels that constitute MASTA. The protocol was published in 2012 and was prepared with the assistance of the International Union of Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The protocol establishes the procedure that any external actor must follow in order to comply with free, prior, and informed (FPIC) consent in the Miskitu territory. The protocol is one of the most significant efforts to regulate FPIC in Honduras. It was applied in 2013 to consult about the exploration of off-shore oil. The process was not without controversy, especially given the connection between the approval for oil exploration and the government's support for the titles (Galeana, 2020).

The Bio-Cultural Protocol asserts the sovereignty of the Miskitu people. In practice, it is applied more piecemeal under the Platform for Territorial Governance, as will be explained in chapter 8. The critical aspect to consider for this chapter is that the protocol itself is a deliberate effort to shape the development agenda for Moskitia. It is part of MASTA's desire for the territorial councils to be considered as jurisdictions that can decide upon the programs, projects, and other interventions that occur in their territories. Moving into this arena represents embracing a broader agenda for the territorial councils, one that people in the communities might not yet be ready to accept.

iv) Other Community Groups

The other three categories of civil society organizations that represent other forms of informal authority include church-based groups, advocacy organizations, and social enterprises. I will briefly describe each of these organizations.

Church-based groups are the most common form of participation. The Miskitu have traditionally belonged to the Moravian Church, but the number of Catholics and Evangelical Christians began to rise around the mid-twentieth century as a result of increased migration and missionary activity. The Moravian Church, however, provides a strong cultural template for the social organization, even for the Miskitu who subscribe to other denominations. The Moravians organize groups for pastoral care and community service. Members of the congregation assume different leadership roles in formal church functions (committee, Sunday school, greeter, etc.). Churches depend on the ecclesiastical authority based in Puerto Lempira. Most congregations have affinity groups, such as women's or youth groups, that serve the dual purpose of cultivating devotional practices and socialization. It is common for these groups to organize cash-earning activities like baking bread or catering events to earn extra income or fund group activities like trips to retreats. Besides these formal leadership positions and affinity groups, members of the congregation are expected to volunteer their time by participating in different service committees. The two most important committees are dedicated to tending the church agricultural fields that feed the pastor and his family and to the repair and maintenance of the church's infrastructure.

Advocacy organizations provided another important medium for group socialization. The two most important organizations in Moskitia in this category were the Organization of Miskitu Women of the Atlantic Coast (*Asociación de Mujeres Miskitas*, MIMAT) and the Association of

Honduran Miskitu Disabled Divers (*Asociación de Miskitos Hondureños Buzos Lisiados*, AMHBLIN). These organizations had their legal personhood and maintained membership through different villages in Moskitia. Participation in MIMAT was mainly through productive projects and training that had women as the main beneficiaries. AMHBLIN protected the labor rights of disabled divers. They interposed their case against the negligence of the Honduran state at the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights. One of their main functions was to oversee the implementation of the recommendations issued by the commission. They also managed other social assistance that was channeled through government projects.

The third category of community groups is constituted by social enterprises. It was common for government agencies and NGOs to propose the formation of cooperatives, producers' associations, or producers' groups to promote income generation activities. Some of the larger social enterprises had their legal personhood established, but the majority operated more informally. Indigenous leaders and aid workers concluded that many of these social enterprises only worked while an external partner injected funds, but most failed to graduate into financial sustainability.

6.3 ASSESSING AUTHORITIES

i) Participation

(1) Context

When I started visiting the Wampusirpi area in 2017, the territorial authorities were under pressure from donors and the government to conduct new elections for the board of the territorial council of BAKINASTA. One of the donors provided them the funding to travel to each village to elect the board for the community council, a process referred to as *restructuración*

[restructuration]. The donor funds would at least take care of some of the challenges with the logistics, but it did not guarantee the participation of the population.

A conversation I had with one of the elders in Awala provided a glimpse of the myriad reasons why people might not participate in the activities organized by the territorial council. Don Gerardo was ninety years old and the oldest resident of Awala. Yet, he had never participated in any of the meetings organized by MASTA or BAKINASTA. When I asked him the reason he simply replied, “because I have not been invited” (Fieldnotes 2018). I probed him as to why he would feel that he could only participate if he was formally invited. He responded, “as I say, when you are invited to participate in projects or meetings, you have to participate, but when you are not invited, you don't go either” (Fieldnotes 2018).

Don Gerardo’s emphasis on receiving an invitation to attend a meeting made me wonder about how people in the villages participated in different types of community groups and how this participation related to their views on the territorial council. In the next section, I will analyze the results of the household questionnaire conducted in Awala, Kabu, and Twi to explore the different dynamics surrounding participation. I asked respondents about their participation in various community groups and their involvement in the territorial councils. However, some of the issues involving these broader experiences with participation in various community groups also informed responses shaping community aspirations and values around leadership.

(2) Questionnaire Responses

Table 1 shows the different civil society organizations that respondents in the villages of Awala, Twi, and Kabu participated in. These groups included patronatos, church-based groups, cooperatives, producers’ associations, the parent-teacher association, sports clubs, and dance troops. Membership in these groups was not mutually exclusive. The patronatos, church-based

groups, cooperatives, and producers' associations were already discussed above. The other groups included the parent-teacher association, in which parents were expected to volunteer time for the maintenance of school infrastructure and for preparing meals for students. Young people were likely to participate in soccer clubs or dance troops that compete locally and regionally. Political parties were another form of association with significant influence on the organizational landscape. In the questionnaire, however, only one person identified formal participation in her party's organizational committee.

Table 6.1: Participation in civil society organizations among survey respondents

Participation in an Organized Group	Awala	Twi	Kabu	Total
Church-based Group	5	10	10	25
Neighborhood Association	2	1	3	6
Cooperative/Producers' Association or Group	0	2	3	5
Sports Club	3	0	0	3
Parent-Teacher Association	2	0	0	2
Advocacy Group	0	0	2	2
Dance Troop	0	0	1	1
Political Party Committee	0	0	1	1
None	11	10	3	24
Total	23	23	23	69

I asked respondents if anyone in the household participated in the affairs of the territorial council or the communal council. I expected this number to be low, considering that territorial councils and community councils hosted few events in general. Table 2 shows the results in each village. Participation is indeed low in Awala and Kabu, but not in Twi. I suggest that this difference had to do mainly with the way that the respondents interpreted participation in the territorial council. In Awala, three households mentioned that they participated in BAKINASTA because one of the family members had been recently elected to the board of the communal council. Instead, respondents in Twi mentioned participation but without associating it with

occupying a formal role in the board. The one respondent in Kabu who mentioned participation in the territorial council said that his son was involved in Rayaka's youth committee.

Table 6.2: Participation in the territorial council by community

Participation in Territorial Council	Awala	Twî	Kabu	Total
Yes	3	8	1	12
No	20	15	22	57
Total	23	23	23	69

Two out of three respondents in Awala participated in both the territorial council and a community group. In one of these households, a twenty-two-year-old woman had been recently elected as the secretary for the community council (HH#107, Interview, 11 September 2018). She and her mother, who also lived in the same household, also had positions as promoters for a project coordinated by MIMAT. The two of them were single mothers. In the other household in Awala, the husband, a fifty-six-year-old man, had been elected as one of the six spokespersons for the community council (HH#109, Interview, 11 September 2018). In the same household, the seventeen-year-old daughter was an active participant in a church-based group. In Kabu, there is the inverse situation. In one household, the parents participated in a church-based group and the nineteen-year-old son participated with the territorial council in youth-related activities. Therefore, these results suggested that the association was driven by members of the same household that participated in a church-based group. Only in the case of one family, we observed that the same person was holding two roles.

I also asked respondents about their level of awareness about the activities or agenda of the territorial council. I used inductive coding to classify their responses according to a typology that included three levels of awareness: sufficient, medium, and low. Table 4 shows the results for this classification. The results show that respondents in Twî were more aware of the activities

of the territorial council compared to Awala and Kabu. In Twi, eighteen out of twenty-three respondents mentioned that they were aware of what the territorial council was doing. The eight people who said participated in the territorial council confirmed that they were sufficiently aware. On top of this, ten of the fifteen people who did not regularly participate in the territorial council claimed to have sufficient levels of awareness. This suggests that the population in Twi felt assured that they knew about the activities of the territorial council even if they did not participate directly.

Table 6.3: Territorial council awareness by community

Awareness of Territorial Council Activities	Awala	Twi	Kabu	Total
Sufficient	6	18	1	25
Medium	5	4	11	20
Low	12	1	11	24
Total	23	23	23	69

In Twi, the satisfaction with the level of awareness was linked to two specific priorities that the territorial council had pursued. The first priority was the auto-saneamiento mobilization that occurred in 2015. The second priority was the efforts made to protect the right of the community members to sell the softwood lumber to villages outside WAMAKLISCINASTA. The only exception was one man who claimed to have little time for meetings because he spent most of his time working in his agricultural plot, far away from the community (HH #203, Interview, 16 November 2018).

In Awala, only six of twenty-three respondents mentioned that they had sufficient knowledge about the activities of the territorial council. Those six derived their knowledge from their participation in one of three events organized by MASTA and BAKINASTA that had occurred within the last month from the interview. These events included MASTA's general

Congress, the restructuration of the community council in Awala, and BAKINASTA's general assembly. Considering this recent activity, it was surprising that more people did not report higher levels of knowledge about the territorial council. But even participation in one of these events did not guarantee satisfaction with the level of awareness. For example, one of the respondents mentioned that she had participated in the meeting to form the community council but that she did not understand what it was supposed to accomplish (HH #103, Interview, 10 September 2018).

Next, I review some of the arguments given by those respondents who said that they had medium information about the territorial council. Two respondents mentioned that they used to participate in meetings and receive some information, but they stopped going because they lost their trust in BAKINASTA's president. One respondent mentioned, "I know about the territorial council's efforts to obtain the title, but I don't think that the organization is doing well because the president is never in the office when people go looking for him" (HH #117, Interview, 12 September 2018). The other respondent also expressed mistrust, "the territorial council is not doing anything! They only come to collect their signatures and then leave" (HH #112, Interview, 12 September 2018). This last respondent was referring to the common practice of filling an attendance list in meetings with the signatures and official identity numbers of participants. Leaders have to fill up these lists to justify expenditures when the activities are financed by an NGO or government agency. However, many people believe that the leaders use their signatures to request funds on their behalf and enrich themselves.

Next, I review the responses of those in Awala who said that they had low awareness about the activities of the territorial council. One respondent mentioned that his mistrust of the leaders was the main reason why he felt that he was not sufficiently informed:

We know that many resources arrived in the community, but they never reach us. [The territorial authorities] receive assistance and money for the Miskitu people, but those resources never reach the communities. The leaders need to be more humanitarian (HH #113, Interview, 12 September 2018).

This last respondent used the term “humanitarian” in reference to the transparency and accountability that leaders must show to their constituencies. Another reason for the lack of trust was a perceived lack of transparency when invitations were issued. For example, one respondent mentioned that, like Don Gerardo, he had not attended any meetings because he had not been invited:

The territorial council goes around inviting people, but I’ve never been invited; I never go to a meeting that I’m not personally invited to attend. I don’t know what they do exactly, but I suspect it is politics! (HH #105, Interview, 10 September 2018).

This respondent was using the term “politics” in reference to political parties. BAKINASTA’s current president was an active member of the National Party, and he himself had been acting mayor in the early 2000s. For these villagers, it seemed difficult not to consider these multiple identities when they were assessing their leaders.

Other respondents expressed more mundane reasons for not being sufficiently informed. Some said that they simply did not have the time to participate in meetings. It was no coincidence that individuals with more stable jobs, like teachers, could afford the time to participate in organizations like MASTA. Most farmers spent long hours in the field, particularly during the busy periods of the agricultural calendar. For example, one respondent mentioned the inconvenience of attending meetings:

I don’t know what is happening with the territorial council. It’s too far to go to Wampusirpi for a meeting. The president once said that he was going to come here to speak with us while we worked together harvesting beans, but I haven’t heard anything yet (HH #108, Interview, 11 September 2018).

Wampusirpi was only a 20-minute walk from Awala, but even then, the respondent considered it inconvenient. Instead, he suggested a preference for sharing information while working. This response fits the overall pattern of people sharing information while engaging in the practice of *mano vuelta* (exchange of hands), in which family and neighbors switch days to help each other with the arduous tasks of clearing the fields and planting seed.

Kabu was the village that reported the lowest levels of awareness about the activities of the territorial council. Everybody knew who Rayaka's president was, but they conveyed low awareness about the territorial council's agenda. The only respondent who claimed to be sufficiently informed credited his awareness to the fact that his cousin collaborated closely with the territorial council. His cousin was always telling him about the latest with the territorial council and inviting him to meetings (HH #314, Interview, 12 December 2018). The other participants who claimed to have some awareness about the activities of the territorial council mentioned Rayaka's efforts to obtain the territorial title.

The fact that the territorial council had not conducted a meeting recently was mentioned as one of the reasons for not being sufficiently aware. The most recent general assembly for the territorial council took place in 2014, four years from the moment of the interview. Only one respondent mentioned participating in one meeting sponsored by the territorial council to discuss a project, which took place in 2016 (HH #316, Interview, 13 December 2018). One respondent mentioned that he participated in MASTA's general congress in 2018, a few months before the interview, but he still claimed to have low levels of awareness about the territorial council's agenda (HH #320, Interview, 13 December 2018).

The low frequency of meetings in Rayaka was disconcerting, considering that this was one of the areas in Moskitia where communities were in close proximity to each other. In other

territorial councils, leaders had to secure funds from government agencies and donors to pay for transportation costs to move people in trucks and boats to attend the meetings. In Rayaka's coastal fringe, villages were close enough that people could walk or ride a bicycle if a meeting were to take place outside the community. Therefore, the logistics to organize a meeting should have been less onerous.

The previous interviews with leaders had suggested that people had issues trusting the authorities of the territorial councils. In some of the answers to the level of awareness, we already observed how some respondents disassociated from the territorial council as a result of trust issues. For this reason, I also asked respondents directly about how much they trusted the territorial authorities. I used inductive coding to classify their responses according to a typology that included three levels of trust: high, medium, or low. Table 5 shows the results for this classification.

Table 6.4: Trust in territorial council

Trust in Territorial Council	Awala	Twi	Kabu	Total
High	7	20	4	31
Medium	4	3	5	12
Low	12	0	14	26
Total	23	23	23	69

In Awala, respondents who trusted the territorial council did so in recognition of the work that the territorial leaders had done to obtain the property titles. For example, one respondent commented, "if it were not for the territorial council, maybe we wouldn't even have our parcels anymore; colonists think twice before entering the community" (HH #101, Interview, 10 September 2018). Another respondent also mentioned pride in having their own authorities: "I trust the territorial council because they apply Miskitu law; we have our own president" (HH

#106, Interview, 10 September 2018). Likewise, another respondent mentioned that “we have to trust our authorities if we want to defend our rights” (HH #101, Interview, 10 September 2018), signaling the importance of remaining loyal to one’s own. Other respondents were sympathetic to the territorial council’s president but had trust issues. Two respondents believed that the president was not fully transparent and another two were disappointed at the lack of action against the colonists. For example, one respondent mentioned the following:

The president said that he was going to do something about the *terceros*, but nothing has been done yet. They have destroyed the forests. Poor Nacel. He doesn’t command the military; he doesn’t have the resources to do field visits. He can only amble around Wampusirpi going to meetings. At that pace, he will not be able to evict those people (HH #108, Interview, 11 September 2018).

In a similar response, another respondent was both critical and empathetic with the president of the territorial council:

The president has been in that post for nine years, and what has he done? Quite the opposite, he has negotiated with the *indios*. He cannot do anything by himself. Everybody has to come together (HH #107, Interview, 11 September 2018).

This respondent recognized that the president could not accomplish *saneamiento* by himself, but she was particularly worried that he might be getting too close to the Ladino colonists. The respondent recognized both the potential for cooption and the precarious position of the president.

In contrast to this response, other respondents in Awala were less likely to give their territorial authorities the benefit of the doubt. For example, one respondent was disappointed that the president did not come to aid them when they experienced a land conflict (HH #103, Interview, 10 September 2018). A few others complained that the president had not brought projects to the community or that if resources indeed had arrived, they never saw them. Several responses mentioned similar allegations of corruption as the main problem in the villages.

In Twi, most respondents expressed high trust in the territorial authorities. Most respondents expressed having outright support for their leaders. For one respondent, this trust was to be expected: “of course we trust the territorial council; it is us!” (HH #219, Interview, 23 November 2018). Another respondent added that he trusted the territorial leaders because they were working jointly with the government, “the two of them respect each other” (HH #204, Interview, 17 November 2018). Other respondents had also expressed that they wanted the territorial council to work together with the government. For example, one respondent mentioned the following:

The territorial council is working under the ancestral law, and the government is collaborating too. Although the territorial council still has much to do, the two of them are looking for ways to improve the community (HH #213, Interview, 21 November 2018).

This is an important statement because the community had mobilized against the colonists in the 2015 auto-saneamiento mobilization, bringing it into a confrontation with the government authorities. At least some members of the community were also valuing not only the belligerence of their leaders but also the ability for joint action. In fact, two respondents mentioned some wariness about the actions of the territorial council precisely on the grounds of how well they complied with Honduran law. One mentioned that “all rules should be based on those of the state” (HH #208, Interview, 20 November 2018) and another that “communities should respect both [customary and state] laws” (HH #214, Interview, 21 November 2018). In addition, one respondent complained that the authorities of the territorial council did not take into consideration the other communities in the territory, only Twi (HH #207, Interview, 20 November 2018). However, he admitted that this practice had changed, and the leaders had become more inclusive.

Respondents in Kabu expressed the lowest level of trust among the three communities. Among the few that fully trusted their authorities, the long trajectory of the leaders was mentioned. Kabu's territorial council is the one among the three that had experienced less turnover in leadership. Their trajectory was recognized in statements like the following: "I trust the leaders because they have always looked out for the people" (HH #313, Interview, 12 December 2018) or "Rayaka has always spoken for the poor and help the people" (HH #314, Interview, 12 December 2018). Other respondents were more selective about the reasons why they trusted the territorial council. For example, one respondent mentioned that he only trusted some of the leaders but not all of them (HH #302, Interview, 10 December 2018). Yet, another respondent seemed resigned to accept the territorial council because "one has to respect the authorities" (HH #322, Interview, 13 December 2018).

Most respondents in Kabu did not have a favorable opinion of the territorial council. Their answers could be divided into two main reasons for distrusting the territorial authorities. The first reason is that they did not see that the territorial authorities had done anything to help them. Some respondents mentioned a lack of action in general terms. For example, one respondent mentioned her dissatisfaction:

I don't believe them because I don't see them doing anything either. I don't trust them because there is no authority to do anything (HH #301, Interview, 10 December 2018).

Other respondents referred to specific instances in which the territorial council failed to assist them. For example, one respondent mentioned that they asked the territorial council for help when her mother had a land conflict, and they did not do anything about it (HH #307, Interview, 11 December 2018). The second reason for not trusting the authorities is believing that they had taken personal advantage of their position. Respondents mentioned the same arguments that I have heard many times over that leaders had pocketed the aid from abroad. Another respondent

referred derogatorily to the territorial council's president as a "thief" who was touring the U.S. "supposedly to help the people of the Moskitia, but he has brought nothing back" (HH #315, Interview, 12 December 2018). This respondent was referring to the international trips that the president had conducted during his tenure to participate in different fora to fight for territorial rights. Nonetheless, the international visibility exposed him to criticism inside the community.

(3) Discussion

Looking at the levels of participation, awareness, and trust in the territorial councils of the three villages, we can start to see a discernable pattern. Low participation in meetings is associated with low levels of trust, which makes respondents less aware of the activities of the territorial council, reinforcing the trust issues. There are also significant differences in the way that respondents frame participation in the territorial council in Awala and Kabu compared to Twi. In Awala and Kabu, respondents frame participation in the territorial council as a more formal affair. It has to involve an invitation to a meeting. People only viewed participation as performing some official role in the territorial or communal council.

Interestingly, the only individual in the whole sample who had both a formal role in a community council and one of the other community organizations was a young single mother. According to a leader of one of the largest women's groups in the Patuca area, single mothers are in some ways forced to be more entrepreneurial because they do not have a spouse to provide for them. Being a single woman herself, she shared this memory about her early start in a leadership position: "They insult you, and they call you names, but you have to keep on working." (Vice-Alcaldesa). For women with a spouse, participation in meetings can be tricky. They may attend, especially if the spouse is out in the field, but they rarely talk and do not hold leadership positions.

One notable difference to Awala and Kabu is that respondents in Twi seemed to conceive of participation in the territorial council in less formal ways. They did not have to have a formal role to say that they participated in the territorial council. The memory of the 2015 auto-saneamiento mobilization seemed to serve as a medium for reinforcing this feeling of collective action. Also, from spending time in the community, I learned that people regularly discussed community affairs in central locations, like the mango tree in Waylan's park. They have the tradition of blowing a seashell to call for the meeting, to which most households send a representative. Therefore, the villagers in Twi are part of strong informal networks that help to improve their participation in and perception of the territorial council.

The individual traits of the president in each of the territorial councils were also brought up as reasons for distrusting the territorial councils in Awala and Kabu. They were deemed to be absent from a location where they could be reached by the population. BAKINASTA had an office in Wampusirpi, but the president was often at his home village, where he tended a small shop. Rayaka had no office. The president lived in Tegucigalpa, where he also performed other high-level roles for the Indigenous movements. Ironically, Rayaka's president was one of the most well-connected and politically savvy leaders in MASTA, but people in the village seemed to resent the fact that he was often away. The president of WAMAKLISCINASTA did not live in the territory either. He stayed in Puerto Lempira due to a job he held with a government agency. Respondents in Twi, however, did not mention his extra-local residency as a problem affecting their participation, awareness, or trust in the territorial council because they trusted that he was working toward achieving saneamiento.

The emphasis on the president's conduct also points to the strong personification of the territorial council with its leader. In casual conversation, when people talk about the "territorial

council,” in most cases, they are actually referring to the president. The other members of the board are rarely mentioned. Only in Twi, people seemed to embrace a collective notion of the territorial council as being “us.” Instead, in Awala and Kabu, the territorial council is seen in individualist terms as “the president.” For this reason, criticisms of the leaders’ conduct directly informed their view of the territorial council as a political project. For example, the president’s involvement in a political party is a reason to distrust the territorial councils. In contrast, respondents in Twi did not mention the president. They talk about the community and the territorial council in more collective terms.

The area where respondents across the three villages do give credit to the territorial councils is in their efforts to secure the inter-communal property titles. However, the coupling of status and property titles is a double-edged sword for the leaders, as its maintenance depends on their ability to continue with the saneamiento agenda. For this reason, the leaders in Twi receive the credit and maintain their high status because of their support for saneamiento. Instead, the leaders in Awala and Kabu are criticized for not doing enough. Some respondents, however, did recognize that the leaders face serious challenges in promoting saneamiento. When I interviewed the leaders in Awala and Kabu, they also expressed a sense of responsibility for not promoting an incendiary speech around saneamiento that might result in more threats and violence against the population. For this reason, their strategy has been to advise the population to wait for the government to fulfill its responsibility and carry out the saneamiento.

In BAKINASTA and Rayaka, leaders also exhort the population to be more proactive about their participation in the affairs of the territorial council. During a meeting in Wampusirpi, one of the senior leaders in BAKINASTA tried to convey the message that people should have more ownership:

Anybody should come to the meetings, even if you don't receive an invitation. It is your obligation as a member of the community... Money is what makes people gossip. If they cannot benefit financially, then they do not care. BAKINASTA is just a name, but in reality, it is all of us (Fieldnotes, 2018).

This leader was trying to counteract the arguments of those who expressed a feeling of exclusion from the territorial council. He made the counter-argument that it was actually their self-interest that kept them from participating. In another meeting, a native Ladino man who participated in the formation of the community council in his village explained his own resolution to participate:

My wife told me, 'how could you think of attending the meeting? You don't even have shoes!' But I told her, 'no, it would be absurd not to participate in the community council (Fieldnotes, 2018).

Apart from conveying his enthusiasm, the man could have also been referring to the opportunity that formal participation in the territorial council represented for native Ladinos like himself. The residents of this Ladino-majority village had been reluctant at first to form a communal council, but they accepted the offer the second time that the president of BAKINASTA approached them.

ii) Aspirations

(1) Context

In the meeting for the restructuration of the communal council in Bodega, one of the community leaders said that people were reluctant to participate in meetings because they were not always sure whether it was worth their time. The leader said that people often asked him, "why should we go to these meetings if they do not give us answers to our problems?" (Fieldnotes, 2018). In this same meeting, two female participants raised their hands to ask a question to Pablo, who was in charge of facilitating the meeting. The first woman said, "we are tired of organizations that come to the community because they don't give us solutions to our problems." The other women reinforced the idea by asking, "is this organization going to help us solve our problems?" Pablo said yes to the women's questions. He proceeded to explain the

importance of obtaining legal personhood because it would give the community council the opportunity to request and manage projects. Therefore, the incentive for restructuring the community council was not only to be able to select the delegates that would participate in BAKINASTA's general assembly but also so they could start functioning more like patronatos with their own development projects.

Considering this projection for the territorial council and communal councils as agents of social transformation, I asked respondents in the questionnaire about their expectations for development in their villages. First, I asked them to identify the main problems in their villages and if they had any idea for how to improve them. Then, I asked them who they would call upon to fix this problem or implement the solutions that they mentioned. These questions highlight different aspects of how the respondents might assess the capabilities of the different local authorities in brokering that kind of development agenda for them. I propose that those conditions identified as problems and solutions should be considered within the broader context of the spatial imaginaries in each of these localities.

(2) Questionnaire Responses

Table 7 shows the main problems that respondents identified in each of the villages. Some respondents mentioned more than one problem. Rather than limit one response per household, I included all the problems identified in the community by the respondents. For this reason, the number of problems is 86.

Table 6.5: Main problems by community

Problem	Awala	Twi	Kabu	Total
Unemployment	5	1	10	16
Food scarcity	0	14	0	14
Theft	0	12	1	13
Community infrastructure	8	2	3	13
No programs	2	0	6	8
Leadership	5	1	1	7
Land Conflicts	1	3	1	5
Alcoholism/Drug Addiction	2	2	1	5
Young people don't want to work	1	0	1	2
Timber confiscation	0	1	0	1
Witchcraft	0	1	0	1
Insecurity	0	0	1	1
Don't know	2	1	2	5
None	2	0	2	4
Total:	24	37	25	86

In Awala, the three problems identified as the most important were community infrastructure, unemployment, and organizations. On community infrastructure, respondents mentioned the lack of electricity, water sources, and appropriate health and school installations. Respondents in Twi and Kabu also mentioned infrastructural concerns, such as access routes, but the emphasis given in Awala to more advanced services like electricity and health seemed related to their proximity to the larger town of Wampusirpi.

On unemployment, the respondents in Awala commented on the high levels of poverty in the community and the difficulty in accessing cash. Respondents referred to both the lack of opportunities for salaried work and the lack of markets to sustain self-employment in agriculture and extractive and non-extractive activities. One respondent referred to the recent past when “there was a lot of work, and people could make a decent living in gold panning, mahogany, gum, or tunu” (HH #108, Interview, 11 September 2018). The types of salaried work that existed

nowadays in the community were short-term manual labor in community infrastructure improvement, administrative or janitorial work in a public institution, or work in one of the larger ladino-owned bodegas or the cacao company established in the community.

On organizational problems, respondents in Awala referred to problems caused by leaders who were partisan or corrupt. This observation was not exclusively about leaders in the territorial council. It referred to leaders more broadly, including civil servants and the leadership of social enterprises. Partisanship was mostly referred to in terms of affiliation to political parties and corruption in terms of leaders pocketing the funds or resources sent by agencies. One respondent mentioned that “people come to us to request our signatures to request projects, but afterward they don’t want to talk to us” (HH #115, Interview, 12 September 2018). Beyond these problems associated with the brokers of development assistance, one respondent believed that the root of the problem was the lack of union in the community: “everybody is family in this community, but each family looks after each other; people have a very informal attitude of respect toward those who are not their family” (HH #106, Interview, 11 September 2018).

In Twi, the two problems identified as the most important were food scarcity and theft. In sharp contrast to respondents in Awala, who lamented the lack of cash-earning opportunities, people in Twi were more preoccupied with insufficient crop production. They referred to this problem as “*la hambruna*” (the hunger) that they felt when food ran out. The increase in the frequency of floods, plagues, and erratic rainfall patterns was considered the main culprit. The elderly and single women-led households were considered the most vulnerable to food insecurity.

On theft, respondents in Twi mentioned cattle rustling and problems with drug addicts who resorted to stealing to buy their drugs. These problems were also mentioned in Awala and

Kabu in other interviews, but they seemed more pressing in Twi. Cattle rustling had taken place a few years ago, but people still lamented the herd of cattle that they had lost. This period coincided with the rise of drug trafficking activity and the increase of cattle ranching operations to launder illicit proceeds. It is possible that the cattle stolen in Miskitu communities found their way onto some of these ranches. Likewise, the rise of drug addiction was linked to drug trafficking activity, with drug traffickers paying in kind or making drugs like crystal meth widely available. Nowadays, people in Twi mainly were concerned with young people creeping into their houses at night to steal a small farm animal or household supplies like pots and pans. They lamented that they could not sleep anymore because they had to guard their belongings. They were also frustrated with the justice system for lax implementation. One respondent mentioned the double risk involved with denouncing thieves to the authorities: “the youngsters get out of jail very easily, and when they come back to the village, they laugh at us. It seems there are no laws in Honduras. The same thieves are going to kill the deputy mayors” (HH #208, Interview, 20 November 2018).

In Kabu, the two problems identified as the most important were unemployment and the lack of programs. Like Awala, respondents in Kabu were worried about access to cash-earning opportunities. The main problem was the lack of alternatives to lobster diving. They considered lobster diving a risky profession but lamented that there were few options. One respondent also mentioned the lack of support to former divers who became disabled. Families in Kabu had also invested in their children’s education, hoping to secure a different future from diving or agriculture, but there was no employment for them in the village. Their preoccupation with unemployment was also related to their perception of the number of insufficient programs that arrived in the community. Respondents wanted more support for income-generating activities.

One respondent mentioned the need to have more community infrastructure projects that paid for labor, precisely the types of activities that were supported by Nuestras Raices. Respondents also mentioned other types of assistance that were required, such as supporting the elderly and building latrines.

Land conflicts were mentioned in all three villages, albeit not with the high frequency that I had expected. Only one respondent in Awala and another in Kabu mentioned community members selling land to the colonists as the main problem. A related problem also mentioned in these two villages was that of young people preferring to make a living clearing the fields for Ladino colonists rather than working in their own agricultural fields. Although young people are the ones blamed in this narrative, their pursuit of employment opportunities with Ladino colonists also responds to conditions of land dispossession that present in the villages. People in Twi seemed more apt to link the problems in their village with the rise of Ladino colonization in the area of Wangki River. This area was about 30 kilometers away from the village but within the territory of WAMAKLISCINASTA. The surge of Ladino colonization is what provoked the auto-saneamiento mobilization in 2015. The details of land enclosures in the three villages and the auto-saneamiento will be considered in chapter 6.

Alcoholism and drug addiction were the other problems that were mentioned in all three villages. People with substance abuse problems were considered a risk to the community. For example, one respondent in Kabu mentioned how a family member nearly died because the operator of a boat was intoxicated. In Twi, people blamed drug addiction as one of the causes for the rise in theft. People interpret the rise in drug addiction as a result of an erosion of moral values, but as explained, it was also linked to the rise of drug trafficking activity in the region

which made drugs more widespread. Also, it was possible to imagine a connection between the rise of drug use and the rise of unemployment and land dispossession affecting young people.

Finally, there were some problems that had low responses among the respondents, but that were recurrent themes in other conversations I had in the communities. In Twi, the sale of small quantities of timber to markets in Puerto Lempira and the coast was one of the few sources of cash. Loggers needed permits from the territorial council and the Institute of Forestry Conservation to move the timber out of the community; otherwise, they faced the risk of the product being confiscated by the military. Confiscation was a substantial loss to the logger and a source of anger for the community. In Kabu, one respondent mentioned insecurity, referring to criminal activity that was prevalent in the area. This comment referred back to the more general problem of the rise of violence caused by drug trafficking activity in the area, and that also affected the work of the auxiliars, as previously discussed.

The solutions described by respondents for improvement in the village matched the type of problems they identified. Overall, respondents identified income generation and improvements in infrastructure as the main aspects that needed attention. There were slight variations in each village that merit looking at each case separately, where the distinctiveness of each locality and their spatial imaginaries seems to matter more.

Table 6.6: Development aspirations by community

Solutions	Awala	Twí	Kabu	Total
Income generation	10	13	5	28
Community infrastructure	10	2	11	23
Organizational strengthening	3	5	1	9
Reduce crime	0	3	1	4
Reciprocity	1	2	0	3
Social assistance to elderly	1	0	1	2
Saneamiento	1	0	0	1
Don't know	2	1	7	10
Total:	28	25	26	80

Income generation was identified as one of the main development priorities in Awala and Twí, but less so in Kabu. In Awala, respondents referred to a mix of programs for community work and markets for their agricultural products as potential solutions. The emphasis on community work could have been derived from the road improvement project that was happening while I was visiting the community. For this project, the mayor had assigned a small budget to pay people to clear the side ditches for the gravel road that connected the community to Wampusirpi. This was a standard way of doing small-scale infrastructure in the communities that became popular with programs like *Nuestras Raíces*. Respondents also mentioned markets for their agricultural products as a priority for income generation. This aspiration was widely shared among the local population, who consider that the area has fertile lands but that it would be pointless to grow more rice, beans, or cacao without having a market.

In contrast, respondents in Twí emphasized that they wanted to work for a company that would offer them jobs. Economic activity in Twí was lower compared to Awala and Kabu, but the village was close to Waspam, a large town on the Nicaraguan side of the Wangki River. The headquarters of American-owned gum and logging companies were in Waspam. These companies worked on the Honduran side until the 1960s, which could explain the memories of

working for a company. Presently, Twi's leaders were in the process of looking for a business partner to commercialize pinewood as part of a forestry management plan that had been recently approved. The leaders of WAMAKLISCINASTA had resisted entering into commercial relations with companies to fell timber until they obtained the property title. This is one of the reasons that caused the split of the former federation of ALINASTA. With the property title in hand and the forest management plan, they seemed ready to accept a commercial venture with an external business partner. However, it is interesting that people still referred to "working for a company" rather than making a direct reference to their producers' association providing employment.

In Kabu, almost half of the respondents had identified unemployment as a major problem but only a few offered suggestions for improving this situation. Their suggestions revolved around support to producers' associations and enterprise development in the fishing sector, which would also offer an alternative to lobster diving.

The aspirations for community infrastructure also reflected the different priorities of the villages. In both Awala and Kabu, respondents mentioned that they would like the road improved. Awala is crossed by a 10-kilometer dirt road that connects Wampusirpi to the village of Bodega and allows for the circulation of large vehicles. Kabu is crossed by a 30-kilometer dirt path that only allows for the transit of motorbikes.¹²³ In both communities, respondents complained that the roads became muddy during the rainy season, making travel more uncomfortable or nearly impossible for larger vehicles. In Awala, the respondents that prioritized

¹²³ Larger vehicles sometimes circulate by the sandy beach.

market opportunities for their agricultural products also expressed an aspiration for a new road that would provide this access.

In Kabu, respondents also mentioned their desire for the dredging of the navigation canal that connected the community to Brus Lagoon to facilitate travel. In terms of other infrastructure, respondents in both communities longed for electricity, clean water, and improved housing (roofs and latrines). In Kabu, a few respondents also complained about the overgrown grass and wished for the deputy mayor to organize cleaning campaigns.

In contrast, only two respondents in Twi mentioned community infrastructure as a solution. Also, their priorities were different from those of other communities. They wanted better health and education services in Twi. This emphasis on health and education reflected the priorities they had for government services in contrast to relatively more advanced services like latrines and electricity.

A desire for improved organizations and leaders was also present in the three villages. Particularly in Twi, respondents discussed their development aspirations in terms of the ability of their leaders to work effectively and together with the community. These responses matched the characteristics identified in good leadership, which will be explained below, wishing that their leaders would know how to work well with the community, enforce norms, and embrace a Christian ethos.

One of the respondents also mentioned that the solution would be to create a new municipality for Twi and the surrounding villages. He believed that the fiscal transfers from the central government were not enough to cover the entire municipality and that they “stayed” in

Puerto Lempira. Another respondent in Twi mentioned the responsibility of the state to address the problem in the community, but he had little trust in the government:

I look at the government, and I don't know who's the boss; the president of the republic [Juan Orlando Hernandez] is headless, that's why he has problems with the thieves (HH #203, Interview, 16 November 2018).

In this commentary, the respondent was trying to rationalize the criticisms faced by President Hernandez in terms of whether or not he had strong leadership.

In Awala, respondents discussed leadership in terms of community leaders. One respondent said outright that they needed a new president for the territorial council and a new mayor if things were to improve (HH #117, Interview, 12 September 2018). Other respondents discussed their aspirations for improved organizations in the capacity for people to work together. For one respondent, it was clear that families needed to trust each other and learn to work together (HH #105, Interview, 10 September 2018). Another respondent, who was a delegate of the Catholic church, pinned his hopes for fostering more union through the church activities he was currently involved with (HH #106, Interview, 11 September 2018). He was disappointed that the congregation had fought over a recent renovation project to the church building. He planned to create a group for couples and another for singles hoping that this configuration would allow the congregation to work better.

Respondents also mentioned an assortment of other ideas to improve their communities. Crime reduction was identified as a priority by a few respondents in Twi and one in Kabu. In Awala and Twi, a few respondents mentioned that it would help to return to the practice of *mano vuelta* (exchange of hands) in which family and neighbors helped each other to care for their agricultural fields. Without access to this reciprocity practice, households have to limit the size of their fields or pay laborers. Also, respondents in Awala and Kabu mentioned the need to assist

the elderly. Finally, only one respondent mentioned saneamiento as one of the aspirations for development in the community.

After identifying problems and solutions, I asked respondents to identify the local authority figure that they might approach to discuss these problems and solutions. It is clear that a local authority may not have the ability to solve these problems, but they could act as brokers with external actors to find the appropriate resources Table 9 shows the results in each village. Multiple factors might influence who people identify as the point person to address the problems in the village. It may have to do with the nature of the problem or the leaders' personal traits. However, I suggest that the data shows some general trends about how respondents are evaluating their authorities.

Table 6.7: Preferred authority by community

Leader	Awala	Twi	Kabu	Total
Auxiliar (Deputy Mayor)	1	13	14	28
Mayor	11	0	2	13
Pastor	5	1	1	7
Territorial Council President	0	5	1	6
Other Community Leader	5	0	0	5
Elder	0	3	0	3
Don't Know	1	1	5	7
Total:	23	23	23	69

The first trend to note is that the territorial council's president does not rank high in terms of the preferred authority to discuss some of these problems and solutions. The territorial council enjoyed high credibility in Twi, but the president ranked below the auxiliar as the point person for the problems in the community. There is logic to this order. Respondents in Twi identified theft as one of the main problems, and the auxiliar is the person that they would go to resolve this issue. Contrary to what BAKINASTA's president suggested in the vignette described at the

beginning of the chapter, I doubt that respondents in Twi were thinking of the auxiliar as an oppositional figure to the territorial council. Like Douglas, these respondents talk about the auxiliar as the *cuatmas*. The auxiliar may be a liaison with the municipal government and the state police, but he was also a member of the community. Furthermore, people in Twi expected their leaders to work jointly with state authorities, not independent from them. The auxiliar also had the highest ranking in Kabu. I suggest that the auxiliar was seen as the default option for dealing with any problem in the community.

Interestingly, Awala, the community within BAKINASTA, showed a different pattern from Twi and Kabu. In Awala, the highest-ranking authority was the mayor. Again, there is logic to this decision considering that the main problems identified by respondents concerned community infrastructure. The mayor is, after all, the authority with the institutional mandate to improve infrastructure. Less straightforward answers came from the way that some respondents identified other community leaders and pastors as the preferred authority.

For the community leader, respondents in Awala referred specifically to one individual who was highly motivated. He was also the president of the community council, but I suggest that people trusted him more because of his reputation than his current position. He had been involved in two cooperatives and was generally perceived as an entrepreneurial, well-spirited individual. Ironically, he was also a cattle rancher that had deforested a large plot of land to make space for grazing pastures. Although his economic activities should have put him at odds with the rest of the community, in a way, they positively contributed to his reputation as a self-made man. In other words, the material goods that he had—a house and grazing pastures larger than most—were seen as the product of his labor and not the result of graft. He was, after all, still a peasant, like most others in the community. This was a different positionality from that of the

teacher or leader that had a more visible connection to the apparatus of government agencies and NGOs.

Pastors also figured more often in Awala than in Twi and Kabu as figures of authority whom people could consult. Pastors were generally seen as the authority that people would consult to request advice about a personal matter. I suggest that the pastor was seen by respondents as a neutral figure, especially for those that may not wish to get involved with the mayor or the territorial council for considering them too political.

It is also important to note the absence of certain authorities. First, it is important to note the low number of respondents who identified the territorial council as the preferred figure of authority to solve their problems. This response follows the trend that the territorial council is still perceived as the authority that deals with land issues but not necessarily with the other everyday concerns of the population. Second, no one mentioned the patronato. The patronato should have been the other obvious choice, especially in cases that involved community infrastructure. Respondents in Awala, however, mentioned that they would go directly to the mayor. This result confirms that the patronato continues to have a low influence on community affairs. Third, in Kabu a few respondents answered that they would not even know who to go to for addressing their problems. This is another way of saying that they generally had low levels of trust in the efficacy of authorities—state or communitarian—to solve their everyday concerns.

(3) Discussion

Territorial councils are in a tough position to lead a development agenda for the villages in their jurisdiction. Villagers are not naïve in expecting that MASTA and the territorial councils will build roads or provide employment. As mentioned in the previous section, they expect the territorial councils to concentrate on property titles and saneamiento. The tension arises when the

territorial councils claim more jurisdictional functions to govern inside the territories. To go back to the question asked by the participant in the village meeting in Bodega, “is this organization going to help us solve our problems?” The implication is that if it does not, then there is little point in participating.

It would be not only unrealistic but also unfair to expect the territorial councils to take on the responsibility for solving the problems in the villages. They do not have an established taxation system, and they do not receive state transfers. The challenges of working against an established system based on settler colonialism are enormous.

For the leaders of the territorial councils, one of the main challenges is evolving into their role as brokers of a development agenda with external partners. A conversation I had with a Miskitu leader living in Tegucigalpa, who worked for a government agency, addresses this point. I asked him if the communal council were operating in his territory, to which he answered:

They are not working. I am the president of the communal council of [redacted.] I was elected more than ten years ago. While I was in the village, I tried to start a conversation about what we could, right? But it does not matter if you make a decision at the level of the village. It did not matter much because, at the level above, the authorities are practically deaf or do not have any management capacity. That’s it. All the efforts are finished; they vanished. (Fieldnotes, 2018)

Jimmy, one of MASTA’s earlier leaders, who also lives in Tegucigalpa, shares a similar view.

When I asked him during our interview at the city mall why the titling process could not be completed in the 2000s, he mentioned the lack of political will under the Zelaya administration, as mentioned in chapter 3. However, he also added:

I also believe that the other factor is the poor Indigenous leadership. We have to recognize that most of the leaders are not prepared. I was fortunate to be supported by the World Bank to attend a leadership course with CREFAL in Mexico, which was also supported by the OAS. In that course, we learned very important topics such as subjectivity, which is a very complex topic; it implies being self-critical, recognizing

before your people where you have made a mistake. No leader in Moskitia is ready to do that. (Fieldnotes, 2018)

From Tegucigalpa, it is easy to see the faults of the Miskitu leadership working in the territorial councils. Leaders on the ground, however, have to face numerous challenges in instituting the territorial councils as territorial jurisdictions. These include the threats of Ladino colonists and government agents that try to meddle with the affairs of the territorial council, as will be discussed in chapter 7.

Another challenge comes from the spatial imaginaries of these localities and what kind of development they envision. For the people in Twi, there is a more direct alignment between what they want as a territory and the structure of the territorial council. One of their main priorities is to stop land invasions in their territory, and their leaders were able to organize the auto-saneamiento mobilization with ample support from the communities. Instead, in Awala and Kabu, people expect other kinds of solutions. They expect the promotion of agricultural markets in Awala and alternatives to diving in Kabu; they also want better infrastructure. These expectations would be more difficult to match under the current conditions of the territorial councils.

Next, I explore what attributes the population identifies with good leadership.

iii) Attributes of Leadership

(1) Context

Ibans is one of the largest villages on Rayaka's coastal fringe. It is bustling with several cantinas that are filled up by divers when they come ashore during the lobster diving season. I met with Victoriano at his cantina because he was one of the people in the village with more

years of experience serving as an auxiliar. Although he was relatively successful with his business, he was worried about providing a bad example.

I opened the cantina about eight years. I needed to have an economic activity to survive. But now I see that this business may not be the one. As a leader, I need to think of a different project that can pay the bills and where I can serve as an example to the people. We are the maximum leaders in the village. We are an example to the people. And that means that we cannot have businesses like a cantina because they ruin others, the minors. They also affect other leaders, like the Christians who live nearby. When the music is playing really loud, maybe they can't sleep, they can't rest. And there are also elderly people. So, I think I should better stop this year. We will do a different business, so I, as a leader, can say that I'm looking for God (V. Zelaya, 7 June 2018).

Victoriano believes that there should be congruity between his role as an auxiliar in the village and his line of business. Although I could not say how likely it was that he would close down what seemed to be a successful business selling alcohol, it was clear that he saw the need to reconcile his actions and leadership role through a Christian lens.

In the questionnaire, I asked respondents to describe the most important characteristics that they expect from a community leader. The most common response to this question was that a leader should “*tratar bien a la gente*” [treat people well]. Overall, this formulation reinforced the idea of equality and individuality that anthropologists have identified as a central feature of Miskitu sociality which was reinforced by Moravian teachings (Helms, 1971; Pérez Chiriboga, 2002). Victoriano’s explanation of how he should lead by example included elements of this Christian-inspired ideology. Interestingly, it was this element of “treating people well” that constituted a central feature of the attributes of good leadership rather than the importance of capacity building or formal training that leaders like the ones I interviewed in Tegucigalpa had identified as fundamental. In this next part, I will dwell more on what other attributes are considered part of this moral principle of “treating people well.”

(2) Questionnaire Responses

I did inductive coding to identify more specific attributes to look into the different ways that respondents thought of leadership. Table 10 shows the results. These attributes, however, are not mutually exclusive. They highlight one element within a narrative of leadership that may be connected to another attribute in the list.¹²⁴

Table 6.8: Attributes of a good leader

A good leader should:	Awala	Twi	Kabu	Total
Be amicable	7	5	9	21
Facilitate employment/economic support	4	1	5	10
Be equitable	5	3	2	10
Maintain proper communication	5	2	1	8
Be a transparent administrator	0	3	3	6
Foster union	1	2	2	5
Sanction the law	0	5	0	5
Have formal education	0	1	0	1
Be an elder	0	1	0	1
Don't know	1	0	1	2
Total:	23	23	23	69

Being amicable was one of the attributes with more responses. Respondents in this category referred to the desire for leaders to maintain good relations with the community. Being amicable could be shown in three concrete ways.

The first area where leaders express their amicability is in that they should embrace and live according to Miskitu custom. In the words of one respondent, “for leaders to get along with the community, they must share their thinking” (HH #210, Interview, 20 November 2018). Many respondents used the Spanish verb *compartir* (to share) to refer to their expectations of leaders.

¹²⁴ The decision to code only one leadership attribute per household contributes to the artificial separation across categories. I decided to code the data in this way because respondents were not probed to provide multiple answers or express preferences among leadership attributes.

Compartir alluded to the idea that leaders should not only share the same worldview but also literally apply it by sharing their resources according to social expectations. One respondent summarized this social expectation in this way:

To be a Miskitu leader is to share with others in need; they have to help lend them a hand. It is bad if they do not share with their neighbors (HH #120, Interview, 13 September 2018).

Three respondents also clarified that they expected their leaders to live in or visit the village, alluding that those that now lived in Puerto Lempira, La Ceiba, or Tegucigalpa were less likely to live according to customary values. One of these respondents denoted the importance of residing in the community for keeping their priorities straight: “leaders are fighting, yes, but at the higher level they are losing their grip. This is because the leaders in Puerto Lempira no longer come to the communities” (HH #208, Interview, 20 November 2018).

The second area in which leaders expressed their amicability was by avoiding or mitigating conflict with other community members. Respondents used the term *portarse bien* (behave well) in relation to the desire for leaders to know how to manage conflict in the community. For example, one respondent mentioned that “a good leader has to be an upright person, with a clean record of not picking fights with people” (HH #305, Interview, 11 December 2018). Another respondent expressed this attribute in the following way: “a good leader must behave well, which means not fighting, not having problems, being humble with the people” (HH #119, Interview, 13 September 2018). Therefore, in this person’s explanation, humility is a value of special importance. Again, this response maps to common views of seeing leaders as arrogant or disconnected from Miskitu customs by virtue of being professionals or residing outside the village.

The third area in which leader expressed their amicability was by showing the virtue of patience when dealing with community members. One respondent said in a matter-of-fact way that “for leaders to fulfill their mission, they have to be very patient because they have to listen to a lot of complaints!” (HH #313, Interview, 12 December 2018). With this commentary, the respondent was also empathetic to the social pressure in which leaders find themselves. Another respondent also associated the value of patience to a Christian virtue: “leaders must have faith in the Lord, be patient; rich people only want to negotiate the lands of the Miskitu” (HH #314, Interview, 12 December 2018). The response suggests that the Christian faith should be the source of the patience that leaders would need to deal with complex problems in the community, such as land grabbing.

After amicability, the most important attribute associated with good leadership was the ability to facilitate economic benefits to the community. These benefits were mostly associated with the leader’s ability to “bring” projects that generate employment in the community. “A good leader is the one that moves around, works hard, to get projects for the community” is one of the responses that summarizes this sentiment succinctly (HH #219, Interview, 23 November 2018). The respondents distinguished between “projects” and “assistance.” Projects were those that involved employment opportunities, like community work in a road improvement project or a social enterprise. The assistance referred to subsidies or donations. In most cases, respondents associated this assistance with the municipal government, which means that they included the mayor in their conception of a local leader. This assistance included food aid, transportation to mobilize the sick, and contributions to improve church buildings. One respondent referred to this sentiment in a religious tone, “a person that is a good leader has to ‘love thy neighbor;’ they need

to put the needs of the communities first and think about ways to increase capacities.” (HH #316, Interview, 13 December 2018).

Being equitable was also an important attributed desirable in a good leader. Respondents expressed frustration with the partisanship that they observe in leaders. This partisanship was connected to nepotism and affiliation to political parties. The distribution of government or donor-funded assistance was usually the source of discord of partisanship. According to one respondent, “leaders have to demonstrate with their attitudes and behaviors that they are for everyone; they cannot show partisanship” (HH #111, Interview, 11 September 2018). The same respondent complemented that non-partisan practices were “the only way to provide a future for the population.” Two respondents discussed equity in terms of prioritizing assistance where it was most needed. For example, one respondent remarked that “some communities are poorer than others and have more needs,” expressing the idea that a good leader would be able to take these variations into account (HH #113, Interview, 13 September 2018). The other respondent mentioned more specifically that “what the community needed was a leader that loved the elderly,” referring to this group as one of higher social vulnerability (HH #205, Interview, 16 November 2018).¹²⁵

Maintaining constant and transparent communication with the community was singled out by many respondents as the most important attribute that a leader should exhibit. The responses around communication practices pointed to both the risk of not sharing information and the form that this information sharing should take. One respondent linked the risk of not sharing information with the unannounced visits of people external to the community. “People

¹²⁵ The respondent was 60 years old and considered himself part of this group.

come to the community, and we do not even know what their agenda is” (HH #103, Interview, 10 September 2018). The respondent made a comment in reference to visits by government or aid officials, which again shows the importance given to leadership and the flow of resources to the communities. Another risk associated with not sharing information was related to the inability to consider the appropriate channels of communication for their grievances. For example, one respondent mention that “when there is a problem, the leader has to organize an assembly to be able to deliver the information to MASTA” (HH #217, Interview, 22 November 2018). Other respondents made it clear that problems are bound to happen without proper communication channels to discuss them. On the form of communication, the respondents emphasized face-to-face dialogue, such as in the case of a community assembly. Radio is a popular form of mass communication in the region, but it was not emphasized.¹²⁶

A few respondents identified the attributes of good leadership, specifically with the transparency in the use of project funds. This attribute was associated with another dimension of project management, such as the ability to pull resources and distribute them equitably. Six respondents specifically used the term “don’t steal” to refer to the attributes of good leadership. Not stealing was also identified as one of the ways in which leaders could maintain amicable relations with the community. For example, one respondent mentioned, “we want a leader that gets along with the people, that doesn’t steal, respects the people and their rights” (HH #212, Interview, 21 November 2018). Another respondent referred to the perceived risk in individuals that had the human capital but not the vocation to be leaders: “the Miskitu race is hard-headed; it appears as if they understand, but the reality is that they don’t. Leaders need to have a formal

¹²⁶ Respondents were asked to comment about the attributes of good leadership in general, but it is possible that most addressed them in the local context.

education to know how to help the people, but our leaders are sneaky!” (HH #303, Interview, 10 December 2018). Only one more respondent identified formal education with the attributes of good leadership. Overall, this attitude followed the trend of being suspicious about the professional cadre perceived to be out of touch with the needs of the community.

Fostering unity is another attribute that is closely related to amicability, open communication, and equity. Five respondents referred to “*mantener el pueblo unido*” (unite the people) as the chief attribute of leadership. One respondent described it in this way: “a good leader needs to maintain a good relationship with the community and the people; they need to maintain the community united, not divide it. We have to be like ants to work well together” (HH #222, Interview, 23 November 2018). The response suggests that the past actions of leaders divided the community. In the context of the other responses, the source of division could have been discrepancies over the allocation or distribution of project funds or government assistance. Another respondent highlighted the idea that union is ultimately based on mutual respect: “a good leader needs to foster union, seek the consent of the community. They have to respect the community, and the community has to respect them for their vocation as leaders” (HH #207, Interview, 20 November 2018). Finally, only one respondent in the sample mentioned that a good leader should keep the people united to fight against land grabbing: “a good leader has to unite with the people, seek cooperation to defend the lands in the Platano River” (HH #312, Interview, 12 December 2018).

A few of the respondents associated the attributes of good leadership with law enforcement. Their responses, however, referred to the law in different ways. One respondent was probably thinking about the role that the deputy mayor plays in handling minor theft in the communities: “a good leader needs to punish people when they make mistakes; they have to tell

the thieves to return the belongings to the rightful owner” (HH #206, Interview, 18 November 2018). Another respondent spoke of the legal rectitude that a leader needs to exhibit: “a good leader needs to do things according to the law” (HH #202, Interview, 16 November 2018). In another response, the respondent mentioned her frustration with people that arrive in the community to take pictures of works that are not theirs to justify the use of funds. Therefore, it is possible that when she talked about “doing things according to the law,” it was in reference to project management as supposed to statutory law. Only one respondent in the sample specifically mentioned that a good leader needs to “work well with community authorities and state authorities” (HH #211, Interview, 20 November 2018).

(3) Discussion

Responses for what community members identified as attributes of good leadership had more common threads among the three villages than the previous two dimensions of participation and development aspirations. They all seemed to be informed by an ethos of egalitarianism that characterizes a Miskitu moral economy. They shared a strong influence of Moravian teachings that valued equality and individualism (Helms, 1971). The same teachings promoted the value that people who obtained wealth needed to share it or they would be considered stingy (Pérez Chiriboga, 2002). As seen in chapter 3, the Moravian Church contributed some of the earlier organizational experiences in Moskitia. Membership in a church-based group continued to be the most popular form of participation in civil society. With this framework in mind, it is easier to see why people might consider talking with the pastor even when the subjects involved community affairs.

These perspectives on leadership that people have in the villages did not overlap with those held by more experienced leaders who are now in Tegucigalpa. As mentioned, these

leaders residing outside the villages believed that territorial councils needed to become more professionalized. They needed more capacity building and training. NGOs were supporting the agenda of territorial governance, a topic discussed in chapter 8, insisted on providing this kind of training to the territorial councils. However, it is important to note that training by itself will not fulfill the expectation that villagers have of their leaders. In fact, it may contribute to greater separation if they believe that leaders will spend more time outside the villages.

6.4 CONCLUSION

People in the community recognize and validate the territorial councils for the work that they did in obtaining the property titles and the functions they performed thereafter to defend and manage those property rights. Not all residents, however, are clear about the kind of authority figure that the territorial councils and the communal councils should be when it comes to managing internal affairs. This reticence does not necessarily flow from any fault in the original design of the inter-communal property regime, but rather it is to be expected considering that there are other competing forms of authority in the villages. We see that the composition and moral economy emerging from each of the localities influence the different degrees to which residents accept the authority of the territorial leaders.

Moskitia is a region with high levels of poverty and marginalization. Although it is paradoxical to claim that these conditions emerged from the absence of the state (Ballvé, 2020), it is nonetheless the case that the Honduran state had failed to provide many of the basic conditions in the villages. People in the communities expect rather little from their authorities, but they do demand basic improvements in infrastructure and opportunities for income generation. Although the territorial councils may not have the opportunity to deliver these services themselves, they could be perceived as the organizational spaces where a development

agenda from below are discussed and established. In most places, however, the territorial councils have not yet reached this level of validity.

The organizational weakness of the territorial councils is a recurrent topic of discussion among MASTA's leaders and NGOs. MASTA continues to engage with multiple partners across scale to reinforce capacities. NGOs have made capacity building a central component of their agenda for contributing to territorial governance. The perception of organizational weakness, however, is also a double-edged sword that is used by external actors to attack the basis of the inter-communal property regime. These tensions will become much clearer when discussing the interactions among MASTA, government agencies, and donors in chapters 7 and 8.

One aspect to notice from the perspective of people in the communities is that building the capacity of individual leaders will not necessarily lead to more acceptance of their authority on the ground. People in the villages evaluate the legitimacy of their authorities on an ethos of egalitarianism that creates tensions with the imposition of hierarchical structures among Miskitu. Opportunities for developing capacities that focus too narrowly on individual career advancement are likely to create more tension between the base and leadership.

The focus on individual advancement has also contributed to efforts to fabricate other spaces that can articulate demands on behalf of communities. There are other groups and organizations that have emerged to compete for resources at a moment when the inter-communal property regime has opened the space with the donor and the Honduran government to negotiate more Indigenous participation. They rely heavily on the few individuals that compose their boards, without any clear articulation to a grassroots base. Sometimes people refer to these smaller organizations pejoratively as "suitcase NGOs" to compare their leaders to a traveling salesman. These organizations are often overly critical of MASTA and fight to be recognized by

the government and donors as alternative means of representation for the Miskitu communities.

Although plurality is a characteristic of a more democratic civil society, in this context, these organizations put at risk the gains that have been made with the inter-communal property regime.

These implications will be explored in more detail in chapter 7.

PART III

TECHNOLOGIES OF CITIZENSHIP

CHAPTER 7: ELECTIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Some delegates came by water, others by foot, and some of the Indigenous leaders by air, as about 1,400 people convened in the town of Ahuas from all over Moskitia to participate in MASTA's XX Congress on August 27, 2018. The main order of business at the congress was the election of MASTA's new Board of Directors. Bringing the delegates to Ahuas had created fuel shortages in a region that only received supplies ferried from La Ceiba a few times a month. Ahuas's population of 2,000 people almost doubled in size during the three days of the event. Most visitors had to sleep on the floor of school classrooms converted into dorms. Multiple kitchen stations, which MASTA had commissioned local families, occupied the soccer field. Men cut the wooden poles and arranged the palm thatch to erect these temporary structures, as women were busy preparing the bonfire for the cooking pits. Nearby a couple of cows were tied to a palm tree, waiting for their turn to be slaughtered. After that, the visitors could smell the fragrance of the Miskitu beef stew *gluk-gluk* simmering on the bonfire. I was lucky to find a room in one of the four guesthouses in Ahuas. The other three rooms were taken by Miskitu musicians who came to entertain the delegates during the evenings. When I arrived, they were rehearsing a couple of songs played on an electronic keyboard in the jumpy rhythm that characterized contemporary dancing Miskitu music.

The general congress, which took place every four years, was MASTA's most anticipated event because it involved the election of a new president. The event in Ahuas in 2018 was MASTA's largest congress to date, with the participation of about 1,400 delegates that came to cast their vote. The event took place in the *polideportivo* [sports center], located right next to the

high school, the only place that could accommodate a crowd of this size. The contrast with the previous congress in 2014 was notorious. In the other event, MASTA's leadership had kept a strict policy on participation that restricted access to the event to only about 400 delegates. The event's location in the remote fishermen village of Aurata, located on the Warunta Lagoon and accessible only by charter boat, had made it easier to keep out uninvited guests. MASTA's leadership had resorted to this policy in order to avoid the interference of Ladino colonists who had taken an interest in meddling with the organization's internal politics since the inter-communal property titles were awarded. In 2018, however, MASTA's leadership faced a different political scenario that incentivized them to make the event more accessible by inviting more delegates. Thus, the leadership decided to hold the event in Ahuas, a transportation hub located at the center of Moskitia.

At the time of the congress in Ahuas, MASTA was experiencing what was probably its worse internal governance crisis since it was founded in 1976. Two weeks before this event, a splinter group had organized a parallel congress in the departmental capital of Puerto Lempira. The splinter group demanded more transparency from MASTA's incumbent leaders, whom they accused of being corrupt. They had tried to negotiate for the congress to take place in Puerto Lempira to allow more people to participate in the election. MASTA's incumbent leaders did not concede and discredited the organizers of the splinter group as the agents of external actors who were looking to infiltrate the organization. These external actors included a mix of national and local government officials and Ladino colonists, some of whom MASTA accused of being involved in the drug trade. When negotiations failed, the splinter group organized their own congress, which was also attended by a large crowd of about 1,300 delegates. MASTA's incumbent leadership felt the pressure to put on an even larger event in Ahuas to show that their

congress was more legitimate. They talked about 3,000 delegates showing up, but in the end, they managed to bring about 1,400 delegates to vote.

MASTA's governance crisis in 2018 represented a crucial tension in the inter-communal property regime. Despite its state-like qualities as the coordinator of the territorial councils, the organization continued to be registered as a civic association. The term of the current board was set to expire at the end of August 2018, but MASTA's incumbent leaders were hesitant to announce plans for the next congress because they feared that local government officials and Ladino colonists would take the election as an opportunity to introduce candidates who would be sympathetic to their interests. The splinter group used the leadership's reticence about setting a date for the congress as the excuse for launching a campaign centered on the ways in which the leaders were failing to comply with MASTA's bylaws. MASTA's leadership was at a crossroads: To make the elections more open risked interference, but to keep them restricted made them look authoritarian.

The erratic practices that had developed around the funding of congresses compounded the tension over MASTA's governance. Neither MASTA nor the territorial councils had their own funds to finance the elections, and the limited infrastructure in the region increased their cost. Leaders had to collect funds from multiple sources, with donors covering a significant share of expenses. The absence of a formal mechanism to fund elections created a dual scenario of chronic underfunding and little oversight, which made them fall prey to unofficial patronage. Funding from a patron could help a candidate take some control over the logistics of the event, thus favoring their chances of winning. Unofficial patronage was a top concern in the governance crisis of 2018 because the donors who would have normally funded these events had decided to keep their distance to avoid reputational risk. Each faction accused the other of having

received funds from patrons involved in the drug trade to organize their respective events. The splinter group's accusations of narco patronage were meant to discredit MASTA's incumbent leadership, who had fought for the inter-communal property titles and was pressuring the government to complete saneamiento. This crisis was unfolding at a time when MASTA's incumbent leaders were in a gridlock with the government and donors, a topic discussed in chapter 8.

The democratic election of Indigenous authorities in MASTA and the territorial councils was one of the core attributes that granted legitimacy to the inter-communal property regime, but the governance crisis threatened to disempower it. The crisis combined the insecurity that MASTA faced as a civil association subject to Honduran law with the political economy that had created vested interests in the organization. A Miskitu acquaintance, who was a long-term collaborator with MASTA, believed that the Miskitu had themselves contributed to the problem by expecting external funding to organize their elections. She recalled the old days when leaders did not expect to receive payment for organizing meetings and participants used their means of transportation to attend these events. They would walk or row long hours to reach the meeting place, bringing their own provisions to share with others. My friend asked, "why *can't* we return to this practice?" It was clear that the inter-communal property regime had brought a new set of expectations on Miskitu meetings, but this transformation did not preclude the potential for new forms of political practice.

This chapter seeks to examine the role that elections play in citizenship formation in the inter-communal property regime. Following Lyons (2010), I am concerned with the potential that elections play as a technology to shape Miskitu citizenship. I argue that the potential of elections as a site of citizenship formation is shaped by the moral economy that informs political action

among the Miskitu, on the one hand, and the infrastructural elements that condition participation, on the other. I bring this dual attention to political action and infrastructure by drawing on the concept of techno-politics. Antina von Schnitzler defines techno-politics as “the ways in which political actions are embedded within technical forms and, conversely, the ways in which the technical shapes political questions” (2016, p. 10). I use ‘technical’ to refer to infrastructure in two ways: the conventional understanding of infrastructure as physical form and the metaphorical understanding of infrastructure as a convention or standard that structures social life. I draw on participant observation during the two congresses that took place in August 2018. I complement these observations with those that I had made earlier in 2015 during an event to elect the authorities of a territorial council. Furthermore, I traced the actions that led to the split between the two factions in 2018 and examined them in light of the broader historical and structural factors that shape conditions for organizing elections.

I argue that Miskitu elections accommodate traditional and modern elements that produce hybridity that is interpreted as a distinctive form of Miskitu citizenship. Therefore, the incorporation of new rules or procedures is not itself a problem. Nonetheless, tension is created because the Miskitu have to enact these rules under conditions of limited infrastructure that make compliance onerous. The requirements for complying with the standards of Honduran law have fostered dependency on external funding, a situation that has been exploited by a variety of actors. The interference of actors involved in illicit trade is especially risky, given the potential for violence. However, the Miskitu do not necessarily use the state’s concept of legality to assess the legitimacy of funding, which is itself interpreted from the lens of a moral economy. In the end, the conditions of interference and external dependency are the products of settler-colonial logics that disavow Indigenous sovereignty and create structural violence. Amidst this violence,

the Miskitu are forming new expectations of what it means to be a citizen in the inter-communal property regime. These expectations are seen in the way that people discuss the participation of delegates and consultation of development projects.

7.2 ELECTIONS IN MOSKITIA

i) From Past to Present

The meetings in which Miskitu elections take place are a hybrid of old and new practices of sociality. Traditionally, the Miskitu did not necessarily have a system of formal elections. The Mosquito Kingdom functioned as a confederacy of territorial jurisdictions, each overseen by a paramount chief (Mendiola, 2019; Olien, 1998). The evidence suggests that these paramount chiefs served as representatives with external actors, like the British and the Honduran government, but it is unclear how they exercised this authority on an everyday basis in the villages. For example, Conzemius (1932) mentioned that King's *cuatmas* imposed law and order, but only during the monarch's visits that were held once a year. Conzemius argued that life within the Miskitu villages was rather egalitarian and that there was no formal chief. Instead, the villagers would come together to elect a chief at a time of need, like warfare, but this position of authority would be relinquished once the circumstances returned to normal.

Despite a lack of formal elections, there is scholarly and anecdotal evidence that points to the importance that the Miskitu gave to meetings that allowed people from different villages to come together for the purpose of socializing and discussing affairs. Elders I interviewed for oral histories recounted the ancient tradition of communities coming together to celebrate the first anniversary of a chief's death known as the *sikru* (the meeting). In Miskitu cosmology, this event marks the ascendance of the soul from this realm (Conzemius, 1932). The host community had a year to gather the supplies to entertain their guests, including the fermented drink *chicha*. Guests

also brought some provisions for sharing. These gatherings served as spaces for discussing the state of affairs as well as to engage in celebrations. An elder grinned when he told me that these events were also occasions for young people to meet potential partners.

The Moravian Church has also profoundly influenced the way that the Miskitu participate in meetings. The church formalized a hierarchy in the villages—with the Miskitu pastor representing a permanent figure of authority—and introduced the practice of electing members of the community to participate in positions of authority within the congregation. The Moravian Church also organized congresses that allowed the Miskitu to socialize with others in both Honduras and Nicaragua. Affiliation to a church-based group continues to be one of the most common forms of civil society participation for the Miskitu, as seen in chapter 6. Meetings of any kind always start with a prayer by an elder. The speeches constantly refer to biblical stories. This attachment to religious form is further reinforced by the fact that most meetings take place inside church buildings.

Today, the requirements imposed by Honduran law significantly shape the structure of meetings. Since Honduran law does not recognize the legal personhood of Indigenous nations or communities, the government applies the general law overseeing civil society organizations. MASTA and the territorial councils are required to be registered as civil society organizations in a public registry. This incorporation gives their organization the legal right to represent their constituency and manage financial funds on their behalf. Registered bylaws regulate the enactment of legal personhood. These bylaws determine the rules for holding elections. MASTA and the territorial councils must observe these rules to keep their registration valid.

Next, I will describe three elections. The first event took place in July 2015, and it was for the election of the board of a territorial council. This was a more intimate event that I

attended by personal invitation. For purposes of confidentiality, I do not identify the specific territorial council in which the event took place and use pseudonyms. The other two events correspond to the parallel congresses that took place in 2018. Since these events were highly publicized and relatively open to anyone in the community, I use the real identities of those individuals who were there performing a public function.

ii) Elections in a Territorial Council

José was the president of one of MASTA's territorial councils. After interviewing him in 2015, he invited me to attend the territorial council's congress, where they were going to elect the new board. I was a little hesitant to accept his invitation because I did not know if it would be appropriate for an external person to attend this type of event. However, José reassured me that it was common to invite guests as observers. On the day of the event, a driver picked me up at 6:00 AM in a hired double-cabin pickup truck. The vice-mayor, who was one of the guests of honor, was already in the vehicle. Next, we drove to pick up José. He told us we needed to run a few errands before departing for the village in which the meeting was to take place. Members of his team had already brought some supplies from Puerto Lempira (rice, lard, flour, eggs, drink mix, etc.) and procured others locally (a pig, cassava, plantain), but José had learned that more people were coming than expected and he wanted to make sure we had enough food.

José seemed anxious with the prospect of more people showing up to the election. José had arranged transportation only for ten delegates per community. The hired drivers were given instructions only to bring in those people whose names appeared on the list of delegates approved by the council's board. Since José was up for reelection, I surmised that he could have influenced who was on the list. When we arrived in the village around 8:00 AM, we found a tense environment. An aide rushed to tell José that his main political opponent, Tomas, had

brought in his own delegates and set up a separate kitchen station for them. Tomas's actions had disrupted José's planning. By arranging alternative transportation, Tomas was able to circumvent José's instructions. The additional people he had brought in duplicated some of the delegations that José had invited. José was exasperated, but he had limited options. He could not legitimately oust Tomas and his delegates from the event because they were members of the territory too. Plus, he would have had to explain how the other delegates were selected.

Tomas's actions were further complicated by his relationship with a man who was allegedly financing the costs of these additional delegations. Bayron was a ladino businessman from Puerto Lempira who owned large tracts of land throughout Moskitia, but especially around Tomas's village. When I asked people at the meeting about Bayron, they described him as a large landowner, and a few others murmured that he was involved in the drug trade. A middle-aged man, Bayron seemed cheerful as he moved from one group of people to the next in front of the church where the event was taking place. According to José's aide, he was paying bribes, 500 lempiras to vote for Tomas (about U.S.\$ 20).

I sensed José becoming increasingly anxious about this situation. Finally, José exploded when, during the presentation of each village delegation, Bayron attempted to introduce himself as a delegate. "People who are not from the community shouldn't participate in the election," José yelled, pointing his finger at Bayron from high up in the church's podium. A commotion broke out, with people shouting different exclamations against Bayron and Ladinos. Bayron sat down and did not speak again during the meeting. The first day of the event adjourned around 6:00 PM. We had dinner in our respective kitchen stations, and then all delegations met again for a dance party with live Miskitu music. These events where Miskitu music was played were referred to as a *noche cultural* [cultural night]. José and Tomas were present at the party and

found a way to channel their competitive energy by trying to give increasingly large cash prizes to the couples participating in a dance competition. The election took place on the following day. To José's misfortune, Tomas won the presidency. For José and others present in the meeting, Tomas's ascendancy marked the dangerous intrusion of a large landowner's interests into the inner structure of the territorial council.

The governance situation in the territorial council worsened when it was time to repeat elections in 2017, which Tomas also won. Tomas arranged for the event to take place in possibly the hardest community to reach in the territorial council. While the site of the previous election could be reached by vehicle, this new site could only be reached by boat. The remote location made it less likely that competitors would try to do what he did last time when he defied José's instructions and brought his own delegates. This was also the same strategy that MASTA had employed when they organized the congress in Aurata in 2014. One of the participants confirmed to me that Bayron was also present at this event.

MASTA and many of the communal leaders were concerned with the lack of transparency in the organization of the event. Tomas had not followed the procedure established in the bylaws that required a 15-day notification period. Even Tomas's fellow board members seemed to have been taken by surprise when they found out the date and location of the event. MASTA and the community leaders were also concerned that one of the bi-lateral donors had provided Tomas with the funds to organize the event. The donor already had a program in the territorial council, which included funds to support events like the elections. However, MASTA could not believe that the donor had decided to continue providing Tomas with this support despite all the irregularities. To counter Tomas, MASTA supported another group of leaders to organize their own election. The event was held a few weeks later and resulted in the election of

new authorities. However, Tomas had taken swift action to file the paperwork in Tegucigalpa to renew the legal personhood under his name as president.

MASTA tried to exert pressure to get the government and donors to ignore Tomas and recognize the other elected authorities. However, the registration gave Tomas the legal authority to represent the territorial council. The government and donors sided with Tomas because he was the legitimate president according to Honduran law, even if this status was contested by MASTA and the other leaders. The donor that had provided Tomas with the funds to organize the election and register the results in Tegucigalpa continued to coordinate their programs through him. The donor's support reinforced Tomas's stature even when MASTA opposed him because the villagers associated him with the aid being provided.

During my period in the field in 2017 and 2018, the territorial council had two boards. The two boards co-existed in animosity but avoiding public confrontation. Tomas was excluded from events organized by MASTA, but he continued to represent the territorial council in those organized by the government and donors. Bayron continued to remain a powerful figure behind Tomas. I heard rumors that Bayron was using his influence to make a profit out of the aid distributed to territorial councils, like using some of the machinery given to the communities for his personal business. Also, he was involved in the establishment of a new forestry association. The bilateral donor that supported Tomas had funded the legalization of the association and the preparation of a management plan that would allow it to exploit timber for commercial purposes. Some leaders believed that Bayron had also captured this association for his personal benefit.

This conflict over the representation of the territorial council preceded the conflict that split MASTA by a year. For some Miskitu leaders, this sequence of events foretold a dangerous tendency of external actors—Ladino colonists, government, and donors—becoming more

influential in the internal affairs of their organizations. Next, I will turn to a description of the two events in 2018.

iii) The Struggle for MASTA

Infights in MASTA were not something new. In the 1990s, a faction of MASTA's leaders had opposed the creation of the federations, as explained in chapter 3. In 2018, however, it was the first time in the organization's four decades that two congresses were celebrated, each electing their board. The main rationale advanced by the splinter group was that they needed to make MASTA more transparent and accountable. One of the main arguments of the splinter group was that the incumbent board members had exceeded their term limits. MASTA's bylaws, which dated back to 1988, set a term limit of one year for the board. However, it had become customary for each council to hold power for two years before calling for a new election. Legally, they could do it by filing an extension of the board. This tradition was broken in 2012, when the council, which had been elected two years prior, filed an amendment to the bylaws to extend the period to four years. The public registry received the petition to amend bylaws but did not officially approve them. Nonetheless, the incumbent board acted as if the amendment had been filed and waited two more years to hold elections in 2014, de facto extending its period to four years. In addition to these complaints about term limits, the splinter group also argued against MASTA's lack of transparency in the use of donors' funds. They pointed to the half-finished building that was supposed to become MASTA's headquarter in Puerto Lempira as an example of corruption. They demanded a comprehensive financial audit of all funds that MASTA had managed under the current administration.

The splinter group branded themselves the "Committee for the Rescue of Democracy" and made a public call to organize a meeting to inform other Miskitu about their agenda. The

meeting was held on July 20, 2018, in Puerto Lempira. In the meeting, the splinter group's main grievance was to set the date and place for MASTA's congress. The term of MASTA's incumbent leadership was expiring at the end of August, but no plans had been announced yet for the new congress. The splinter group argued that the congress should be held in Puerto Lempira, where more people would be able to attend. MASTA's incumbent leadership had announced that the congress would take place in Wampusirpi, as had been agreed four years ago in the previous congress in Aurata. The splinter group did not like the idea of hosting the congress in Wampusirpi because it was going to limit mass participation due to the high cost of mobilizing people to this location.

MASTA's incumbent leadership denounced the grievances of the Committee for the Rescue of Democracy as false claims. They discredited the splinter group's organizers as Miskitu individuals who were working in government agencies and served the interest of external actors. They warned that the splinter group was supported by Ladino colonists who wanted to sabotage the saneamiento agenda. Wealthy Ladino merchants like Bayron were supporting the splinter group. Bayron and other powerful Ladino colonists wanted to capture MASTA's top leadership the same that they had done by placing Tomas in the territorial council. In a public statement, MASTA's incumbent leadership described the situation in these terms:

We state that since the beginning of the titling process of the territories in Moskitia, a group of non-native people, who live in the area and use our territory for illegal activities, have been seeking to discredit the [incumbent] board with unfounded accusations based on slander and that unfortunately colonists are using a group of native mercenaries to divide the people and those same individuals are now falsely claiming to be the saviors of the people (MASTA, 2018, p. 1).

The departmental governor, a Miskitu in good favor with MASTA's incumbent leadership, tried to mediate between the two factions to see if they could agree on a date and location for the congress. Neither of the two factions accepted the other's terms for the location of the congress.

When MASTA's incumbent leadership insisted on holding the congress in Wampusirpi, the splinter group decided to organize a separate event in Puerto Lempira scheduled for August 21 and 22.

(1) The Splinter Group

The splinter group chose the Moravian Church located on Puerto Lempira's waterfront as the location for their congress. The church building was one of the largest in town and functioned as a regional headquarter for other churches in the area that followed the traditional Moravian teachings. The building was located right in front of an open field that functioned as a park, and that provided ample space for people to congregate.

On the day of the event, a large banner hanging from the church's façade read "The Great Assembly for the Democracy and Transparency of MASTA." It was 8:00 AM, and there was already a large crowd outside the church. A crew from a national television channel was outside the building interviewing the members of the Committee for the Rescue of Democracy. The taxis and other vehicles passing by slowed down to watch what was going on. A member of the organizing committee brought fences from the government's agency for disaster relief to stop the circulation of vehicles in front of the church. The organizing committee also requested a police vehicle because there were rumors that the opposition might try to disrupt the event.

I greeted one of the organizers, a young woman who held one of the councilmember positions in the Wampusirpi municipality and whom I had met on a previous trip to the area. She seemed to be interested in my presence because I could function as one of the observers during the event. Although guests invited to participate as observers did not have a formal function, their presence was supposed to provide some formality and external accountability to the elections. The organizing committee had not been able to confirm the presence of any

representative from a government agency, municipal government, or donor agency to come as a special guest. The governor, the highest representative from the central government, was invited to attend but declined. Likewise, donors tried to stay clear from the controversy by declining to participate or fund the event. I was personally mortified at the prospect of being seen as an observer, and for this reason, tried to remain as inconspicuous as possible while I watched the action.

The event started around 9:00 AM. The first to speak was the Moravian pastor, who gave a welcoming speech reminiscent of a sermon:

God will decide this election. Authority can be a military, a councilmember, a mayor, but they all have to serve the people... First, we need to seek God's kingdom. The voice of the people is God's voice. We have to fight to end poverty and bring development to Moskitia. Amen (Fieldnotes, 2018).

With this welcome speech, the pastor had inflected religious symbolism to the question of MASTA's elections and development in Moskitia. He called on the participants to sing the religious hymn, "There is no God as Great as You." When they finished singing, the pastor sat on a chair at the center of the altar, where he continued to watch the event.

After this introduction, the command of the meeting passed from the pastor to two members of the organizing committee. The first to speak was Ranulfo Julian, the former head of the education ministry in the department and who currently worked as a council member in the municipality of Puerto Lempira. He explained the reason for the split and mentioned that they had named their committee "Truskulu" after one of the legendary Miskitu warriors because they were fighting for MASTA's soul. He explained that their main interest was to eliminate corruption in MASTA to save the organization. They did not intend to create a parallel organization. Ranulfo read the agenda for the meeting, which seemed similar to the one I

encountered previously in the election at the territorial council. The agenda even included spaces for the participation of the governor, MASTA's current president, and a representative of the Institute of Forest Conservation, but they knew well in advance that they would not show up.

After Ranulfo read the agenda, Mirna Wood, the other member of the organizing committee, took over the microphone and served as master of ceremonies during the entire two days. Mirna was one of the few members of the organizing committee who did not have a job with a government office. She was a local entrepreneur, who at one point, had created her own organization to request funds from the government. She also promoted a housing subdivision in the outskirts of Puerto Lempira in a real estate development project called "The White City." The land was part of the territorial council of Auhya Yari, where land sales were prohibited. To perform her role as master of ceremonies, Mirna was elegantly dressed in a black dress, high heels, and a stole made out of tunu bark tree with embroidered scarlet macaws and sea turtles.

The meeting had started with a strong religious sentiment, followed by Ranulfo's business-as-usual approach, but as soon as Mirna got the microphone, the mood became more animated. Mirna started by asking the audience in a loud voice, "where are the Miskitu people?" to which they replied, "here we are!" Then, she got the audience into chanting "Fuera Norvin" in reference to the current president, Norvin Goff. She stated a message of inclusivity for their movement. "MASTA is you and I; Norvin is the problem." She clarified that their movement was looking to elect a board that included women, youth, and the disabled.

The man of the hour was Snyder Paisano, who was the highest-profile member of the splinter group and favorite to win the presidency. Snyder served as the departmental representative for the Directorate of Indigenous and Afro-Honduran Affairs (DINAFROH). Snyder did not talk much during the event. In fact, most of the high-profile members of the

splinter group did little public talking during the event. However, in a brief intervention, Snyder spoke of the problems that have caused Moskitia to lag behind in its development. He identifies MASTA's bad administration, corruption, and nepotism as reasons why the region continued to be poor and without development. According to Snyder, this ineptitude added insult to injury when they spent the money on "food, alcohol, and music" during their events when there were many other necessities.

After each of the members of the organizational committee got a chance to speak, there was a rapid count of who was in the meeting. There were about two hundred people inside the church hall. Most of them were from villages in the municipality of Puerto Lempira, but few people from the town itself. One of the main arguments of MASTA's incumbent leadership was that the splinter group tried to have the event in Puerto Lempira in order to lure the people from the city to come and vote against them. Today, however, the majority of participants were from the areas of Tipi and Laka. These areas were strongholds of support for Puerto Lempira's mayor, who allegedly had used municipal resources to bring them to the meeting. There were very few participants from outside the municipality of Puerto Lempira. The organizer did not think this was a problem because they argued that this municipality had the largest population. In their mind, this was how the electorate should be composed, in proportion to the size of the population, and not by equal representation of each territorial council.

The agenda reached the point where it was time for the president of MASTA and the territorial councils to address the delegates and report on the organization's state of affairs. Although it was well known that none of them were in attendance, Mirna went through the rhetorical motion of asking after each of them when it was their turn in the agenda to address the audience. She asked, "where is Norvin? Has anyone seen Norvin?" Then, she asked the audience

to join her in the chant “Fuera Norvin!” This action was repeated with the other presidents of the territorial councils. A similar dynamic occurred when it was time for the governor and the regional director of the Institute of Forest Conservation to speak, but these civil servants did not attend the event.

We broke up for lunch. Many of the participants sat outside on the lawn in front of the church. Here, I encountered a young man who I had previously met in one of the villages. I was surprised to find him here because I considered him to be one of the supporters of MASTA’s incumbent leadership. He told me that he was curious about what the splinter group would be talking about in the meeting. He seemed confused about what he had observed. He mentioned that he did not approve of all of MASTA’s actions, but he still did not fully trust the splinter group. Nonetheless, he liked that there was a diverse crowd in the meeting, including women and children. Another supporter of MASTA’s incumbent leadership that I ran into described the crowd in more paternalistic terms. She was against the splinter group but had come to check out the event. She asked me about my perception of the event. I explained that the organizers of the splinter group were talking about demanding transparency from MASTA, among other issues. She looked at some of the people sitting on the lawn and exclaimed, “poor ones! They don’t understand what is going on, and it is so easy to manipulate them with a plate of food.”

When we returned to the meeting, the afternoon session was spent discussing miscellaneous aspects related to MASTA’s bylaws, saneamiento, economic development, and a cultural agenda for Moskitia. Participation was open to the members of the audience, who raised their hands and came to the front to speak to the crowd. The themes were repetitive. Most of them fell into one of three themes: the high levels of poverty in the communities, the corruption of MASTA’s incumbent leadership, and the desire to fight for the saneamiento of their lands. For

the most part, the participants repeated their complaints with little dialogue among participants. The organizers closed the afternoon session at 5:00 PM and asked participants to be promptly at the church by 7:00 AM tomorrow. The participants who were from out-of-town returned to the various stations where they had been assigned for food and board. These stations were allegedly financed by some of the mayors and the local merchants that opposed MASTA's incumbent leadership.

The next day, the participants arrived early at the park outside the church. They congregated by zone. I could see that in each of these groups, there was someone writing down the name and national ID number of the participants. They would be using this information to provide them with voting cards to make them official delegates. The voting cards were printed on reused paper. They were officialized with two stamps: one with MASTA's logo and another with the map of the department of Gracias a Dios.

The event started at 8:30 AM, with participants singing Moravian hymns. A different pastor was in charge of leading the hymn and morning prayer. He reminded participants that the election of the candidates was an expression of God's will. The crowd inside the church hall was considerably larger compared to yesterday. There must have been around 300 people inside the building. I stayed outside talking to some of the participants. Among them, I ran into three acquaintances that I knew were well-connected to MASTA's incumbent leaders. They have also come to see what was happening. Three of them began recording video with their phones. They were joined by a fourth person, a thirty-year-old man, who also came in yesterday. While we were chatting together, the man criticized the splinter group for deceiving the participants. However, as soon as the other companions left, he admitted that he also wanted to see a change in MASTA's leadership. He had attended the previous meeting organized by the splinter group

on July 20 but expressed disappointment when he realized that it was some of the same individuals who had tried to get elected to MASTA's presidency in the past. Therefore, he was not yet fully convinced that the splinter group had the answer to the kind of change that he wanted for MASTA.

The main order of business for the morning session was to nominate the candidates for the presidency. In Miskitu elections, the candidates were nominated by someone else during the meeting. Mirna, the master of ceremonies, invited people to come to the front to make their nominations. Snyder was the first person to be nominated. The second was Mario Miller, a man who worked as the liaison for the Miskitu people in the inter-cultural education program at the Ministry of Education in Tegucigalpa. Then, Mirna said that it is time to nominate two women. She argued that the norm of gender parity (not formally written) required that half of the candidates should be men and the other half women. Two women were promptly nominated. However, Mirna was not satisfied. She said that one of the women was from Brus Laguna, the same place where Snyder was from and that it would not be fair to have two candidates from the same town. Rather than considering whether Snyder or the other woman should stay, she quickly resolved that the other woman was ineligible and called for another nomination. During this process of the meeting, Mirna was more than the master of ceremonies. She was also the arbiter of the rules.

Once the candidates were nominated, Mirna asked everyone to leave the church hall and wait at the park. Each of the delegations was asked one by one to an auxiliary building right next to the church hall to cast their ballot. A table was set outside the room where the voting card was checked against the roster of delegates. After their ID was verified, the delegates received a ballot and a meal ticket. Therefore, they could not eat lunch unless they waited in line to vote.

The voting started at 11:30 AM. The crowd right now was considerably larger because the people from the neighborhoods of Puerto Lempira started to show up. Most of them were not present for the other portions of the event. They called the different delegations to come to the voting station. They referred to the delegations by using a mix of names. Sometimes they referred to delegations by the name of the territorial council, other times by the municipality or the name of a village. For example, they called one delegation KATAINASTA (territorial council), another Villeda Morales (municipality), and another Laka (village). People had to wait their turn under the blazing sun. One of the older members of the organizational committee took over the microphone from Mirna and started to cheer people up by shouting motivational phrases.

We are seeing the democracy of the Miskitu people.

This is the best that has happened to Moskitia.

I am rejoiced by what is happening today.

This is the civic feast of the Miskitu people (Fieldnotes, 2018).

The voting ended at 3:30 PM. Everybody got back to the church to open the ballot boxes and started counting. Ballots are counted one by one, with each individual result announced by the microphone. After about an hour, they finished counting the 1,324 votes that were cast. Snyder obtained 85 percent of the votes and was declared the winner of the presidency. It's near 5:00 PM, and they still had to elect the rest of the board members. They decide to break up the meeting to allow people to have dinner and return later to finish electing the rest of the board.

I doubted that many people would return to the meeting after dinner, but to my surprise, the church hall was packed. About four hundred people had shown up. The voting for the other members of the board was less formal than for the president. Mirna, who had regained her

position as master of ceremonies, called on people to make nominations. She was the arbiter of whether the roster of candidates for each of the positions fitted the criteria of gender and regional balance. After two or three candidates were identified, she asked participants to vote by raising their hands. A couple of volunteers went around each row, counting the number of raised hands. The votes were tallied, and the winner was announced. People clapped. The process was repeated for each of the nine remaining positions on the board.

By 9:30 PM, all members of the board had been elected. The composition of the new board was almost exact to the composition of the organizing committee. The Moravian pastor who gave the opening speech on the first day was selected as the treasurer of the organization. According to Mirna, this was an important position because he would be the one in charge of “counting the millions of dollars, lempiras, and euros that will be sent to Moskitia because the lungs of the world are here.” The other Moravian pastor that was in charge of leading the morning prayer came up to the altar and said a five-minute prayer to bless the new board. Snyder and the rest of the selected members closed their eyes to receive the blessing.

I am exhausted and hoping that with this blessing, we can all go home. To my surprise, it was now time for each of the delegations to identify the priorities for the new board’s program. People came up to the microphone and talked about saneamiento, fishing rights, jobs, etc., many of the same topics that had been discussed earlier. It was 10:30 PM, and I was getting worried about how I would get home. The streets of Puerto Lempira were pitch black due to the lack of public lighting. Two months ago, a person got mugged around the corner. I thought to myself, “electricity and crime prevention” as two other priorities that I had heard people say in the past. I was lucky to spot one of my neighbors among the crowd. We both made our way back home.

(2) MASTA's Incumbent Leadership

After the large crowd at the election held in Puerto Lempira by the splinter group, the pressure was on MASTA's incumbent leadership to make an even larger event. Ironically, they reasoned that it would be too expensive to mobilize a large crowd to Wampusirpi. Therefore, they moved the location of the congress to the town of Ahuas, which was more centrally located and easier to access. The congress was set up for August 29 and 30, which are the last days to hold it before the period for the current board expired at the end of the month.

On August 28, the plan was to meet at the pier of Puerto Lempira at 8:00 AM to board charter boats that would take us to Ahuas.¹²⁷ We were told that we needed to wait longer because there was no fuel. We were told that the ferry arrived yesterday with new supplies, but they were still disembarking it and might take a couple of hours to get it to us. It was 1:00 PM, and we were still stuck at the pier waiting for the fuel. One of MASTA's leaders told me that she was going to get tickets from one of the private transportation companies that make the daily trip to Ahuas. She had a special budget funded by an external partner to lead an encounter with Miskitu youth in Ahuas, and the delay was derailing her agenda. She suggested I get my own ticket too because there was limited accommodation in Ahuas and I needed to secure a room. I listened to her advice and bought the 500-lempira ticket (about U.S.\$ 20). As we departed on the private company boat, I felt guilty about the other participants still waiting for the fuel.

The next day, I arrived at the sports center at 8 AM, which was the time at which the meeting was supposed to start. However, we ended up waiting until 11 AM for the official program to begin. Orlando Calderon, a long-time collaborator of MASTA and with many years

¹²⁷ It took about 2 hours to reach Ahuas with a 200-horse outboard motor.

of experience, was the master of ceremonies for the event. Like Mirna, Orlando started the meeting by asking the audience, “where are the Miskitu people?” One of the elders from Ahuas said the prayer. Orlando moved to the presentation of the different delegations.

WAMAKLISCINASTA had the largest delegation in contrast to their scant presence in the congress in Puerto Lempira. However, the bleachers were about half empty because many of the delegations had not yet arrived. MASTA’s president, Norvin Goff, did not arrive until later in the afternoon.

The organizers put plastic chairs on the court for the guests of honor. Some of MASTA’s board members were sitting down on these chairs, as well as some of Ahuas’s leaders. They were not expecting the governor or donor agencies to come. In the meantime, the only external guests were two reporters from a national tv station and me, and so, we were invited to sit on these chairs. I sat in the VIP area during the morning session but managed to move to the bleachers in the afternoon and the rest of the event. The next day, YATAMA’s delegation arrived from Nicaragua to show their support to the incumbent leadership.

The morning session was a collection of presentations by different groups and ad-hoc interventions. One of the leaders explained that the XX Congress was named in honor of three distinguished members of the Miskitu community: Osvaldo Munguia, who had served as director of MOPAWI since the early 1990s and oversaw the Land Legalization Program; Jacinto Molina, who helped organized OEGAD and MASTA; and Galias Borda, who was the director of the former Moravian institute in Brus Laguna and previous president of MASTA. These three members were an example of the Miskitu intellectuals who had been part of MASTA’s transformation in the 1980s and 1990s, explained in chapter 3.

After this explanation, Orlando ceded the space for the presentation of the newly formed Youth Committee and the Council of Elders. The representatives of each of these groups presented the members and described their objectives. After this presentation, it was time for the president of WAMAKLISCINASTA, Victor Santiago, to tell the audience about the auto-saneamiento mobilization that occurred in 2015 and the actions that they had taken since to protect themselves against the Ladino colonists. Victor had a similar intervention during the event I attended in 2015 for the election of the territorial council's board. On both occasions, the audience listened attentively to Victor's account of the event. The retelling of the auto-saneamiento mobilization gave people a sense of pride and hope that they would be able to stand against the Ladino colonists grabbing Indigenous lands.

We broke up for lunch, and the participants went to the nearby soccer field where the kitchen stations had been set up. Each of the delegations was assigned to one station. The organizers supervised closely to ensure that the participants received their food ration. They wanted to avoid the situation where people from the hosting village would sneak in to get food while the visitors were left without it. This had occurred in other events because it was difficult to exclude people from the hosting village.

We returned to the sports center at 3:00 PM. Less than half of the participants from this morning were there because many were still waiting to get their food served. Nonetheless, Orlando decided to continue with the program. The first topic for discussion was the road between Wampusirpi and Puerto Lempira. Orlando explained that MASTA was not supporting this initiative because it would facilitate the entry of more Ladino colonists to the Warunta area. They even heard the rumor that Honduras' richest man and oligarch, Miguel Facusse, had already bought lands in the area in anticipation of the road. MASTA was worried because last

week, four mayors met to discuss the road project. The government already sent a group of engineers to prepare the feasibility study.

Orlando explained to the audience that the government had violated Convention 169 because the government needed to obtain free, prior, and informed consent before proceeding with the project. Orlando called for an immediate consultation on the road project. He asked the audience, “do you want the road?” I heard a loud “No” coming from the bleachers. No one raised their hands or said yes to support the road project. I thought that this segment of the meeting was supposed to be an information session on the road project, not a consultation. I was unclear if the segment had been originally planned as a consultation or if it had happened spontaneously. Like Mirna, Orlando seemed to have more control of the meeting than what I would have assumed from a master of ceremonies.

Norvin arrived around 4 PM. He greeted people as he walked to the VIP area. He delivered a 15-minute speech, without any notes, that people listened attentively to. He talked in a deliberate manner, not as effusively as Orlando or some of the other Miskitu leaders. He was less likely to introduce religious motives into his speeches as other Miskitu leaders did, but he consistently relied on personal anecdotes to make his points, which was a prized rhetorical quality among the Miskitu. He also referred to international and domestic law with ease. This combination reflected his combined background as a Miskitu leader and college graduate.

In his speech, Norvin clarified that he was not against development but that he wanted development on their own terms. Before they could consider large infrastructure projects like the road, the government had to complete the saneamiento. He mentioned that his main policy agenda was to continue fighting to defend the lands of Moskitia from external interests. He explained that the splinter group had launched this campaign against him because it was part of

the Ladino's strategy to stop the saneamiento from coming. He asked rhetorically about the problem with reelecting him if that was what people wanted. He compared his case to that of the mayors, who could be reelected indefinitely, like the mayor of Juan Francisco Bulnes, who was in his fourth period.

The meeting closed around 5:30 PM. The participants went back to the kitchen stations for their dinner and then to the places they were staying to rest for a little bit before the evening activities. We returned to the sports center around 8:30 PM, where an ensemble of Miskitu musicians was getting ready for a 'cultural night.' There were more people present for the entertainment portion than for the day assembly. Part of the reason was that people from the hosting village were also invited to participate. The mood was festive, with people dancing to the rhythm of the electric piano. The only interruption came when a few drunk men got a little too excited and wanted to take the microphone from the singers to sing themselves.

The second day of the congress was more intense than the first day. After the morning prayer, the first order of business was to elect the provisional board that would be in charge of overseeing the election. The roles of president, secretary, and fiscal of the provisional board were voted on based on their affiliation to the territorial councils. While the provisional board got everything ready for the election of the president, the agenda had a full list of interventions by organizations that represented different segments of Miskitu society. There were planned interventions by the Organization of Miskitu Women of the Atlantic Coast (MIMAT), the Youth Committee, the Council of Elders, MOPAWI, the Transparency Committee, the Moravian Church, MASTA's president, and ex-presidents of MASTA. There was also time reserved for YATAMA and representatives from the Honduran military. There was no time to go through the

entire list of participants. Only MIMAT, Council of Elders, and YATAMA got to make their interventions during the meeting.

The mood started to get more heated when the provisional board read the requirements for president of MASTA. Being a Miskitu and not having sold land to Ladino colonists were qualifications that everybody agreed upon. The years of experience proved to be more controversial. It was unclear who drafted the initial proposal, which said that the president needed to have ten years of experience. The members of the Youth Committee balked at that, saying that those requirements discriminated against young people who could have the potential to lead the organization. After some deliberation, the organizers agreed to reduce the requirement to three years, but there was no formal vote. Another point of controversy was whether each territorial council should present its candidate for president. This rule would have really changed the dynamics because it would have made coalitions among the territorial councils more difficult. In the end, the assembly decided against it, and they continued with the practice of open nominations.

The process of nomination followed the rule that anybody could nominate any candidate. It resulted in six candidates, among them Norvin Goff and all of them male. Like Mirna, Orlando tried to mediate to see if there were nominations for a female candidate. An elderly woman stood up and said that she was not going to propose another woman for the position of president because they needed men to be at the top of the organization. She summarized this genderized version of leadership with the phrase, “we need strong men because we are going to war.” Her remarks caused controversy, and a female participant who presided the provisional boards said that “Miskitu women [were] strong too.” Two women came up to the front to share their point of view. They concurred that Miskitu women were fully capable of leading MASTA, but they said

that they had already decided to support Norvin, so they did not see the point in nominating a woman if they were not going to vote for her.

In the early afternoon, the voting started. Like in the other assembly, each participant received a voting card. The main difference between the two assemblies is that in this congress the number of delegates is more evenly split among the twelve territorial councils, whereas in the congress in Puerto Lempira, there was a higher prevalence of voters from the city neighborhoods. People were called by the territorial council to come to vote. The casting of ballots took about four hours, after which the counting began. All the results were tallied in full by 8:00 PM. Norvin was declared the winner with 97 percent of the 1,404 votes that were cast.

After the election for president was completed, the meeting proceeded with the nomination and election of candidates for the other positions on the board. Volunteers went around the bleachers, counting the number of raised hands for each of the candidates. Some argued that more women needed to be nominated as candidates, but even after securing the nomination, they often lost to their male counterparts. For two consecutive periods, a woman had been elected as vice-president, but this time the president of WAMAKLISCINASTA got the position. I heard some participants saying that they needed someone strong who was going to fight for saneamiento and who better than this leader. The mood got tenser when it was time to elect the five representatives (*vocales*) on the board. Their selection came down to which territorial councils have not yet been represented in the other positions (president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, and fiscal). Once all positions were filled up, the members of the newly elected board came to the front and held a flag with MASTA's logo while the president of the Council of Elders swore them in.

It had been a long day, but people were ready to celebrate. The Miskitu musicians had already begun to set up their equipment and were ready to start playing. All the paperwork from the election was cleared out from the table that occupied the podium. They made room for four large plastic buckets that contained a fermented drink from the supa palm fruit. Norvin, as the reelected president, did the honors of serving drinks to everyone. People were excited. They came closer to get a drink. The mood was once again festive, and people danced until late in the evening.

After the meeting in Ahuas, I traveled to Wampursirpi to continue with my field research. I discussed the consultation on the road that had taken place at the congress with someone who did not participate. She asked, “were any of these people who voted no from Wampursirpi? What right do they have to tell us here in Wampursirpi what we can or can’t have?” Not a person I talked to in Wampursirpi wanted the Ladino colonists to grab more land, but many saw great value in the road as it would mean easier access to schools, health services, and markets. Although MASTA believed to be acting in the best interest of Wampursirpi residents, this person’s comment questioned the legitimacy of decisions made by others on their behalf. They saw MASTA as denying them their right to public infrastructure.

7.3 THE MORAL ECONOMY AND TECHNO-POLITICS OF ELECTIONS

i) Hybridity in Meetings

The very concept of holding an election as part of a congress was a modern-day invention for the Miskitu. However, this modernity has not prevented the Miskitu from transforming these events into spaces that reproduce their cultural distinctiveness. According to Brazilian anthropologist Marcio Goldman (2013), scholars of democracy often equated elections with institutionalized political practice, which left out emic interpretations of these events. In his

analysis in Northeast Brazil, Goldman contended that Afro-Brazilian cultural movements disrupted electoral politics creating “real political theories” that engendered a unique logic and aesthetics that resisted capture by dominant political processes. Similarly, I argue that the Miskitu have created a hybrid of traditional and new practices to integrate elections into their sociality. They have borrowed from experiences in teachers’ federations and forestry associations to recreate some of the formal procedures in elections. The voting mechanisms also mixed formal and informal rules. The titling of the president was formal, with voting cards. The election of the other candidates was more open by raising their hands or shouting the name of their candidate.

These meetings where elections took place presented some of the social elements rooted in traditional and Moravian influences. Government and donors may have regarded these congresses in terms of the function they played in the election of officials, but for the participants, these events were also a mode of celebration, an occasion to socialize with family and acquaintances from distant communities, eat beef stew that is hard to come by due to the scarcity and high price of meat, pray and sing hymns, and dance to live music. As Goldman (2013) proposed, elections were “invaded” by cultural logics suggesting that the study of politics could be separated from social life or considered as a dimension with the same function in every society. There were some interesting differences in the way that these logics were expressed in the two meetings in 2018. The meeting organized by the splinter group in Puerto Lempira reproduced more the religious aspects influenced by the Moravian Church, whereas the meeting organized by MASTA’s incumbent leadership reproduced more the worldly dimension of celebration in the form of music and dancing. Interestingly, a few Miskitu individuals I spoke

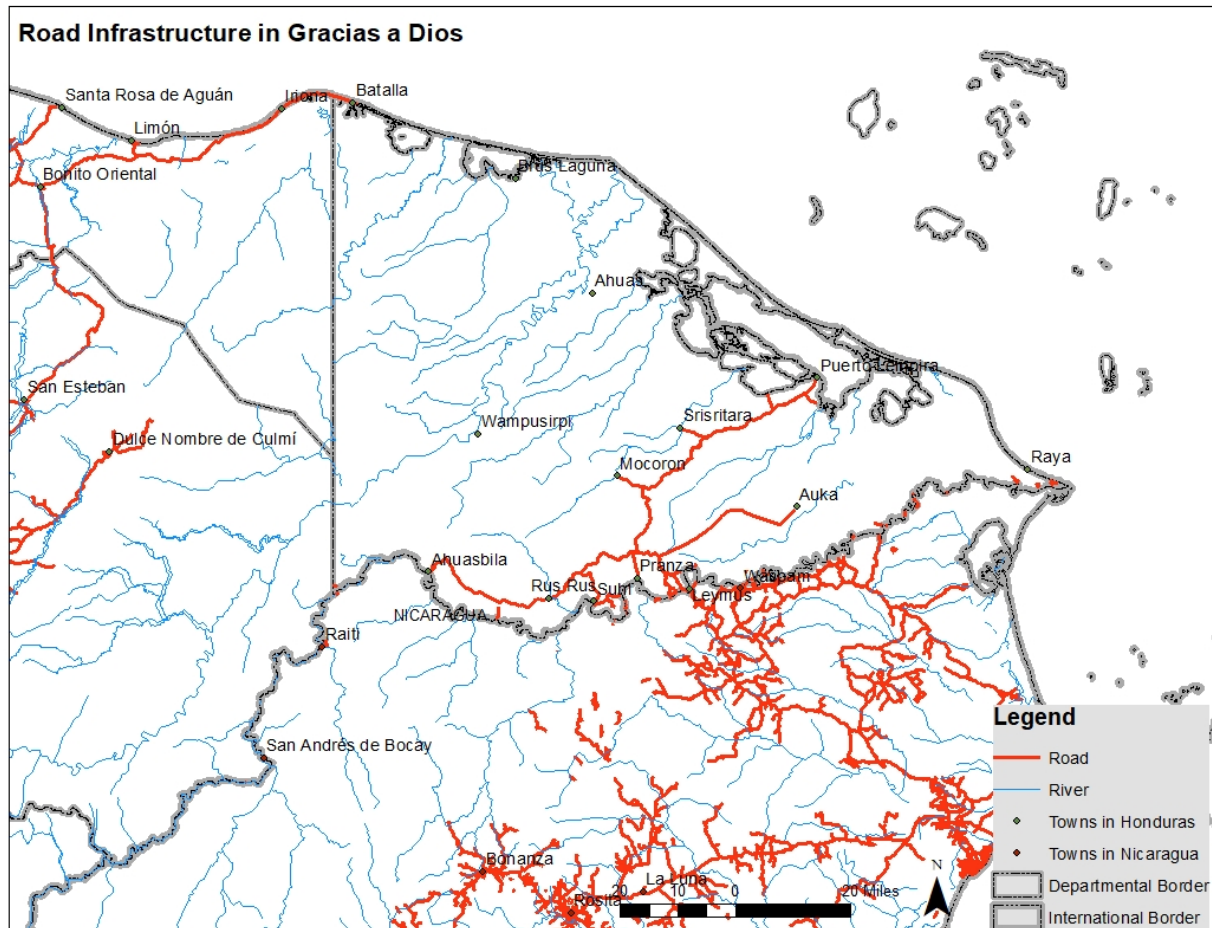
with during the course of fieldwork criticized MASTA's incumbent leadership for the practices of alcohol consumption and dancing that took place during their events.

ii) Structural Violence

The Miskitu had adapted to perform elections, but problems emerged when the organization did not have the means to comply with requirements imposed by Honduran law. Bylaws established a formal calendar for the elections, but it was not always possible to follow it. The bylaws of territorial councils established that they must perform general assemblies every two years to elect a nine-member board plus a vigilance committee. In MASTA's case, the original bylaws called for annual elections, but the new practice was to celebrate them every four years. MASTA and the territorial councils did not have the funds to put on the kind of events expected for elections and comply with the formal scheduling.

Elections cost money, between 3,000 to 5,000 US dollars for about 200 guests, and four to five-fold more for the election of MASTA's board. Organizers had to provide transportation, food, and lodging for delegates. The limited infrastructure of Moskitia made transportation more expensive relative to other regions of Honduras. Transportation options were limited, and most people did not have the disposable income to attend these meetings without assistance. Moskitia has limited connectivity both with the rest of Honduras and within the region. From the rest of Honduras, the only road access was to the town of Batalla on the border with the department of Colon. All other forms of transportation were either by air or water. Virtually, the entirety of the road network was concentrated within the municipality of Puerto Lempira and connected the departmental capital with the larger towns of Auka, Mocoron, Tipi, and the border with Nicaragua. This road network was built in the 1950s and expanded in the 1980s as a response to

conflicts in Nicaragua. Travel to the population centers in the other five municipalities had to be done by air or water.



Map 6: Road Infrastructure in Gracias a Dios

One of the main responsibilities of the party in charge of organizing a meeting was to arrange the transportation of the participants. However, MASTA and the territorial councils did not have their own revenue to finance the cost of holding an election. They depended on grants from donors to finance these expenses. Donors normally financed these costs as part of their agenda to support local capacities for governance. Although donors liked to consider themselves to be neutral and professed that they did not want to get involved in internal politics, they did

interfere. For example, MASTA accused one of the largest bilateral donors in Moskitia of legitimizing Tomas's illegal tenure as president of his territorial council. This donor agency had provided the funding to the event where Tomas was re-elected, and they continued to channel all cooperation through him.

MASTA interpreted the donor's actions as explicitly taking sides with the opposition, even though the personnel justified their actions on the basis of Tomas holding the legal representation. Donor agencies also interfered in the internal politics of the territorial councils when they conditioned their assistance on the holding of new elections. As was the case with MASTA's congress in 2018, some of the presidents of the territorial councils had to calculate how and when to hold the elections in order to control external interference. However, donors tended to interpret the delay in celebrating elections as a symptom of corruption and lack of transparency.

Donor funding could be unreliable, with aid agencies in Tegucigalpa not approving disbursements until the very last minute, which put leaders into a bind when they were trying to organize events. Also, donors limited funding for complementary activities or personal expenses. For example, donors were sometimes unwilling to cover some of the ancillary expenses that came with the preparation of a meeting, such as traveling to remote villages to make announcements. Furthermore, Indigenous authorities were financially vulnerable since leadership positions were on a volunteer basis but ended up consuming a lot of their time. Donors only paid technical staff, but they did not fund the salaries of elected officials, which were only eligible for financial compensation in the form of *per diems* during the performance of official duties. In response, leaders had developed a variety of strategies to complement incomes, such as assigning

the preparation of food to family members, redirecting benefits to themselves or allies, and asking for direct payment when they facilitated a meeting.

Outsiders had learned to exploit the vulnerability that came from not having a reliable funding mechanism for elections. As shown in the case of the election at the territorial council in 2015 and Puerto Lempira in 2018, patrons could literally make elections happen by providing the funds to bring delegates to these events. MASTA accused some local government officials and Ladino colonists of providing this patronage in order to weaken an agenda for saneamiento. Likewise, the splinter group accused the incumbent leadership of receiving extra-official funding to support their political platform. Both sides suggested that narco interests were behind this patronage. These accusations touched on a controversial subject that implied a nexus between Miskitu organizations and narco interests. MASTA's incumbent leadership had been fighting to defend their lands and natural resources from narco land grabbing. Drug trafficking in Honduras had already infiltrated both the government and business sector (Spring, 2020), which suggested that they would attempt to coopt Indigenous leaders too. For MASTA's incumbent leadership, the emergence of the splinter group was evidently part of the narco's playbook for gaining control of their organization to derail the process of saneamiento. However, they faced the same accusations too. It was undeniable that narcos, both Ladino and Miskitu, had the physical and economic power to shape governance dynamics in this frontier setting. What made the situation even more dynamic was that the Miskitu did not consider all forms of narco patronage to be the same.

One dynamic I noticed is that the Miskitu themselves approached the question of narco patronage from a lens of moral economy rather than whether the activity was considered legal or illegal. Research on illicit economies in Moskitia suggests that some drug traffickers develop

collaborations with local communities in order to facilitate their activities in the area (Blume, 2021). I observed that most Miskitu were less likely to have an issue with narco patronage when it came from another Miskitu. They assumed that the Miskitu individual would be more likely to respect the norms of the traditional land tenure system, even when they had become large landowners themselves. I was often referred to as the example of a specific Miskitu individual involved in drug trafficking who was known for acting as a patron to Miskitu leaders and had a large estate. When I asked some of the people in a nearby community if they considered him to be a land grabber, they responded that his large estate protected the area from other Ladino colonists.

The Miskitu referred more openly to narcos as a problem when the individual in question was a Ladino. Then, the assumption was that the Ladino was interested in interfering with elections to favor colonization activities. Therefore, this suggests that the ethnic identity of the patron shaped the way that people interpreted the type of dependency being created. This occurred because people assumed that the ethnic identity came with a set of expectations. Funding by another Miskitu was considered more morally acceptable because it symbolized protection of Miskitu territoriality, even if that individual was a large landowner himself. Instead, funding by a Ladino was considered to be a dangerous act that could undermine the process of saneamiento.

iii) Citizenship Formation

In the midst of trying to comply with external requirements and navigating relations of dependency, I found that the elections were also spaces where the Miskitu were trying to construct values of Miskitu citizenship. The construction of this citizenship was more salient in

discussions over the selection of delegates and the format of consultations for development projects.

The selection of delegates was one of the main points of contention in the election events that I attended. The bylaws mention that the territorial councils must select their delegates to participate in the assembly. Eleven of the twelve bylaws, prepared around the same time by the same lawyer, mentioned a roster of members from which the delegates must be selected. In practice, community councils rarely hosted official meetings in which delegates would be selected, and none of the territorial councils had a roster of members. The selection of the delegates was an informal process. This informality led to leaders of both factions accusing each other of using their power to select delegates that would favor their candidacy. I found that many participants in these meetings were also trying to figure out for themselves what the process should be to select these delegates. The organizers of these events had developed schemes like provisional ID cards and rosters to control delegates once they were in the meeting, but the process for the selection of these delegates was still undefined. It seemed that once people arrived in the meeting, it was more difficult to exclude them, as had occurred in the case of an event at the territorial council. These additional delegates had to be accommodated, as they were also members of the community. Under these norms of sociality that restricted exclusion, one of the most effective ways of controlling access was to select a remote location.

The main debate that emerged in the 2018 governance crisis was whether the number of delegates assigned to each territorial council should be proportional to the size of the population or if each territorial council should have the same number of delegates. These were fundamental questions in an electoral system. Unfortunately, these questions were being articulated in the

midst of accusations about narco patronage and interference, which undermined the potential for more constructive spaces for dialogue.

Another site for the formation of citizenship was the discussions over large-scale development projects like the road to Wampusirpi. Having visited the area on three occasions, I could understand why many people in the area wanted the road. However, MASTA and the leaders of the territorial councils maintained that the road project would bring more harm than good by facilitating Ladino colonization. The road project was a difficult political decision where different priorities had to be considered. MASTA clarified on numerous occasions that they were not “anti-development” but that they did not support building the road before the enactment of the saneamiento decree. Many Miskitu families in Wampusirpi wanted saneamiento, but they did not think that it should be an excuse to delay the construction of the road.

Although MASTA’s decision on the road project was politically consistent with their platform to support saneamiento, I found that some people in Wampusirpi felt discomfort with the lack of a formal process for a consultation. They felt that they had not been properly consulted as the main potential beneficiaries. Seen through the eyes of one Miskitu resident of Wampusirpi, she felt that people from other territorial councils did not have the right to decide for them. Nonetheless, the road project did not concern Wampusirpi alone. It was supposed to cross the territorial council of FINZMOS too. The spillover effects would be felt in the entire region. Instead of discounting the position of the road supporters as selfish or naïve, I want to suggest that they were part of an ongoing process for constructing Miskitu citizenship. They were actively exercising their right as Miskitu citizens by demanding their leaders to clarify rules for consultations and by lobbying for their regional priorities.

7.4 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I suggested that the Miskitu have been able to transpose their own cultural logics to the process of elections. However, the rules imposed by the Honduran state created a situation of chronic underfunding and dependence for the Indigenous leaders. This situation was compounded by the poor infrastructure in the region. Under these conditions, I proposed that the governance crisis that affected MASTA in 2018 should be interpreted from a lens of technopolitics that described the problem as one of structural violence at the intersection of both physical and organizational infrastructures. MASTA's incumbent leadership and the splinter group were struggling to maintain legitimacy on a landscape shaped by this structural violence. Although some Miskitu were genuinely interested in a democratic alternative, it was difficult to take at face value the splinter group's call for MASTA's democratization. The circumstantial evidence suggested the intervention of third-party interests among this faction. In contrast, it was clear that MASTA's incumbent faction had fought for the inter-communal property titles and was pressuring the government for saneamiento. Despite this dire situation, I suggested that the Miskitu were also participating in citizenship formation by questioning some of the practices of their leaders, particularly those concerning delegate selection and consultation procedures.

This close look at the making of Miskitu elections should serve to add nuance to the difficult subject of narco patronage in Indigenous organizations. Drug trafficking has profoundly affected the political system in Honduras as well as accelerated the dispossession of Indigenous and Afro-Indigenous peoples by financing the grabbing of land and resources. Narco patronage is present at every level of the Honduran political system (Spring, 2020), which means that its presence among Miskitu organization is part of this broader problem of governance. In other words, this situation does not represent a problem or pathology unique to Miskitu organizations

by any means. In fact, the Miskitu have enacted agency by using their moral economy as a guide to differentiating among sources of narco patronage. Addressing the effects of narco patronage should begin with removing some of the structural conditions that make organizations vulnerable to chronic underfunding and dependence.

CHAPTER 8: TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE

8.1 INTRODUCTION

On April 7, 2016, the president of Honduras visited the city of Puerto Lempira to formally cede the remaining inter-communal property titles for the territorial councils on the Platano River Biosphere Reserve. These titles crystallized MASTA's aspirations for consolidating the inter-communal property regime, but the symbolic documents came with strings attached. The president used the occasion to announce the new Alliance for the Development of Mosquitia (ADM), co-funded and organized by the Honduran government, the United Nations, and multiple bilateral aid agencies. "The time has come for Mosquitia," the president declared. "The priority of my administration is to develop the municipalities of the forgotten Honduras." (Gobierno de Honduras, 2016). In spite of the fact that MASTA had campaigned for property rights as a means of restricting agro-industrial development in Indigenous homelands, the president proposed to address the "problems of Mosquitia" by expanding palm oil investment and building infrastructure developments.

This chapter explores the tensions between development programs and the assertion of Miskitu sovereignty in the inter-communal property regime. Indigenous peoples have been fighting for the right to define development in their own terms as part of their struggles for self-determination (Escobar, 2008; Gudynas, 2011). MASTA believed that the inter-communal property titles protected the right of Miskitu communities to define a development agenda in the region. However, it was unclear how the government and donors' proposal to create the ADM would reconcile with MASTA's vision. This uncertainty took place in the context of what anthropologist Peter Larsen (2015) called "post-frontier resource governance." Larsen identified

the emergence of a new narrative that no longer characterized lowland forest areas as frontiers. Instead, through an array of explicit interventions to rationalize land tenure and land use, lowland forest areas could be thought of as orderly spaces. Indigenous land rights and community participation played an important role in this new reconfiguration of spatial order. However, Larsen argued that post-frontier discourses did not transform social relations and practices as much as re-positioned new interests on the frontier.

I examine the making of post-frontier resource governance in Moskitia by analyzing the dynamics surrounding the formation of a multi-stakeholder forum known as the Platform for Territorial Governance. This platform was created soon after the ADM's announcement to operationalize the principles of this new collaboration. The Platform was an example of the type of multi-stakeholders fora that had become popular to promote *good governance* (MacDonald et al., 2019; Sirimorok & Rusdianto, 2020). In Moskitia, the Platform's purpose was to serve as a coordination framework to discuss development policies in Moskitia. The chapter situates the discussion of the Platform for Territorial Governance within the broader critique of technologies of neoliberal governance. Governance, one of the development buzzwords par excellence, is considered to be a polysemic and ambiguous term (Bevir, 2008). For this reason, subaltern actors like Indigenous organizations have also been drawn to the discourse of governance even as they contested the neoliberal model (Benavides & Duarte, 2010). The analysis in this chapter is based on discourse analysis of the Platform's constitutive documents, participant observation of three meetings, and interviews with key stakeholders. In this chapter, I make three inter-related arguments.

The first argument is that the conjuring of 'territorial governance' is what enabled collaboration in the multi-stakeholder forum established in Moskitia. The concept of territorial

governance operated as a boundary object (Star, 1988; Star & Griesemer, 1989) that created a shared space for collaboration even as stakeholders held different interpretations of its meaning. The space for collaboration was enabled by a shared understanding that the Honduran state had a historical debt toward Moskitia. The government and donors created the Platform for Territorial Governance in response to this discourse of historical debt, a move endorsed by MASTA. However, the practices of the Platform were embedded in the unequal social relations that already characterized interactions among government agencies, donors, and Indigenous organizations. The institutional structure set up for the Platform by the government and donors was supposed to provide the space for enacting territorial governance, but MASTA pushed the boundaries of collaboration by engaging in social protest. The space of collaboration created by the conjuring of territorial governance was defined by the funding concerns, on the one hand, and contentious politics, on the other. Therefore, the discussion on territorial governance was not subsumed by the Platform's formal structure.

The second argument is that this collaboration around territorial governance illuminated two dynamics that constituted the practices of Miskitu sovereignty. On the one hand, the Honduran state refused to uphold its role as the underwriter of the historical debt to Moskitia by passing on this responsibility to the donors. On the other hand, MASTA could not afford a total refusal from the politics of recognition embedded in the Platform, but they continued to engage in contentious politics. Together, these two dynamics described the processual nature Miskitu sovereignty in a nested process that included not only the state and Indigenous peoples but also the donors.

The third and concluding argument is that the Platform by itself offered little chance to redirect the course of development in Moskitia. Most of the projects and programs discussed in

the Platform had already been predetermined by the government and donors, with little input from the Indigenous organizations. Some gains for Indigenous organizations, like the approval of the Saneamiento Decree, were only possible because of MASTA's social mobilization outside the structure of the Platform. With this loss of credibility, the Platform for Territorial Governance perished, but the idea of territorial governance continued to live on as the axis for enacting the inter-communal property regime.

8.2 APPROACHING TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE

Retracing the genealogy of the term *governance* is a good place to begin thinking about what is made possible by conjuring territorial governance. The dictionary defines governance as “the act or process of governing or overseeing the control and direction of something” (Governance, n.d.) The term, however, has acquired a particular meaning as part of neoliberal governmentality. The term became widely used in the political science and management literature in the 1990s to describe issues of decentralization and optimization (Bevir, 2008). The overall premise was that effective management required less direct control and emphasized the ability to manage relations—this idea was built on a polycentric model where power was assumed to be dispersed across multiple actors. The World Bank helped to popularize the concept in the 1990s when it promoted an agenda of good governance. This turn to governance in development policy was part of a revised Washington Consensus that recognized the importance of governance and institutional development issues in structural adjustment programs (Margheritis & Pereira, 2007). The embrace of governance among development agencies represented both the means to enable capitalism and the end goal of setting up neoliberal governmentality (Ferguson, 1994). The reproduction of this governmentality relied on

participation in fora such as multi-stakeholder fora that could align interests and foster new conducts (Green, 2010; Li, 2007).

The concept of *territorial governance* emerged as part of the good governance agenda highlighting the spatial components involved in coordinating across multiple scales. The European Commission (EC) was one of the early adopters of ‘territorial governance’ as an approach to contribute to good governance. For the EC, territorial governance meant the alignment of the multiple interests among its member states in order to achieve policy integration among member states (Stead, 2013, 2014). In Latin America, planners also adopted the term. Particularly, Brazilian scholars theorized territorial governance as part of the broader scheme of participatory planning instruments that had taken root in the country (Dallabrida, 2011; Dallabrida & Becker, 2003).

In Latin America, Indigenous peoples appropriated the concept of territorial governance to assert their claims for self-determination. Carlos Benavides and Carlos Duarte (2010) argued that in countries like Colombia, Indigenous organizations began using the term governance more explicitly in the 2000s after achieving the legal recognition of their land rights. The reason was that governance allowed them to make claims on a broader set of territorial rights beyond land ownership. There was no definitive moment associated with the emergence of ‘territorial governance’ to describe Indigenous territorial rights, as supposed to merely governance, but the term was popular among Indigenous organizations, NGOs, and donors in the 2010s (FAO & FILAC, 2021; Forest Trends, 2019; Merino, 2021).

Although the language of territorial governance promised to contribute to the assertion of self-determination, it also involved the risk of de-politicization. In particular, Duarte (2015) argued that the drive to incorporate the language of governance among Indigenous organizations

was leading to the creation of multiple institutions and instruments—universities, community justice protocols, planning tools—that were, nonetheless, deeply embedded in state logics. Furthermore, Duarte argued that the Indigenous leaders that participated in these institutional forms were caught in the contradiction of having to act simultaneously as government functionaries and community leaders. Nonetheless, Rappaport (2005) argued against this form of binary thinking, proposing that Indigenous leaders could advance the goals of the Indigenous movement from different institutional roles. My own analysis of Indigenous intellectuals in Moskitia in chapter 3 suggested that the context for collaborations mattered in interpreting which practices contributed to emancipatory causes and which ones did not.

I find boundary object to be a useful concept for understanding what enables collaboration in schemes like multi-stakeholder fora. The concept of boundary object has been widely adopted to refer to particular processes, things, or phenomena about which there are multiple and/or competing interpretations or perspectives (Star, 1988; Star & Griesemer, 1989). In this conceptual framework, the definition of an object is ecumenical and generally refers to “a set of work arrangements that are at once material and processual” (Star, 2010, p. 604). Objects can refer to concrete entities or ideas that provide “organic infrastructures” for collaboration that emerge from the interactions among members of different communities of practice (Star, 2010, p. 602). The boundary object exists as a framework for collaboration even if consensus is never reached on the subject under discussion (Star & Griesemer, 1989). The emphasis on collaboration without consensus is especially fitting to analyze scenarios like the Platform for Territorial Governance, in which the interests of stakeholders are not necessarily aligned, because it pays attention to those organic infrastructures that are created in the midst of participation.

I engage in debates on Indigenous sovereignty to analyze the political effects of collaborating in a boundary object. Like sovereignty, the adoption of territorial governance became another way for Indigenous peoples to participate in the game of recognition to assert their sovereignty. Some Indigenous scholars in North America had suggested that sovereignty had to either be indigenized (Coffey & Tsosie, 2001; Deloria Jr, 1979) or rejected (Alfred, 2009), leaving little room for ambiguity. I find Audra Simpson's (2014) concept of nested sovereignty particularly helpful for tracing a middle-ground that accounts for a more processual understanding of Indigenous sovereignty. Simpson proposed the concept of nested sovereignty to characterize the positioning of Indigenous political agency within settler colonialism. This nested process implied that Indigenous and settler sovereignties were connected but not subsumed by one another. She argued that Indigenous peoples navigated between accepting or refusing the politics of multiculturalism as an avenue to enact their sovereignty within this nested process.

For the rest of the chapter, I will explain the origins, implementation, and demise of the Platform for Territorial Governance. Then, I apply the concepts of boundary object and Indigenous sovereignty to analyze the experience of collaboration. I use boundary object to outline the organic infrastructure that resulted from collaborations when conjuring territorial governance. Then, I engage the discussion on nested sovereignty to reflect on the characteristics of Miskitu sovereignty with the practices of territorial governance. Finally, I conclude with some thoughts about the potential for influencing development policy in Moskitia in the inter-communal property regime.

8.3 THE PLATFORM FOR TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE IN MOSKITIA

i) Origins of the Platform

The use of the term territorial governance in Moskitia arose with the emergence of the inter-communal property regime. Before the inter-communal property titles were issued, the term “territorial governance” was not used. After the first property title was awarded in 2011, the World Bank-funded Land Administration Program (PATH) began to use this term to describe efforts aimed at drafting regulations for natural resource management and creating mechanisms for land conflict resolution in the titled territories. In parallel to the World Bank-funded project, MASTA had already begun using the language of governance to articulate their interests and demands for territory. Although MASTA had been involved with the land rights agenda since the late 1980s, its bylaws still described the organization’s mission in generic terms—“promoting the improvement of Gracias a Dios.” The bylaws had been issued in 1988, and their language reflected the organization’s origins as an interest-based group. However, this mission statement no longer represented how the organization had evolved. In 2010, MASTA had the opportunity to revise its mission statement during the preparation of its Lifeway Plan. The new mission statement was the following: “strengthening the autonomy and Indigenous governance of Moskitia’s territory revitalizing our culture and guaranteeing the legalization, administration, and effective control of our lands, territories, and natural resources.” Although MASTA did not use the specific term of territorial governance, the language clearly pointed to the coupling of governance and territory. Subsequently, MASTA interacted with projects, such as the World Bank-funded PATH, that were using this term.

The auto-saneamiento mobilization in 2015 encouraged the United Nations to seek out solutions to address governance issues in Moskitia. As described in chapter 5, the Miskitu-led

efforts to evict the Ladino colonists increased attention to the problem of land invasions in the region. Among the donor agencies, the United Nations became the most active in finding a solution to the conflict. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) had already been working with WAMAKLISCINASTA on their Lifeway Plan prior to the evictions. During the hostage negotiations, one of the agreements between the government and the territorial authorities was to invite the Special Rapporteur for Indigenous peoples at the United Nations. This visit was conducted in November 2015, during which the Special Rapporteur, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, found that little progress had been achieved toward completing the saneamiento (United Nations, 2016).

Around the same time as the Special Rapporteur's visit, the office of the United Nations in Honduras developed a more formal proposal for development planning that included the language of territorial governance as a master concept. The first time that territorial governance was made visible as a boundary object was in a workshop organized by the United Nations on November 17, 2015 (*Foto-resumen del taller de gobernanza territorial compartida para la Moskitia*, 2015). The memoir of the event stated that the objective was to “know the expectations and priorities of the local actors related to the construction of a shared territorial governance agenda in Moskitia as the basis for promoting sustainable and inclusive development” (*Foto-resumen del taller de gobernanza territorial compartida para la Moskitia*, 2015, p. 1). This event was the first of several that led to the formation of territorial governance as a boundary object.

From the beginning, it was clear that stakeholders held different interpretations of territorial governance. This type of “interpretative flexibility” (Star & Griesemer, 1989) is what gives life to the concept of a boundary object as a space of collaboration without consensus.

These differences appeared since the first workshop in November 2015, where the official version of territorial governance emphasized coordination, in clear contrast to the vision of autonomy that MASTA had attached to its version of governance. The memoir of the event presented this official version for territorial governance, summarized in a series of bullet points (see Box 1) as if it had been reached in consensus with meeting participants. However, another exercise conducted during the same workshop indicated that the participants had different expectations on what territorial governance ought to be. The organizers asked the participants to identify their priorities concerning territorial governance. These priorities were summarized in a table, reproduced here in Table 8.1. In essence, the priority was rule and law for the government, program effectiveness for the donors, and saneamiento and autonomy for the Indigenous organizations. These priorities anticipated that there would be conflict when trying to formalize the concept of territorial governance in the structure of the Platform.

Box 1: Definition of territorial governance. Taken from 2015, *Foto-resumen del taller de gobernanza territorial compartida para la Muskitia*, p. 4.

- It is a way of exercising authority over a territory or community where the responsible institutionality [sic], the applicable regulations and the existing human resources must be defined.
- It becomes a regulation that allows a good administration of resources and that is adopted by all.
- Ability to carry out good government and produce well-being in the community.
- Agreement process that is generated between different actors to make decisions based on current legislation and ancestral norms (Cosmovision), for an adequate administration of resources and thus be able to achieve a good life (Conflict resolution).
- Capacity of society in making agreements on the use and care (Comprehensive management) of resources in a planned way in the short, medium and long term for the benefit of the people, with solidarity to the poorest.
- Government mechanism within a legal and institutional framework that accounts for inclusive and democratic participation, respecting human rights and cultural values.
- Administration, care and conservation of the territory with structures and mechanisms that facilitate dialogue between local authorities, civil society and territorial councils.

Table 8.1: Priorities by stakeholder group. Taken from 2015, *Foto-resumen del taller de gobernanza territorial compartida para la Moskitia*, p. 4.

Group	Priorities
Government	• Institutional autonomy for resource management • Jurisprudence • Territorial and cultural rights in natural resource management • Human rights and socioeconomic well-being
Donors	• Harmonization of the legal framework • Institutional governance • Economic governance • Generation of knowledge and transformation of conflicts
Indigenous organizations	• Titling and saneamiento • Territorial administrative autonomy • Inclusion and recognition of indigenous and Afro-Honduran rights in the national legal framework • Strengthening of Indigenous and cultural institutions

ii) *The Formalization of the Platform*

The process to formalize the Platform started with the signing of a high-level political commitment that became known as the ADM. The idea for the ADM was also introduced by the United Nations as a first step toward constructing “shared territorial governance” in Moskitia. The government appropriated the idea and arranged to officially launch the ADM on the day that the president traveled to Puerto Lempira to deliver the remaining inter-communal property titles. On the day of the visit (April 7, 2016), representatives from the government, donors, and Indigenous organizations signed a *Memorandum of Understanding* that became the founding document for this new experience of territorial governance.

The Platform for Territorial Governance was officially launched a year after the ADM in April 2017. Its main purpose was to provide the institutional mechanism to enact the agreement made in the alliance. The Platform was composed of three working groups: The Justice and

Governability group, led by the departmental governor; the Economic Development and Natural Resources group, led by the regional representative of the Institute for Forest Conservation (ICF); and the Infrastructure and Social Development group, led by a technical officer at the Association of Municipalities of Gracias a Dios.

The rhetoric surrounding the Platform promised horizontal collaboration to promote participatory and sustainable development, but its formal structure reproduced the hierarchy of conventional development practices. This hierarchy was entrenched in the governance bodies that oversaw the ADM and the Platform, where the central government and donors maintained a privileged position vis-à-vis local governments and Indigenous organizations. In the alliance's steering council, the top position was always reserved for the government representative. Individual donors were allowed to have one representative each, but local governments and Indigenous organizations were restricted to only one per block. Likewise, in the Platform's governing board, the central government and donors had two representatives per block, but local governments and Indigenous organizations only had one each.

By design, the Platform was set to avoid conflict, which significantly undermined its potential for addressing concerns over territorial governance. The alliance's founding document promised that the programs and projects in the ADM would support "sustainable and inclusive development that incorporate[d] social, economic, and environmental dimensions under a rights-based and shared territorial governance approach" (Honduran Government, 2016, p. 1). However, the government and donor agencies that organized the Platform actively discouraged any kind of conflict mediation, which arguably might have contributed to the advance of this rights-based approach. This restriction was noted in the memoir for the event where the specific arrangements for the Platform were discussed (*Foto-resumen del segundo taller de la Plataforma*

de gobernanza territorial compartida para la Moskitia, 2016, p. 9). The main justification for imposing this restriction was that the Platform included too many stakeholders and would not be an effective space for conflict mediation.¹²⁸ Although the organizers seemed to be concerned with efficiency, this restriction seemed oblivious to the fact that the need for the said multi-stakeholder forum had been born out of interest to address governance issues like the auto-saneamiento mobilization.

iii) The Platform in Practice

The Platform had its first official meeting in April 2017. Although the government and donors claimed that the Platform could move forward an agenda for territorial governance, it was unclear how they would do it considering the constraints already noted above. In this section of the chapter, I describe the practices that emerged from participation in the Platform. I observe these practices during the course of three meetings that the Platform held during my time in the field in 2018. Overall, this section shows how MASTA grew further apart from the government and donors, rather than closer, during their participation in the Platform.

(1) March 2018

The Platform met for the third official time in March 2018. As in previous occasions, the meeting took place at the Center for the Learning of Indigenous people (CAPI). The venue was located in the outskirts of Puerto Lempira, in a spacious lot in the grassy pine savanna overlooking the point where a fresh-water and a salt-water lagoon met. The complex was made up of a two-story building with a large multipurpose room on the first floor and three smaller rooms on the second floor, a dormitory building, and a canteen. The complex was a 10-minute

¹²⁸ The platform was expected to have the participation of a maximum number of 40 participants in each of its quarterly meetings according to its bylaws.

ride from Puerto Lempira, but it already felt like the middle of the countryside. The large multipurpose room with a cool breeze and unobstructed view of the coastal landscape was a respite compared to the smaller, stifling room at Puerto Lempira's Catholic Church that was also used for this type of event. The distant location also made it more likely that attendees stayed for the entire duration of the event and discouraged non-invited guests. A taxi ride cost about \$5 dollars each way. To reach the venue, most attendees hitched a ride on the truck beds of government and donor vehicles or rode the only repurposed American school bus in the department of Gracias a Dios, which was chartered by the organizers.

The central government officials in charge of running the Platform arrived two days early on the flight from Tegucigalpa. Likewise, the representatives of donor agencies, NGOs, and other government institutions arrived directly from Tegucigalpa or traveled by road to La Ceiba to catch the plane. Arriving on the direct flight from the capital city denoted status, as the airfare was significantly more expensive. The Indigenous representatives arrived by air, road, or boat, depending on the location. The largest portion of the event's budget included paying for the participants' travel and per diem. Donor agencies usually paid for the mobilization of the Indigenous representatives and sometimes for government officials too. The event brought together about 60 participants. In preparation for the main event, participants first met separately as part of three stakeholder groups—government, donors, and Indigenous leaders—and subsequently as part of three working groups to discuss progress by sector. The leaders of the working groups, who were local civil servants, presented the results of each sector during the plenary. This cascading structure was built on the principle of subsidiarity. Central government officials were supposed to take note of issues that required the involvement of other state actors not present and report back at the next meeting.

Since this is the Platform's third meeting, MASTA was already expecting that the government would have been able to make more progress over saneamiento. During the previous meeting, in October 2017, the participants in the Justice and Governance working group had discussed an initial draft of a ministerial decree that, once approved, would set up the legal basis for saneamiento. For the current meeting, MASTA was expecting the decree would have already been approved. However, MASTA discovered that the government had the intention of using the meeting to review a slightly modified draft of the decree. MASTA's leadership considered that they had taken a step back in the process of saneamiento. One of MASTA's elders, Dolly Diaz, voiced this frustration in the following way:

Sometimes I think, as an elder, that maybe it is the will of the government to allow the third-party colonists to come and grab land here in Moskitia. Is it? If the Government cannot deliver saneamiento, then let it tell us because we cannot starve. Then we will do auto-saneamiento. And is that good? Does the government want that? So, as an elder, I do want [the government] to tell us and to give us an immediate way out. A preventive measure. How to prevent it? How to stop [third-party colonists]? Our authorities who oversee the forests are on top of the [local] people who cut timber, but what about those who are clearing [forests] in large quantities? Nothing! They are not in prison. Our military does nothing. So, comrades, I believe that for us, as elders, I say from my heart please, as long as there is no solution on the issue of saneamiento, for the Miskito people, all this work does not serve us (Fieldnotes, 2018).

MASTA's leaders mentioned that there was no point in participating in the Platform any further if the government did not approve the saneamiento decree. Although MASTA was not officially boycotting the Platform (yet), their comments had thrown the Platform's credibility into question. The idea for the ADM and the Platform had emerged right after the event of auto-saneamiento as a way of institutionalizing a response to prevent future conflict. However, in MASTA's eyes, the government did not seem committed to finding a solution for saneamiento.

In the aftermath of this meeting, MASTA's leaders also grew frustrated with the donors' approach to territorial governance. This frustration became more apparent in a workshop

organized by the SCO-funded Prawanka in May 2018, where both municipal governments and territorial councils were invited to discuss the harmonization of local governance procedures. The NGO officers who organized the workshop were hoping for a dialogue between the two parties that would help to identify areas of conflict and gaps in the legal framework. For example, some of the grey areas included those who had the authority to levy taxes and issue land use ordinances. However, when I talked to some of MASTA's leaders who attended the workshop, they mentioned that the NGO had sided with the municipal authorities. My own understanding from talking with the NGO officers who facilitated the workshop was they delivered a presentation to explain the Municipal Law. This law did not include any provisions recognizing Indigenous jurisdictions. Although the NGO officers may have been acting in good faith by explaining the current legal framework, in MASTA's eyes, they had not been proactive enough in countering the settler-colonial logic in the law.

This frustration over the workshop was part of a deeper conflict between MASTA and the donors that had been building for a while. This conflict had to do with the way that donor agencies managed project funds. In the Platform, donors promised shared governance, but in practice, they continued to maintain tight control over the allocation of resources. MASTA argued that the territorial councils should be empowered to define priorities for funding and manage the resources. MASTA complained that donors were still channeling part of their funding through the municipal governments, which competed against the territorial councils. In more extreme cases, MASTA perceived some of the donors as interfering directly with the internal politics of the territorial councils by supporting individuals who were against saneamiento (this issue is covered at greater length in chapters six and seven).

(2) June 2018

The next official event for the Platform was held in June 2018, two months after the last meeting. The government planned for this event to be an interim meeting, between plenary sessions, to provide follow-up. Therefore, the number of people invited to participate was smaller than for the previous meeting. Although MASTA's leaders were invited to attend the event, they decided to boycott the Platform. The boycott was their response to the lack of support that they felt they were getting from the government and donors to address saneamiento. MASTA had lost trust that the Platform could serve as an appropriate space to voice their concerns over territorial governance. They announced their decision to boycott the Platform in a statement that was sent to the government and donors. MASTA's leaders did not hold any protests; they simply did not show up to the event.

I was curious to find out what the Platform would look like without MASTA's participation. In the previous meeting, MASTA's participation is what had given the Platform the quality of a multi-stakeholder forum that had to manage high-profile competing interests. For the event in June, participants were asked to meet separately in each of the working groups for the first day and come together on the second day. During the first day, I attend the Economic Development and Natural Resources working group in the morning and the Justice and Governability working group in the afternoon. Both working groups have a low turnout as a result of MASTA's boycott.

About thirty people participated in the Economic Development and Natural Resources working group, which met in the conference room of a community credit union. The meeting had a down-to-business tone. The group's coordinator sat at a desk located in the front of the room and typed on a laptop projecting onto a blank screen. The coordinator opened a spreadsheet with

a matrix that included rows for each of the activities and columns to track their status. The morning session was spent discussing each of the activities. The relevant donor or government agency in charge of each activity would provide an update on implementation and recommend future action. The topic that inspired the most comments among participants was the question of how to promote entrepreneurship among the Indigenous population. A seasoned NGO administrator, who had just recently been posted in Puerto Lempira, argued that the donors had yet to figure out an entrepreneurial model that was culturally appropriate for the Miskitu. Other NGO workers contended that their projects were already doing this. The rest of the meeting went on without major disruptions. This meeting was perhaps the only one during my time in the field where I did not see Indigenous leaders intervening to make appeals for more resources or accuse leaders and/or NGO workers of favoritism or corruption. Although there were few participants, there were a few community leaders among them who could have reproduced this dynamic. The down-to-business tone of the meeting seemed related to the fact that MASTA's leaders were absent, which put the government and donor representatives more in charge.

MASTA's absence was more notable in the meeting for the Justice and Governability working group, where the issue of saneamiento was discussed. The meeting was only attended by fifteen individuals, three of them representatives of the Tawahka, Garifuna, and Pech organizations. On the topic of the saneamiento decree, the highest-ranking central government representative mentioned that President Hernandez was expected to approve the decree in the next cabinet meeting. There were no questions or follow-up by the audience. Earlier during the meeting, however, the more contentious issues of land grabbing and saneamiento had crept into the conversation as part of the discussion of other issues. When the central government representative suggested that the Indigenous organizations dealt with the lack of operational

budget by collaborating with the municipalities to socialize their causes in town hall meetings, one of the Indigenous leaders contended that the mayors were not always favorable to their cause. He mentioned how the mayor was collaborating with third-party colonists to grab Indigenous land and the death threats that he himself had received. The governor dismissed the accusations against the mayor and complimented him for acting like a “zambo” even though he was ladino.¹²⁹ The other time that saneamiento was mentioned was in the context of a new consultancy on gender that one of the donors had commissioned. The only female representative among the Indigenous organizations shared that she was able to talk directly about saneamiento with the third-party colonists because people were used to interacting with her in her role as a nurse. The discussion, however, was bracketed as a positive example of the difference that women in leadership can make. There was no further discussion on the actual dangers of implementing the saneamiento decree once approved.

The next day’s large-group session followed the same low-key political attitude of the previous day. There were rumors that MASTA might show up, but they did not. The meeting was a combination of clarification about the implementation status of various projects, brainstorming solutions for problem-solving, and congratulatory messages for the work of the Platform. While in the previous meeting, the main tension was between the government and MASTA, as it usually was, in this meeting, the tension was between the central and local government officials. The local government officials complained that they were kept in the dark about program coordination and budget programming in Tegucigalpa and that they lacked the capacity to influence decisions concerning the region. They asked the central government commissioner to represent their interests. In response, the commissioner said that he was glad to

¹²⁹ Zambo is a derogatory term for referring to Miskitu.

comply but that he always needed an official written request. With that letter, he promised to “breath down the neck of the minister until the request was fulfilled.” The audience laughed. The local government officials had to wait and see how effective the Platform could be to channel their demands.

The representatives of the donor agencies took a back seat during the large-group meeting. The two consultants hired by one of the donors to coordinate the event were busy in the background running all the logistics. It was clear that without the donor support, the event would not be taking place. The previous day, the donor agencies had played a more active role in the Economic Development and Natural Resource group, but in the plenary, it was the local government representatives that did all the talking. For the donors, they were fulfilling their mission of fostering dialogue among different government agencies. Donor support for events like this was supposed to generate trust and support for their projects and coordinate activities that would facilitate implementation. However, the donors failed in integrating Indigenous organizations.

The Indigenous representatives were not given any space to share during the plenary. Although MASTA had not sent official representation, the presidents of the Garifuna, Pech, and Tawahka organizations attended the plenary. They did not ask questions either. The meeting ended unceremoniously ahead of schedule, and we were asked to stay for a few more minutes until the snacks could arrive. The central government commissioner called on the Indigenous leaders for a private meeting while we waited for the snacks. I could not tell what topics were discussed in the private meeting, but it was worth noting that this was the only time in which their participation was requested during the event.

(3) December 2018

The event in December 2018 followed the same format as the plenary that had taken place in March. During the first day, each of the working groups met separately, and the next day everybody got together in CAPI for the plenary. There were about 140 people at the plenary event. The conference hall was packed, and some people had to stand on the back and outside looking in from the large windows. The big question lingering in my mind was whether MASTA's leadership would show up for the event or would they continue the boycott?

Since the last event in June, the conditions for exerting pressure had changed for MASTA. In August, MASTA had experienced the governance crisis described in chapter 7, which had resulted in the election of two boards. The two factions competed for the government's sanctioning of their board, which would occur when the public registry accepted the inscription of one over the other. The two elected presidents—Norvin Goff and Snyder Paisano—were in attendance that day. The tone in the meeting was rather courteous, but I could only imagine the tension between the two factions. Under these conditions, I reasoned that Goff's faction, which had organized the boycott, could not afford to lose the opportunity to participate in the Platform and gain visibility with the government and donors.

A minister attended the Platform for the first time. The minister was given the honor of opening the event. He gave an unceremonious speech more befitting to a government bureaucrat than a politician. The central message was that the government was already showing results and that the "people" were seeing that President Hernandez fulfilled his promises. "We can work together, as long as we agree that Moskitia's development is the ultimate objective," the minister said almost as a warning against making demands that were outside the established objectives of a development agenda. The minister revealed that the president had asked him to attend the

meeting to “accelerate processes and to give answers.” Probably, his presence signaled that the President wanted to keep a closer eye on the Platform after what had taken place with MASTA’s governance crisis.

Despite the government’s best effort to keep the meeting’s focus on program management, the topic of saneamiento came back to the forefront. The topic was initially brought out by one of the central government representatives that provided an update of the progress achieved in the Justice and Governability group. Despite promises made in the last meeting in June, the decree had not yet been approved. “The Council of Ministers could approve the decree tomorrow, that is not the problem, but it would be irresponsible without assigning it a budget.” With this explanation, the government official made it seem that the government’s commitment to saneamiento was so firm that it could not be done without giving it an appropriate budget first. The official moved to the next list of deliverables—training provided, territorial elections organized, agreements with the Indigenous organizations, signed, etc.

The official finished the presentation and was about to sit down when a Miskitu leader raised his hand and asked if he could ask questions. The official accepted. “We went to Tegucigalpa in August, and they told us that INA already had a budget,” the Miskitu leader said. “Why are you telling us that there is no budget?” INA’s saneamiento expert, who most likely was the source of this information, was sitting in the front row. The official that delivered the presentation could not hide her discomfort at the contradictory messages from two government officials. INA’s staff were seen as more left-leaning, protected by a union. A government official I interviewed earlier had referred to them as “the resistance within the government.” The official responded to the question by normalizing the lack of budget approval:

The approval of the decree is not the problem. The lack of budget is something normal that always happens when there is a change in government because there is less control. There is nothing unusual going on, but we need to see how different pieces add together in the national budget.

The Indigenous participants did not seem satisfied with this reply, and hands started to go up all across the room. The impromptu discussion over saneamiento disrupted the agenda put together by the government and the donors. MASTA's reelected president, Norvin Goff, provided his remarks.

We can talk about cacao and basic grains, but we will not move forward if our lands have been invaded. The Warunta area in Wampusirpi has been invaded by people who have come after being displaced by the Patuca III. The Patuca III is in Olancho, but we are living the consequences here. We do not want to repeat the same situation in Auka where the people had to rise up. The people had to defend themselves, and even so, the court issued an arrest warrant for three Indigenous leaders. They called us cow stealers, terrorists. We do not want this situation to happen again. If mahogany has to be sold, then let it be sold as long as the budget is achieved (Fieldnotes, 2018).

After a few interventions by Indigenous leaders, the highest-level official in attendance stood up to calm the situation:

Rest assured that an answer will be given. I do not want to make promises but expect the best effort in the quickest possible time... rest assured that we will not return unless we have an answer (Fieldnotes, 2018).

The minister's remarks, however, were similar to earlier promises that the saneamiento decree was ready for approval. The Platform's delegate said that the budget that was required was not only for INA but also for the Attorney's Office, the military, and the police. The official that gave the presentation asked INA's representative to clarify the confusion over the budget. It seemed like she was challenging INA to align with the government's position.

INA's representative stood calmly, walked to the front of the room, and faced the audience. It did not seem like he was intimidated by the other government representatives. He started by saying that from INA's point of view, the saneamiento decree was ready. Addressing

the budget issue, he said that the financial cost would not be high because the third parties would not be compensated.

Compensation was a forbidden word. There will not be any kind of compensation... We have to consider the environmental impact done by the third-party colonists. They cut down the forest, use the timber that belonged to the territory. The only materials they brought with them were the nails and the zinc sheets. If we consider the environmental damage against the things that they brought, they still lose. They would be the ones paying compensation (Fieldnotes, 2018).

The Indigenous leaders clapped to support the remarks made by INA's representative. This was the first time that I heard a government official speak with such resoluteness about saneamiento in the Platform. Previous discussions about saneamiento were about the procedures for drafting and approving the decree, but the substantive issues were not discussed. Participants continued to discuss saneamiento for another twenty minutes. More people want to participate, but the moderator, an NGO worker, said that they were behind schedule and asked the next working group to present their results.

The rest of the morning session was spent reporting the activities of the other working groups. The working groups split in the afternoon to discuss topics in more detail. I attended the Infrastructure and Social Development working group because I was unable to participate in the previous event in June. I was surprised that most of the discussion was about a new electricity generator that a donor agency had donated to the municipality of Puerto Lempira. The more contentious topic of the proposed road between Wampusirpi to Puerto Lempira was not discussed. The two Miskitu representatives in the working group also seemed uninformed about the topics that were going to be discussed. Most of the conversation was among the municipal authorities and a civil society group that had been created to oversee energy development in the city.

After more than six hours, the participants' energy during the concluding plenary was low. The chairs for each of the working groups gave a summary of the discussions and identified the goals for the next period. There were no questions or interruptions from the audience. It seemed that the event was about to end when Dolly Diaz, the elder who had given the speech on saneamiento last time, asked if he could say a few words. He went to the front of the room and said that if the government did not resolve the question of saneamiento that they would take matters into their own hands. He invited the Indigenous representatives to join him. The presidents of the Miskitu councils and of the Garifuna, Pech, and Tawhaka organizations joined Diaz. There was silence in the room as they stood up and walked toward the front of the room.

I did not expect this symbolic act considering that most of the day had gone without major confrontations. It was interesting that this time, Diaz delivered this message at the end rather than the beginning of the Platform. It was as if MASTA knew that they could not afford to boycott the rest of the discussion on programs and projects funded by the government and donors.

iv) The Collapse of the Platform

The Indigenous leadership seemed to have participated optimistically during the first meetings of the Platform, but by the third meeting held in March 2018, they had lost patience with the government's delays over the approval of the saneamiento decree and the donor's lack of disregard for the autonomy of the territorial councils. Between March and June, they had switched to the strategy of boycotting the Platform. However, by December, this strategy was no longer tenable because of the governance crisis that was affecting MASTA. Once again, MASTA participated in the Platform and continued to push for the approval of the saneamiento decree. However, this rapprochement with the Platform did not last.

After the meeting in December 2018, the Platform essentially disintegrated. The Platform existed on paper, but it lost its legitimacy as a multi-stakeholder forum. I argue that the main reason for the Platform's dissolution was MASTA's return to a more confrontational form of politics. In an official statement dated March 29, 2019, they thanked President Hernandez for the effort to establish the ADM. However, they openly criticized functionaries of the central government and the mayor of Puerto Lempira for attempting to discredit MASTA. They directly accused the commissioner in charge of running the Platform for Territorial Governance of interfering with their internal politics. It was clear that from that point on, the commissioner no longer had the credibility to spearhead the Platform.

MASTA's efforts were part of a campaign that they named "*Atahki Nikbanka*" (Unity Movement). The campaign began on April 22, 2019. This name symbolized that the Miskitu were united under a single MASTA, despite the fact that the conflict with the other faction had not been resolved yet. The main grievances of the Unity Movement were the approval of the saneamiento decree and stopping the government from interfering in their internal affairs. Especially, they accused the municipal authorities in Puerto Lempira of trying to undermine MASTA's authority by supporting the other faction and granting land titles on land titled to the territorial councils. MASTA's supporters occupied the buildings of the municipality, the Governor's Office, and the Institute of Forest Conservation in Puerto Lempira. The strike at the ICF's offices ended after a week when the Minister agreed to a meeting to discuss the process for the approval of forest management plans. The strike continued in the municipality until the end of May and the Governor's Office until June.

A series of dialogues between MASTA and the municipality of Puerto Lempira was organized in late May. As a result of the dialogue, MASTA and the municipality agreed on a

number of points to improve their relationship. The first was for the municipality to recognize the authority of the territorial councils. The municipality also agreed to a financial audit and to a review of the titles that they had extended on lands titled under the territorial councils. The language of governance was not completely thrown out of the picture. One of the agreements was to “search for experiences for the strengthening of an effective governance between the municipal governments and the Indigenous territorial governments in countries where these models exist” (MASTA & Corporación Municipal de Puerto Lempira, 2019, p. 2). It is also interesting that this is one of the few documents where the territorial councils are referred to as “Indigenous territorial governments.”

After the negotiation with the municipality was concluded, MASTA continued to occupy the Governor’s office. Earlier in May, the central government had issued a statement in which they had promised that INA would open an office in Puerto Lempira to start receiving complaints against third-party colonists and that budget would be allocated to remove the obstacle preventing the approval of the saneamiento decree. However, by June 2019, the government had not yet issued the saneamiento decree. To mount more pressure, MASTA organized a march in July that culminated with a protest outside the President’s office in Tegucigalpa. The pressure worked, and the saneamiento decree was finally approved on July 15, 2019. In a way, MASTA had used the same combination of negotiation and contentious politics that had worked to get Lobo to agree to the titling of the territorial council.

8.4 ANALYSIS

i) Territorial Governance as a Boundary Object

The Platform’s short lifespan, from April 2017 to MASTA’s uprising in 2019, might suggest a failure of collaboration. MASTA turned to the streets to protest a breach from the

moral economy of Miskitu property. They acted to push the government and donors to respect Miskitu property rights and autonomy, mobilizing the inter-communal property regime to neutralize the Platform. However, in this chapter, I want to raise attention to a different way of understanding collaboration. I suggest that the idea of territorial governance is what enabled collaboration much more than the formal structure set up by the Platform. In other words, the Platform should be understood within the broader landscape of collaboration outlined by territorial governance. Following Star and Griesemer (1989), I argue that territorial governance operates as a boundary object that defines a space for collaboration without consensus. Attributing the qualities of boundary object is useful not only to acknowledge the interpretative flexibility of the term but also to consider the organic infrastructure that sustains collaboration beyond those formally inscribed in the Platform's bylaws. Star and Ruhleder (1996) explain that organic infrastructures consist of structures, social arrangements, and technologies that act as conventions and/or standards that enable collaboration. These infrastructures are themselves embedded into other structures but should be transparent so as to enable their use.

One characteristic defining how stakeholders use territorial governance in Moskitia is the almost inevitable reference to the *deuda historica* [historical debt] that the Honduran state has toward the region. This reference to the historical debt is explicitly mentioned in the Platform's founding document, where the region is defined as "historically marginalized and unattended," therefore requiring special attention (Honduran Government, 2016, p. 1). I argue that for the Honduran government, this idea of the historical debt does not necessarily emerge from the breach of the social contract but has a particular meaning attached to the earlier failures to accomplish the civilization program in Moskitia. For this reason, the government employs the term of historical debt to refer to the Miskitu but not to other Indigenous peoples in central and

western Honduras. Likewise, MASTA latches on the discourse of the historical debt but for other reasons. For MASTA, the historical debt represents the obligation that the Honduran government acquired to respect the property rights of the Miskitu people in the 1859 Wykes-Cruz Treaty. This notion of historical debt not only served as the rationale for the inter-communal property titles and saneamiento but remains a tenet for invoking Miskitu sovereignty. Therefore, historical debt functioned as a convention that enables the Honduran government and MASTA to collaborate.

Using historical debt as a convention of practice pointed to who would pay for it. The government expected donors to underwrite the historical debt. This practice resembled those of an earlier period when the government looked for foreigners to invest in the development of Moskitia. I also find that donors, who are relatively new users of this convention of the historical debt, have also learned to adapt it for their purposes. The United Nations representation in Honduras seemed genuinely concerned in preventing conflict in Moskitia by finding an institutional mechanism that would help pay for the historical debt owed to Moskitia. However, donors could also latch on to a more negative side of this convention. For example, the discussion about the appropriateness of having organizational models adapted to the Miskitu culture expressed both concern and judgment. On more than one occasion, I heard non-Miskitu aid workers referring to this need for special treatment in terms of the historical underdevelopment of the region. This way of mobilizing the convention reproduced the racialized tropes that portrayed the Miskitu as lazy and unavailable to do collective work (Mollett, 2011).

The space of collaboration created by conjuring territorial governance is shaped by funding concerns, on the one hand, and the Miskitu moral economy, on the other. Donor funding

was the gravitational force that attracted the other stakeholders to the Platform. This dimension was explicitly stated in the ADM's founding document, which described its objective as promoting "the cooperation and coordination among the parties to launch, finance, co-finance, administer, and execute programs and project" (Honduran Government, 2016, p. 1). The government wanted the donors to underwrite the historical debt. MASTA also wanted the donors to fund development programs in the region. In fact, their reason to boycott the Platform was not that they were against the presence of donors but rather that they wanted more voice in funding priorities and allocation of resources. In turn, the donors benefited from the participation of government and Indigenous organizations to track and manage their projects, thus improving their effectiveness. The participation of these stakeholders in a forum, such as the Platform, also added legitimacy to their activities for promoting good governance. In fact, the social practices of donors significantly shaped the practices of the Platform, which in turn affected the broader space of collaboration. Officially, the central government coordinated the Platform, but in practice, donors financed and coordinated the logistics for these events. The programs funded by these donors became the building blocks of the Platform. Meetings revolved around the tracking and management of these programs, especially when MASTA was absent. Sometimes, this tracking and management occurred literally in the form of filling out reports on an Excel sheet projected on the screen for everyone in the audience to see.

MASTA exerted its own pressure to ensure that collaboration was not constrained by the donor-dominated platform. They employed a repertoire of contentious politics that included boycott, marches, and occupations that built on practices of social protests among the Miskitu. At the height of its internal governance crisis, MASTA had to evaluate its strategy and temporarily suspend the boycott. However, when the government continued to lag on the

approval of the saneamiento decree and interfere in their internal politics, they scaled up the protest by organizing the Unity Movement. By doing so, they forced the government agencies to collaborate with them outside the Platform, but still, while both parties held the banner of territorial governance. This collaboration further advanced discussions about territorial governance in ways that were not possible in the Platform's formal structure. This social action showed that participation in the Platform did not de-politicize MASTA and that territorial governance had a larger scope than simply that contained in the Platform's structure.

ii) Territorial Governance and Nested Sovereignty

The collaboration that resulted from conjuring territorial governance illuminated two dynamics that helped to shape the contours of Miskitu sovereignty. One dynamic concerned the state's failure to enact its own sovereignty; the other dynamic pointed to MASTA's dependence on the development apparatus for securing the project of territorial governance. Together, these two dynamics described the processual nature Miskitu sovereignty in a nested process that included not only the state and Indigenous peoples but also the donors.

Invoking the convention of the historical debt was also a way for the Honduran government to deflect the underwriting responsibility to the donors. I show this attitude by pointing to what a government official told me about his experience during one of the scouting missions for the formation of the ADM. He described the interaction with the Miskitu participants in this way:

They put together a list for Santa Claus. It was too much! If you sum up all the projects that they had requested to different ministers, it adds to over 100. The government does not have the capacity to fulfill all those demands... We have always told MASTA that they need to prioritize (Fieldnotes, 2015).

The government official offered the excuse that the state did not have the budget to cover all those demands. However, it was not that the state did not have enough funds but rather that it had consistently failed to fight the chronic corruption and revert the de-funding of the public sector, which were primarily responsible for why government institutions operated under tight budgets (Chayes, 2017). This concern over lack of funding was not only concerning the demands of the Indigenous organizations. Donor funding also went to support the work of the municipal governments. Therefore, for the government officials, territorial governance was a way to enact decentralization under fiscal austerity.

The ADM provided a convenient way for the government to engage donors with funding programs that could be seen as helping them fulfill the historical debt. In fact, the government had in mind a co-financing mechanism similar to the one they had established for the Dry Corridor, a region in Southcentral Honduras prone to droughts and with high levels of poverty. In that region, the government had set up a trust fund to administer money from USAID, the Canadian Agency for Development, and the World Bank toward infrastructure and other social programs during the Hernandez administration. They wanted to repeat the same model for the Moskitia. The Hernandez administration was starting to use trust funds to seek out co-financing from the donors and the private sector. They were relatively easy to establish, and one of the main advantages was that they were exempt from many of the public procurement regulations. This feature made disbursements more agile, but it also raised concerns about corruption and mismanagement (Chayes, 2017).

The plans for a trust fund in Moskitia were never made public, and, in the end, it did not materialize. One of the government officials I interviewed mentioned that one of the advantages would have been the additional source of funding for the central government to attend to issues

in Moskitia (Fieldnotes, 2017). The government official was referring to the perceived higher cost of monitoring activities in the department of Gracias a Dios. Government bureaucrats often complained that they did not have the funds to assign personnel to travel the region, which they said was one of the main reasons why the population was underserved. The trust fund could have provided a source of discretionary funds for central government officials to cover the cost of servicing the region. The trust fund, however, was never established. Donors continued to maintain their funding streams separate from the government, but they helped to finance the participation of government officials in the events of the Platform.

Like the government, MASTA also depended on the donors to maintain the flow of programs and projects to the region. These programs not only served the needs of the Miskitu populations but also provided financial assistance for the operation of the territorial councils, as shown in chapter 7. During the Platform's meeting held in March 2018, MASTA made the donors aware that they valued their programs but that they believed that saneamiento should be the priority. When the government and donors did not follow through in the way MASTA expected, they boycotted the Platform. However, the boycott had its consequences. Under these conditions of distancing, the donors were less willing to openly support MASTA's incumbent leaders when they went through the governance crisis in the summer of 2018. MASTA had to return to the Platform, even if it was briefly, to reestablish the relationship with the government and donors. The subsequent break-up in April 2019 indicated that this was a dynamic process, which involved a lot of back-and-forth in the way that MASTA asserted sovereignty through the conjuring of territorial governance.

I argue that MASTA's (dis)engagement with the Platform indicated how they oscillated between recognition and refusal in the nested process of governance. The social protest was

never a complete refusal of the politics of recognition embedded in the Platform. The social protest was rather a means to seek better terms to accommodate their interests. The corollary to this argument is that the Platform did not de-politicize MASTA either. Therefore, the conjuring of territorial governance led to a practice of Miskitu sovereignty characterized by both engagement and disengagement.

8.5 CONCLUSION

For the conclusion, I want to return to the concern signaled in the introduction to this chapter about MASTA's ability to redirect development policy under the inter-communal property regime. It is useful to separate between the Platform's formal structure and the deployment of territorial governance as a boundary object. If we look only at the Platform's formal structure, then the answer is that MASTA had little leeway to shape the development agenda. The Platform provided few spaces of formal representation in governance bodies, and the projects and programs that were monitored had already been decided upon by the government and donors. The Platform was a space to coordinate the *existing* development project, not to create a *new* one.

However, the conjuring of territorial governance highlighted MASTA's agency. After a boycott, occupations, and a march, the government approved the saneamiento decree. In other words, contentious politics were still necessary to enact the inter-communal property regime. The post-frontier resource narrative identified by Larsen (2015) was not a mere rhetorical device to carry on with conventional development. MASTA's actions ensured that the narrative had some effects in counteracting power imbalances in the formal structures of participation.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION

When I visited Honduras in 2015, I was struck by the way that one of MASTA's representatives used a PowerPoint slide to articulate their vision for an Indigenous government in Moskitia. The presentation slide centered on the question of governing Moskitia by bounding a territory, a population, and an authority. The topic of the presentation that day was a participatory mapping project that MASTA had recently completed in one of the territorial councils, which they hoped to repeat in all of them. The mapping project represented MASTA's ambition to move its governance agenda forward. This event was the first of many that motivated me to look at MASTA as a state-like entity that engaged in what I referred to as Indigenous state formation in their efforts to transform property titles into jurisdictions.

The mapping project turned out to be an ominous example of what to expect from these efforts. Believing that the mapping project would have an important consequence in defining the practices of Indigenous state formation in Moskitia, I set to study how these maps would be used to conduct land use planning and other decisions affecting the territory. MASTA managed to complete the project in seven of the twelve territorial councils, but the efforts stopped when the external funding dried out. I asked how the maps were being used, but no one was able to tell me. The only time that I encountered one of these maps in the field was in a meeting at the territorial council of KATAINASTA, where one of the leaders had saved the banner with the image of the map that had been used in a public presentation organized by the donors two years earlier. The leader proudly displayed the banner in the church to symbolize the space where a meeting of the territorial council was about to take place. The mapping project was a useful reminder that Indigenous state formation worked through the production of an imaginary—one

that MASTA hoped that one day would help re-organize meanings, actions, and regimes of accumulation in Moskitia.

In this dissertation, I made three claims about the process of Indigenous state formation in Honduran Moskitia. First, the weak capacity of the Honduran state to assert its own sovereignty had to be considered. I argued that this weak capacity led to a situation in which the Moskitia region had *de facto* autonomy from the Honduran state up until the mid-twentieth century. However, the weak presence of the Honduran state also created a scenario in which foreign actors, from nineteenth-century mahogany traders to present-day donor agencies, have exerted a large influence on the governance of the region. Second, the inter-communal property regime was built around the need to defend the traditional land tenure system from Ladino colonization. However, variations to the Miskitu moral economy across sub-regions shaped different views about the territorial councils as state-like jurisdictions. Third, physical and organizational infrastructures constrained the mobilization of technologies of citizenship. These constraints emerged from the structural violence of the settler-colonial state and created chronic underfunding and relations of dependence for MASTA and the territorial councils. Nonetheless, the Miskitu were also interacting with these infrastructures to construct new meanings of citizenship and enact their sovereignty. Based on these claims, I provide three reflections on the future of the inter-communal property regime as an expression of Indigenous state formation.

First, the Honduran state is likely to attempt the weakening of the inter-communal property regime by delaying *saneamiento* and failing to approve the legal reforms to clarify the status of the territorial councils as state-like jurisdictions. MASTA would continue to engage in contentious politics to maintain *saneamiento* on the agenda, but these efforts most likely would require external assistance to exert sufficient pressure on the Honduran state. There are at least

three potential instances that could help channel this external pressure. First, donors could become more assertive and offer more direct support to MASTA to finance activities related to saneamiento, mitigating the government's excuses that they do not have enough budget. However, this strategy involves the risk of perpetuating the relations of dependence between donors and the territorial councils. Second, MASTA might try to seek legal redress by suing the Honduran state using the Inter-American Human Rights System. Legal action by the Mayagna in Nicaragua and Maya in Belize using the Inter-American Human Rights System was crucial to get Central American countries to recognize territorial rights (Wainwright & Bryan, 2009). Although a lawsuit might help elevate the cause for saneamiento, the experience with the titling efforts suggests that any recommendation or ruling might not be sufficient to guarantee enforcement. Third, the U.S. government, which has remained relatively on the side on the question of the inter-communal property regime, could decide to voice support to the Miskitu. It is plausible that the U.S. government becomes increasingly interested in saneamiento as part of an agenda to reduce vulnerability to the drug trade. The U.S. Department of Defense already showed an interest in funding the Bowman Expedition that conducted the mapping in Moskitia. The involvement of the U.S. government could incentivize the participation of international conservation agencies to support saneamiento as a strategy to reduce deforestation and forest degradation. However, the involvement of the U.S. government could make the Miskitu more prone to surveillance and ultimately result in more violence if the security apparatus turns against the population.

Second, Miskitu leaders will continue to be in a tight spot trying to legitimate their authority in front of the Miskitu population. I identify at least two challenges in this arena. First, acting like state-like bureaucrats will require that the leaders spend more time away from the

communities, which might compromise their status as community members in the eyes of others—maintaining this status as community members is important because it can help to improve their legitimacy vis-à-vis the local government officials. Under current conditions, territorial leaders are disadvantaged because they do not have the means to enact law and order or fund development in the same way that local government officials do. However, they could improve their legitimacy by using their insider/outsider positionality in the community to become more effective brokers between the Miskitu population and external actors. Second, leaders would need to find a way to respond to local conditions in each territorial council while maintaining policy coherence for the inter-communal property regime. Local planning instruments could help leaders achieve this goal, but the experience with the Lifeway Plans suggested that the process mattered more than form. Donors prescribed the format for the Lifeway Plans. There was a bona fide effort to make the content relevant to the communities, such as collecting information about Miskitu spirituality and community histories. However, this information ended being filed away in a document. The only Lifeway Plan that seemed to matter was WAMAKLISCINASTA's, but its significance had little to do with the content of the plan itself. The Lifeway Plan was important because it gave people an opportunity to assess the situation of Ladino colonization in their territory and plan concrete actions. This experience suggests that planning instruments, like the Lifeway Plans, have a better chance to be effective when attention is redirected to the ongoing process of participation rather than the end goal of producing content.

Third, conflicts over elections are likely to continue destabilizing the inter-communal property regime. Local government officials and Ladino colonists will not stop trying to place candidates that are favorable to them because it is an attractive strategy to influence the regime

from within. The influence of these actors in provoking the split in MASTA in 2018 was notorious. The splinter group may have touched a central nerve in demanding greater transparency and accountability in Miskitu leadership, but they were themselves involved with third-party interests that made their movement into a farce. Despite this difficult situation, the territorial councils remained aligned with MASTA's incumbent leadership, which allowed it to maintain its claim over the Miskitu geo-body. The electoral crisis revealed the urgency of conducting legal reforms that would recognize MASTA and the territorial councils as state-like jurisdictions. With more autonomy, the Miskitu leadership could adapt the legal procedures to fit the conditions present in the inter-communal property regime. Even in the absence of legal reform, the inter-communal property regime is more likely to thrive as a state-like entity if the Miskitu believe that there is transparency in decision-making. This transparency could start by clarifying norms for the participation of delegates and the organization of consultations.

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