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## **The Mosquito Shore in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – colonial competition, cultural syncretism and global context of local developments**

Small, economically little productive, but strategically located region of Central America, a narrow stripe of land stretching along the Caribbean coast of present-day Honduras and Nicaragua, known as “Mosquito Shore” (Costa de Mosquitia), became in the 19<sup>th</sup> century point of intersection of imperial interests of the Great Britain, USA, the Central American republics, but also several of the German states. At the same time, it became a place of intense cultural mixing and mutual influencing of various racial and cultural groups. Until 1860 there existed a formally independent “Mosquito” or “Miskito” Kingdom under the protectorate of the Great Britain. The polity was then incorporated into Nicaragua as a “reserve” and in the year 1898 its autonomous status was ended.

The Mosquito case is rather atypical in the context of American colonization. It was a predominantly English-speaking enclave within Spanish America, on the frontier between the specific zones of influence of the two empires, never officially colonized, but thanks to a welcoming attitude of its inhabitants maintaining extremely tight political and cultural relations with Great Britain. It was unique also in terms of its longevity, having been recognized and cultivated by the British since the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century up to the year 1860. Some historians present it as an early manifestation of the „indirect rule“ colonial policy, implemented by Great Britain in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless, it also shared many of the traits typical for British „colonies proper“. Therefore, it is possible, on the basis of facts from the history of Mosquito Shore, to begin a discussion on what were the common and what the specific features in the colonial history of the overseas regions; to trace the development in time of the practices of power of the metropolis and the local responses to them. The more so, because due to the activities of the German Protestant Church (Moravian Church or Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine) there is a possibility to use specific type of sources that provide the „third party“ view of the processes of colonialism and syncretism. Precisely on the basis of sources from the archive of the Moravian Church, the case of Mosquito Shore can be discussed and inserted into the broader context of colonial studies, as a place where outer instigations in the forms of colonial endeavors intersected with inner cultural dynamics.

In order to make possible discussion during the session, I present the short factual summary on the topic of the Mosquito Shore history intersected by open-ended questions through which I aspire to either to confirm the historical specificity and uniqueness of the

Mosquito Shore case, or else to find common features with the processes of colonization and indirect rule in other parts of the globe.

### **1. The agency of native inhabitants**

The role of natives in the processes of conquest and colonization should be taken into account in any comparative analysis. Possible themes include the early native reactions to colonization; their active/passive cooperation or active/passive resistance, efforts to take advantage of the European colonizers in local competitions; and also the use or misuse of historical interpretation of the pre-contact and early colonial history of the native groups in the 20th century political contests (endeavor to legitimize the demand for specific rights of native groups by their „primordial residence“ in the region, or to question these rights on the basis of contrary arguments).

After the early reconnaissance by Spanish explorers,<sup>1</sup> the Caribbean coast of Central America remained out of the sphere of immediate Spanish dominance, due to its remoteness, lack of precious metals, unhealthy climate and the militancy of its inhabitants. In the 17th century, English pirates and smugglers entered the coast. Their earliest ventures are not documented, but after the founding of the colony on the island Providence in the 1630s, the settlers contacted the natives on the mainland and opened a trade with them. Trade eventually turned from trinkets and beads to firearms that the natives made use of in their fights with the Spaniards.<sup>2</sup> The trade, according to the sources actively sought for by both parties, continued also after the destruction of the Providence colony by Spanish forces in 1641, as pirates looked on the coast for shelter and supplies. The Indians assisted them by selling victuals, furnishing dugouts, guiding buccaneers along the easiest routes to the interior, and fighting alongside them. The travel accounts and autobiographies of famous freebooters often mention the friendly relations with local inhabitants, called Moscos, Moustiques, Musquetos or Miskitos.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> On his fourth voyage to the New World in 1502, Columbus visited the coast, naming it *Costa de Orejas*, from the ear elongation practiced by the region's inhabitants, did not enter into widespread use. He also gave name to the Cape Gracias a Dios. (Bartolomé de las CASAS, *Vida de Cristóbal Colón*, ed. Oscar Rodríguez Ortiz, Caracas 1992, p. 150) Later, however, the Spanish borrowed two terms used by the Aztecs to refer to this region: Taguzgalpa (place of gold) and Tologalpa (place of tule). (Baron L. PINEDA, *Shipwrecked Identities: Navigating race on Nicaragua's Mosquito Coast*, Piscataway 2006, pp. 26-27)

<sup>2</sup> Karen Ordahl KUPPERMAN, *Providence Island, 1630-1641: The Other Puritan Colony*, Cambridge/New York 1993, passim.

<sup>3</sup> Best known is Alexandre Olivier EXQUEMELIN, *The History of the Bucaniers of America*, London 1705.

However, there have been prolonged discussions among anthropologists and ethnohistorians on the topic of „who were the Miskitos“?<sup>4</sup> The pre-contact (archaeological) data for the Caribbean Coast are rather limited, due to the natural limits and the dynamic development of settlement patterns in the colonial era that erased the earlier demographic patterns. The major source represent the early colonial documents; but their interpretation can lead to diverse conclusions. According to the first cluster of theories, there had been considerably compact and developed entities in the pre-Colombian era that maintained their specific identity throughout the centuries of European penetration. This line of argumentation is mostly followed by the advocates of special Miskito rights within contemporary Nicaraguan society.

On the other hand, there are anthropologists and ethnohistorians who state that „Miskito culture did not exist as such before European contact. ... [There was] no aboriginal, precontact identity. Miskito culture originated as a direct response to European colonialism. To be sure, many specific culture traits are based in the precontact scene, but the overall structure and function of Miskito society is oriented towards and adapted to successful interaction with the wider world.“<sup>5</sup> In other words, the Miskitos are presented as one of the „colonial tribes“ that arose all over the world out of the demographic, economic and biological pressures of European colonization. Of great consequence for this interpretation of Miskito history is the fact that the Native Americans on the coast very early intermixed with black Africans, refugees from cocoa plantations and gold mines in the interior and western part of Central America (or later from sugar plantations on the Caribbean), or slaves acquired as a booty from attacks on Spanish ships. This early intermixing occurred during the same

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<sup>4</sup> Colonial sources from the 17<sup>th</sup> century on commonly used the transcription „Mosquito“ that however, acquired negative, disdainful trace in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This was mentioned by German officials who made official reconnaissance of the territory in service of Prussian government. They stated that local inhabitants preferred to be called „Miskitos“. „Mosquitos are flies, we are Misskito.“ (*Bericht über die im höchsten Auftrage Seiner Königlichen Hoheit des Prinzen Carl von Preussen und seiner Durchlaucht des Herrn Schoenburg-Waldenburg bewirkte Untersuchung einiger Theile des Mosquitolandes von der dazu ernannten Commission*, Berlin 1845, p. 134.) Therefore, the academic discourse after 1950 preferred the version “Miskito”. In the Spanish literature, the version “miskito” is used, in order to put an accent on the first syllable. But in the 1980, the Miskito intellectuals in Nicaragua begun to call for orthographic reform and amedation of ortography that was established by the Moravian missionaries in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the new ortography, only the vowels A, I, U are used, but not E and O. Therefore, it is necessary to write „miskitu“ instead of „miskito“, even though the pronunciation is the same. To the new standard also some anthropologists and historians accomodated. In this article, however, I conform to the more widespread use of „Miskito“. (Karl OFEN, *Los Zambos y Tawira Miskitu: Los Origenes Coloniales y la Geografía de la Diferenciación Intra-Miskitu en el Oriente de Nicaragua y Honduras*, trad. Blanca Estrada Cousin, *Revista de Temas Nicaragüenses* No. 21 (2010), p. 39)

<sup>5</sup> Mary W. HELMS, *Asang: Adaptations to Culture Contact in a Miskito Community*, Gainesville 1971, pp- 3-4. Helms emphasised the socio-economic roots of Miskito origin as a „purchase society“, therefore she derived their ethnonym from *musket*, since „the population in question was distinguished from its neighbors literally as a musekt-bearing group.“ (p. 16)

period that the tribal name Miskitu (in various spellings) first appeared in historical documents. In the 18th and 19th century, the „mixed origin“ served as a pretext for discrediting the Miskitos in pamphlets questioning the very existence of their “nation” and its official ties with the British. On the other hand, in the 19th century there were amply documented efforts by the native inhabitants of the coast themselves to differentiate between the descendents of the mixed race, called Sambos or Sambo-Miskito (from the Spanish word for Indian-African, *zambo*) and concentrated in the northern portion of the coast, around Cape Gracias a Dios, and the Indians to the south who came to be known as Tawira (meaning *straight hair*) or simply Miskito and were considered as being of „purer race“.<sup>6</sup> This alleged acceptance by the native inhabitants themselves of the European notion of „race“ and „race purity“ again invites to discussion on the problem of the interiorization of cultural standards of the colonizing groups by the aborigines.

Whatever is the solution of the “Miskito origin” question, it is rather certain that from the 17th century on, the Miskitos behaved as being aware of their separate identity and they dominated the Caribbean coast of the Central America, expanding on the expense of other native ethnic groups. From Cabo Gracias a Dios, they spread all the way to Costa Rica.<sup>7</sup> In this they were assisted also by the British who in 1655 occupied Jamaica. In 1670 Spanish king granted to the King of Great Britain all lands in the West Indies or America that he had „currently occupied“. This included both the earlier conquered islands in the Caribbean and the North American mainland and Jamaica. The tiny, informal settlements on Belize and the Mosquito Shore were at the moment insignificant; however, later Britain claimed that the wording of the treaty covered also these coastal establishments. Spain consistently denied this claim and until the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century never relinquished sovereignty over the Mosquito Shore.<sup>8</sup>

The Miskitos assumed an active intermediary role in the trade with other Indian groups in Central America; but they also gained profits from slave hunting, selling slaves to Jamaican sugar plantations. In the first half of the 18th century, they even engaged in the

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<sup>6</sup> Karl H. OFFEN, The Sambo and Tawira Miskitu: The Colonial Origins and Geography of Intra-Miskitu Differentiation in Eastern Nicaragua and Honduras, *Ethnohistory* 49:2 (2002), pp. 319-372.

<sup>7</sup> Mary W. HELMS, Miskito Slaving and Culture Contact: Ethnicity and Opportunity in an Expanding Population, *Journal of Anthropological Research* 39:2 (1983), pp. 179-197. The first document mentioning Miskito slaving is [M.W..] *The Mosquito Indian and his Golden River: Being a Familiar Description of the Mosquito Kingdom in America, Written in or About the Year 1699*, in A. Churchill, comp., *A Collection of Voyages and Travels*, London 1732, vol. 6, 285-298. According to M.W., the Miskitos considered themselves different from the „wild Indians“ living on the border of their territory because the Miskito conducted commerce with the English while the „wild Indians“ did not.

<sup>8</sup> Troy S. FLOYD, *The Anglo-Spanish Struggle for Mosquitia*, Albuquerque 1967, 27.

„Maroon war“, that is, in suppression of the runaway slaves in Jamaican interior. From „a small nation, not over 100“, as counted by William Dampier in the 1670’s,<sup>9</sup> the Miskitos had established by 1750 many towns of several hundred persons. Robert Hodgson believed that there were 10,000 Miskitos by 1759.<sup>10</sup> In the meantime, the political ties between Great Britain and the Miskitos were established in a somewhat official way.

The political organization of the Miskitos, however, is also subject of disputes among historians. Since the 17th century the English sources repeatedly mentioned indigenous representatives called „kings“, honored with special marks of favor by the English kings (represented by the Governors of Jamaica) and bestowed by gifts and symbols of authority. The term *king* was even incorporated into the Miskito language. Spanish sources of the time never admitted the legitimacy of Miskito representatives and presented them as mere “puppets”. In succession with these interpretations of the time, also some historians consider the Miskito “kings” as deliberate creations of British colonizers, with the single purpose of legitimating the presence of white settlers on the Shore;<sup>11</sup> or, at the most, as middlemen whose authority derived from their attachment to British trade.<sup>12</sup> But other scholars draw on the British sources that since the 17th up to the 19th century that had consistently presented the Miskito kingship as “genuine authority” responding to the deeply rooted local tradition. These scholars admit that contact with the British settlers, and perhaps with the Africans as well, together with needs of the time (constant warfare with the Spanish, intensified trade) certainly influenced the nature of native political structures in direction of more pronounced centralization and greater influence of the highest representative. However, they are convinced that “in spite of greater or lesser English influence, the structure of the Miskito Kingdom remained remarkably stable for about 240 years. Although the leader of the Miskito was referred to as ‚king‘, suggesting a state level of organization, the Miskito Kingdom was perhaps more like a chiefdom emerging from a tribe involved in predatory expansion. ... A single line of succession has been identified from 1655 to 1894, in which most kings were

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<sup>9</sup> William DAMPIER, *A New Voyage round the World*, London 1697.

<sup>10</sup> José TORRE REVELLO, *Escritos hallados en poder del espía inglés Roberto Hodgson (1783)*, *Boletín del Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas* (Buenos Aires) 5 (1926), p. 93.

<sup>11</sup> For example, Robert Naylor doubts openly the very existence of Miskito „kingdom“. „The territory was occupied by scattered clusters of Indians with no formal conception of territorial domain in the western sense. ... Therefore, the British would virtually have had to create the very entity to which they were allegedly allied. The creation existed more in theory than in practice and was largely a fiction.“ (Robert NAYLOR, *Penny Ante Imperialism: The Mosquito Shore and the Bay of Honduras, 1600-1914 – A Case Study in British Informal Empire*, London/Toronto 1989, p. 48)

<sup>12</sup> Mary W. HELMS, *Of Kings and Contexts: Ethno-historical Interpretations of Miskito Political Structure and Function*, *American Ethnologist* 13 (1986), pp. 198-241.

succeeded by the eldest son of their primary wife. For at least 239 years, the kingship was controlled by a single family group.”<sup>13</sup>

The first official manifestation of allegiance to Great Britain from part of Miskito king came in the year 1655.<sup>14</sup> In 1687 a coronation ceremony for „king Jeremy“ was celebrated at Jamaica<sup>15</sup> and subsequently, most of the kings obtained their royal tokens from the hands of British officials. Another official alliance between the King of Mosquito and the Governor of Jamaica was formed in 1720; and ten year later Great Britain established small military settlements at most important settlement on the Shore: Cape Gracias a Dios, Bluefields and Black River. The tight ties with the British further corroborated Miskito self-esteem. The Miskitos considered themselves „English gentlemen“ superior to any other native group. Local and regional leaders legitimated their authority on the basis of their mastery of English, the prestige language of the Coast. However, the Miskito expansion along the coast and rivalry over titles, trade and gifts created a political division. Divergent interests at least at the beginning of the 18th century led to the emergence of regional chieftancies, whose rulers likewise received English titles of „general“, „governor“ or „admiral“ bestowed in Jamaica or Belize by British authorities.<sup>16</sup> On many occasions there leaders made treaties with foreign interests and issued land grants to foreign investors; they even at some occasions tried to negotiate with the Spaniards. The problem is that hierarchy of Miskito political offices and their interrelations are still poorly understood. However, there is evidence that the titles were highly valued by the Miskito themselves.<sup>17</sup>

## **2. „Indirect rule“ policy of colonization**

For Spain, the Mosquito Shore was crucial with respect to the plans for inter-oceanic communication, that would use the natural water systems of Nicaragua, and in the future replace the problematic passage (*trajín*) across Panama. The journey involved the use of the

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<sup>13</sup> Michael D. OLIEN The Miskito Kings and the Line of Succession, *Journal of Anthropological Research* 39:2 (1983), 198-241, here p. 199. See also Philip A. DENNIS – Michael D. OLIEN, Kingship among the Miskito, *American Ethnologist* 11 (1984), pp. 718-737, who argue: „Miskito kings are usually interpreted within the colonial context. They have been viewed, first, as puppets of the British, ... who were kept intoxicated and put into or removed from office by the English when it suited to their interests. ... Since the Miskito did not have a centralized political system, it has been argued, the Miskito Kings necessarily represented something new and imposed entirely from the outside. But the historical data suggest other possibilities.“

<sup>14</sup> [M.W.] *The Mosquito Indian and his Golden River: Being a Familiar Description of the Mosquito Kingdom in America, Written in or About the Year 1699*, in A. Churchill, comp., *A Collection of Voyages and Travels*, London 1732, vol. 6, p. 288.

<sup>15</sup> John WRIGHT, *Memoir of the Mosquito Territory, as respecting the voluntary cession of it to the Crown of Great Britain...*, London 1808, p. 21.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>17</sup> PINEDA, *Shipwrecked Identities*, p. 44; DENNIS – OLIEN, Kingship among the Miskito, p. 723.

port of San Juan del Norte, the easily navigable San Juan River, the lake of Nicaragua, and a short overland journey from the lake to the minor Pacific port of San Juan del Sur. Spain had studied the possibility of this connection for centuries, first surveys being from the 16th century. Given the trade interest of Spain in the Pacific, the distaste of possible British competition was understandable. In an effort to stabilize the British settlement on the Mosquito Shore face to face with increased Spanish pressure and to corroborate the trade with the natives a superintendency of the Mosquito Shore was established in 1749. Instructions to first superintendent Robert Hodgson stated that he should regulate and supervise the British settlement and to cultivate the friendship and union with the Indians, „*as may induce them to prefer his Majesty's alliance and protection to that of any other power whatsoever.*“<sup>18</sup> The establishment of the superintendency that enabled the control of the territory without openly claiming British sovereignty induced several historians to consider the Mosquito Shore case as the first manifestation of the „indirect rule“ colonialism that characterized British expansion in the 19th and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In this context, we should either explore the specificity of indirect rule solely for British colonization of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, or its more general occurrence in other colonizing projects; its perception and/or utilization by local elites for their own ends; and also the later interpretations of the „indirect rule“ by historians. Specifically in the Miskito case, the thesis of the „indirect rule“ was refuted eloquently by Robert Naylor. Naylor insisted that from economic as well as strategic point of view the Mosquito Shore was of little importance to Great Britain and that the „indirect rule“ strategy of colonization was in fact a result of the private endeavors of individual entrepreneurs who pleaded the authority of British government, but in fact negotiated on their own with Miskito representatives. The proportion of the activities of individuals and of private opinions of policy-makers in London within the general frame of British colonization should also be a theme for discussion. At the most, concluded Naylor, the British interests in the Mosquito shore helped to secure other American territory that was considered more valuable. „Throughout the 18th century, the Mosquito Shore was used as a pawn in the diplomatic negotiations between the Spanish and the English concerning the British role in Belize.“<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> NAYLOR, *Penny Ante Imperialism*, p. 46.

<sup>19</sup> NAYLOR, *Penny Ante Imperialism*, pp. 16-17. See also older text by the same author, Robert A. NAYLOR, The British Role in Central America Prior to the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty of 1850, *Hispanic American Historical Review* 40:3 (1960), pp. 361-382. The Colonial Secretary, Earl Grey, wrote in 1848 to the Prime Minister, Lord John Russell: „*We really must not allow ourselves to be dragged into the expense and trouble of protecting this mock king in the occupation of his territory which he cannot defend himself. I have the strongest objection to a virtual extension of British dominion on the continent, with all the responsibility & heavy expense it would*

On the other hand, the native agenda should be taken into account. While British sources – and also other sources stemming from European cultural area, be it Spanish or later American and Central American official and informal documents – clearly held the view that through indirect rule the British were using the Miskito to their own advantage. However, nowadays ethnohistorians argue that there was a different perception of the situation on the part of the Miskito and their leaders, who viewed their ties with the British in a very positive manner as a way of the strengthening of their own position on the coast. Ties with the British settlers provided the Miskito an important source of trade goods for much of Central America during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. As a result of British-supplied firearms and British backing, the Miskito were able to establish dominance over their neighbors and maintain a system of tribute collection.<sup>20</sup>

One of the principal arguments of Naylor for this interpretation of the „personalized“ roots of British activity on the Mosquito Shore is the fact that when Britain’s involvement in India had increased, higher priority in the colonial policy was given to securing the sea passage to the East and to the explorations of Indochina and the South Pacific, and Great Britain was weakened by the War of Independence, the British retired officially from the Mosquito Shore in July 1786, despite strong protests on the part of the settlers and a large body of promotional literature in favor of the continuing and intensified settlement.<sup>21</sup> In total 2214 people were removed from the Mosquito Shore, 537 of the white settlers and 1677 slaves. Most of them moved to Belize.<sup>22</sup> ..

After 1786, the Spanish colonial officials took active steps in promoting colonization of the Mosquito Shore, inviting from southern Spain and the Canary Islands as well as Franciscan and Capuchin missionaries. Nevertheless, these attempts failed. At the same time, there ensued major change in the ethnic composition of the Shore, as many of the black slaves took advantage of the forced resettlement of their masters to Belize, escaped and remained among the Miskitos. The black population in subsequent years expanded also thanks to the influx of runaway slaves and free coloureds and then, after slave emancipation in 1834, the

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*occasion. Our colonial garrisons in the West Indies have been reduced to what is only sufficient for the protection of our own possessions & I am sure we ought not to increase the number of troops we have there for the purpose of protecting the King of Mosquitia in his claims to this disputed territory.*“ (Richard W. VAN ALSTYNE, *The Central American Policy of Lord Palmerston, 1846-48, Hispanic American Historical Review* 16 (1936), pp. 339-359, here p. 345)

<sup>20</sup> „While the British may have been making use of the Miskito, the Miskito were, at the same time, making use of the British.“ (DENNIS – OLIEN, *Kingship among the Miskito*, p. 726)

<sup>21</sup> The promotional literature quoted in Karl H. OFFEN, *British Logwood Extraction from the Mosquitia: The Origin of a Myth, HAHR* 80 (2000), p. 130.

<sup>22</sup> DENNIS – OLIEN, *Kingship among the Miskito*, p. 720.



freed slaves from throughout the British Caribbean. On the Mosquito Shore, their somatic traits were not considered as stigma and did not prevent them from social ascendancy. On contrary, their knowledge of English language opened them chances for improvement. These Africans were not absorbed into Miskito society, albeit already mixed. They formed an ethnic group of their own, for which the term Creole became current. The Creole community flourished in the absence of any direct colonial control and it consolidated economic and political dominance over the Miskitos, replacing the British in their role of commercial intermediaries with the native communities and political advisors to the Miskito king. A specific Creole culture was established that was based on the language and culture preserved by the slave community as well as assimilated through the close contact with the British colonists. The black population spoke English, albeit with a partially African grammatical structure, and maintained English values and practices. They considered themselves to be British subjects and guardians of English civilization.<sup>23</sup> Again, we should ask if this voluntary interiorization of European ideals by members of the in fact „colonized“ population should be considered as „indirect rule“; another interesting point is the long-term competition between the two principal „native“ groups on the shore, the Creoles and the „Miskito proper“, throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in fact until today.

Even after the official evacuation of the Shoremen was completed, the British were still in Belize and Jamaica. Loggers from Belize spread their exploitation along the coast.<sup>24</sup> Besides, they intensified their trade relations with neighboring Guatemala. The British renewed their links with the Miskito and again profited from contraband activities, logging and plantation architecture. However, the British government did not want to accept formal responsibility for the Mosquito coast. Jamaican authorities were notified in 1805 that friendly relations with the Miskitos could be continued only on an informal basis; that their services could be utilized against the Spanish, whenever circumstances necessitated, but that the British government must not appear to be directly involved. One of the marked signs of the change of posture from part of the British representatives was the diminishing of the practice of the annual gift-giving to the Indian chiefs, practiced on the Shore since the 17th century. Despite the increased prosperity enjoyed by their settlement, the Belize magistrates had

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<sup>23</sup> Peter SOLLIS, The Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua: Development and Autonomy, *Journal of Latin American Studies* 21:3 (1989), pp. 484-485.

<sup>24</sup> At least this is the traditional interpretation, resumed for example by Robert NAYLOR, The Mahogany Trade as a Factor in the British Return to the Mosquito Shore in the Second Quarter of the Nineteenth Century, *The Jamaican Historical Review* 7 (1967), pp. 40-67. On the other hand, OFFEN, British Logwood Extraction, is convinced that there were no considerable mahogany areas on the Mosquito Shore and that that the main reason for British return was the effort to open trade with Guatemala, not to expand the logging.

discontinued the practice on the ground that current prospects on the Shore did not seem to warrant the expense.<sup>25</sup>

### 3. Multiplicity of interests in the process of colonization

The first decades of the 19th century brought about an increasing number of projects for settlement on the Mosquito Shore. British proponents of colonization resorted to exaggerated propaganda, praising the „*enormous possibilities*“ of the region.<sup>26</sup> Of course, we can discuss at the moment the general context of British out-migration in the early 19th century, the pull-out factors of social and economic changes in the home-country as well as the propaganda from part of the land-speculators who acquired lands from the Miskito kings. And, in turn, we should take into account the endeavor to acquire such land reflected in British approach to Miskito kings. Private landed property in the European sense was unknown among the Miskito. Individual Indians were unable to issue title-deeds either to the logging enterprises or the settlement companies. The only appropriate person was the king. Therefore, the institution which in the previous century was perceived as an instrument for political dealings between the British and the Indians (or, if we accept the extreme opinion of „puppet kingdom“, was purposefully created for this end) was gradually transformed into a tool of individual economic interests. The disputes between rival lumber companies over the validity of their respective concessions soon precipitated an international dispute over the nature and extent of the Mosquito kingdom.<sup>27</sup> In the 1830s Miskito king Robert Charles Frederic, with the encouragement of Colonel Alexander Macdonald, the British superintendent of Belize, extended the land claims for the Miskito territory as far south as Chiriquí Lagoon in Panama. King Robert also signed away large tracts of land to foreign developers, under Macdonald's influence. And Macdonald was the most fervent defendant of the „independence“ of the Miskito Kingdom.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> NAYLOR, *Penny Ante Imperialism*, pp. 74, 87, 97.

<sup>26</sup> „No serious doubt, then, can be entertained of the intention of the British government to pen in the Mosquito Territory a new field for the emigration of our countrymen. Numerous and valuable as are the Colonies which are owned by England, it may be confidently asserted, that not one of them can compete with this territory in the fertility of its soil; the abundance and variety of its productions (for which every town in the eastern and western hemisphere offers lucrative markets); the salubrity of its climate; the extent of its water-communication; and its proximity to England.“ (Pamphlet *Revival of the British Settlement on the Bluefields River in Centra America*, London 1840, p. 21, quoted by Craig DOZIER, *Nicaragua's Mosquito Shore: The Years of British and American Presence*, Alabama 1985, p. 45)

<sup>27</sup> Eleonore von OERTZEN –Lioba ROSSBACH – Volker WÜNDERICH, eds., *The Nicaraguan Mosquitia in Historical Documents 1844-1927: The dynamics of ethnic and regional history*, Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag 1990, p. 28.

<sup>28</sup> „I cannot but express my astonishment that the people of Guatemala should attempt to set up a claim to any part of the territory called the Mosquito Shore. Some years ago the present king was crowned at this place by

In the meantime, the Spanish colonial empire in America collapsed and out of it new political entities arose. In the region of our interest was created confederation known as „United Provinces of Central America“ (*Provincias Unidas de Centroamérica*, 1823-38) and, since 1838, five independent states: El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Especially the republics of Honduras and Nicaragua assumed sovereignty over Mosquito Shore, denied the very existence of „Miskito nation“ and Miskito kings, denounced the British protectorate over the Shore and looked to the USA for support in forcing the British to withdraw. Even the Republic of New Granada that formed in the northern portion of South America made a proposal to include the Shore within its borders, with reference to the colonial territorial organization.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, Costa Rica and to a lesser extent Guatemala cooperated with Great Britain and tried to enhance their own position on the isthmus by frustrating the political ambitions of their rivals in the three central states. Private parties in all of the states involved, in Central America, Great Britain and the USA, sought to make use of the situation and acquire advantageous contracts for themselves.

Besides the alleged economic potential of the Mosquito Shore as an agricultural region and logging area, there arose in importance its strategic position on the possible inter-oceanic transit communication. Nicaragua, wishing to exert what it considered its legitimate territorial rights on the region, sent at the end of the 1830s a commandant to the small port at the mouth of the San Juan River, known as San Juan del Norte. This provoked a British response. In 1841, declaring that the Nicaraguans had occupied part of the Mosquito king's domain, Alexander MacDonald arrived at the port with the Miskito king Robert Charles Frederick and aboard of a British man-of-war.<sup>30</sup> The effort to strengthen the British position in this suddenly so valuable region probably was the most important instigation for naming in 1844 of Patrick Walker “British agent and consul-general to the Mosquito”. Walker was stationed in Bluefields, a fact that corroborated the radical shift in power on the Shore (as the traditional Miskito territory was further north, around Cape Gracias a Dios; Bluefield was dominated by

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*order of the British government, and as his ancestors have for generations past been in quiet possession of the Mosquito Shore, I am at a loss to know by what right or title the people of Guatemala can at this late hour lay claim to any part of the Mosquito Territory.*“ (MacDonald to Frederick Chatfield, British chargé d'affaires in Central America, Belize, 20-II-1837, BNA, PRO, F.O. 15/19, p. 69, quoted by NAYLOR, *Penny Ante Imperialism*, p. 114) Also DENNIS – OLIEN, *Kingship among the Miskito*, p. 723.

<sup>29</sup> This claim was derived from a colonial administrative decree issued by Spain in 1803 that had separated from the captaincy-general of Guatemala for military purposes that part of the Mosquito Shore south of Cape Gracias a Dios. The idea was that the viceroyalty of New Granada was in a better position to control the Caribbean coast of the isthmus than was the kingdom of Granada, isolated on the Pacific side of Central America. Although the decree apparently was never implemented, President Santander of New Granada used it to claim that coastline in July 1824. (John Maily to Mackie, Guatemala, 24-VII-1825, *British National Archives*, Public Records Office, Foreign Office (hereafter BNA, PRO, FO) 15/4, 299, quoted in NAYLOR, *Penny Ante Imperialism*, p. 95)

<sup>30</sup> DOZIER, *Nicaragua's Mosquito Shore*, p. 48.

the Creoles of predominantly African descent). Officially, the Miskito Kingdom was recognized by the Foreign Office as a regular “state”; in reality, through the person of the consul, Great Britain exerted its influence. The coronation of young king George Augustus Frederick in 1845, organized and financed by consul Walker, became an open manifestation of British dominance.<sup>31</sup> Other symbols intended to further emphasize the separateness and independence of Miskitos from Spanish-speaking Central American states. A flag was designed that featured a Union Jack in the upper left corner, and a crown in the lower right corner.<sup>32</sup> At the end of 1848 this flag was hoisted at San Juan del Norte in 1848 and, as another manifestation of British power, the town was renamed Greytown after the Governor of Jamaica.

The very British officials who with the name of “consuls” directed the development on the Mosquito Shore pressured for regular colonization of the region, with the argument that the “barbarous aboriginal tribe” of the Miskito is unable to govern itself. The first consul, Patrick Walker, thought over a complex civilizational scheme for the Mosquito Shore that included a systematic support for agricultural production oriented towards the international market and the encouragement of the settlement of immigrants from Europe. He tried to systematize the legal system of the Miskito kingdom and to corroborate the power of the king. The underlying idea was that of a fundamental modernization of coastal society relied through the King, but principally by the British means.<sup>33</sup> Anyway, the realization of the project was prevented by the early death of Walker in 1848. But also the second consul, William Christie, thought that the facade of Mosquito sovereignty should be replaced by outright British possession, as had been done in Belize. (Not being a colony in the formal sense, Belize was nevertheless administered by a superintendent in touch with the colonial office).<sup>34</sup> Again there is the problem of personal activity versus the long-term goals of the Foreign Office, because at this point British interests clashed with those of the United States.

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<sup>31</sup> Douglas A. TOMPSON, Master of ceremony: the British monarchical project in Mosquitia, 1800-1860, *South Eastern Latin Americanist*. 43:3 (2000), pp. 1-20, is convinced that the Mosquito Kingdom „project“ and British ostentatious support of a native „monarchy“ was, besides its strategic implications, an effort to prove that monarchy was a valid political system, even in the Americas where republican governments were in the ascendant. According to Tompson, Walker was conscious of the impression the ceremony would have „on the minds of the neighbouring States, whose serious attention will by this means be ... called to the King’s intimate relations with Her Majesty’s Government.“ [BNA, PRO, FO 53/1, 76-76v, quoted by TOMPSON, Master of ceremony, pp. 12-13]

<sup>32</sup> The flag reproduced in Joaquim RABELLA, *Aproximación a la historia de Río San Juan, 1500-1995*, Managua 1995, 60; and by Walker’s hand in BNA, PRO, FO 53/1, nf.

<sup>33</sup> OERTZEN – ROSSBACH – WÜNDERICH, *The Nicaraguan Mosquitia*, p. 36; the same edition includes some of Walker’s written materials on the topic.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted by NAYLOR, *Penny Ante Imperialism*, p. 175.

In the 1840s among the political representatives as well as the general public in the United States a reassertion of the Monroe Doctrine took place. It was openly reaffirmed by President Polk in December 1845. And especially after 1848, emerging as a two-ocean continental power as a result of the Mexican War, the USA became interested in the Central American isthmus and became highly sensitive to British activities in that area. With the acquisition of California and the commencement of the gold fever, the American government viewed an inter-oceanic link as essential. Gordon's expedition in 1849, the first organized American expedition that reached California via Nicaragua, showed the advantages of the trail over traditional *trajín* in Panama. At the same year, Cornelius Vanderbilt founded the „Accessory Transit Company“ that obtained from the government of Nicaragua the exclusive monopoly over inter-oceanic transportation and the monopoly for future railroad over the isthmus. In 1851 first steamship set out on Lake Nicaragua. Due to the extremely increased traffic, Greytown was in the early 1850s rapidly becoming an American settlement, regardless of who claimed sovereignty over the area.<sup>35</sup> Precisely to the publication activities of American promoters of Central American colonization, in the first place Ephraim George Squier, the American chargé d'affaires for Central America in 1849-50, Robert Naylor attributes the source of the image of British activities on the Mosquito Shore as the first step in a longstanding plan to control the whole Central America.<sup>36</sup>

But there were other nations and groups interested in sharing the commercial and strategic potential of Central America. Among them were the various German states and especially the most powerful of them, Prussia. The pressures for out-migration were rather strong in Germany in the 1840s and therefore, also in this country land speculators and colonizing companies sought for suitable locations in America. While the emigrants aimed at establishing an independent existence in America, the organizers' goal was to make use in especial of the trade potential of Central America and its strategic position that made it a

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<sup>35</sup> As American diplomat Robert Walsh stated in 1852: „*The flag of the Mosquito king is still flying here, but that is the only evidence of his sovereignty. The control of the town is in the hands of foreign residents, principally Americans.*“ Quoted by E. Bradford BURNS, *Patriarch and Folk: The Emergence of Nicaragua, 1798-1858*, London/Cambridge 1991, p. 168.

<sup>36</sup> NAYLOR, *Penny Ante Imperialism*, passim.) For example in October 25, 1849, Squier reported to John M. Clayton, US Secretary of state, that „*for the past fifteen years ... it has been [Great Britain's] intention to possess herself of all Central America.*“ (William MANNING, *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States, Inter-American Affairs 1831-1860*, Vol. III: *Central America 1831-1850*, Washington 1933, doc. 936, pp. 420-422) See Samuel A. BARD [= Ephraim George SQUIER,] *Waikna: or, Adventures on the Mosquito Shore*, London 1855; Ephraim George SQUIER, *Nicaragua: Its People, Scenery, Monuments, and the proposed Inter-oceanic Canal*, London 1852, 2 vols.; Michael D. OLIEN, E. G. Squier and the Miskito: Anthropological Scholarship and Political Propaganda, *Ethnohistory* 32:2 (1985), pp. 111-133. However, Naylor argues that British presence resulted rather „from unsuccessful efforts to discourage adventurers and small-time traders from profiting from a series of marginal enterprises they launched on that isolated stretch of tropical coast.“ NAYLOR, *Penny Ante Capitalism*, p. 16.

stepping stone in trade ventures to the Pacific. On the other hand, the Central American states tried to play the metropolitan powers off against each other and thus create breathing space for themselves.<sup>37</sup>

In 1844, „Königsberg Colonization Company“ sought to establish a German colony at the Mosquito Shore. However, the Prussians insisted on exercising sovereignty over the land they acquired, a condition that British consul Walker vetoed immediately. Still, the German organizers obtained documents from a group of English traders who asserted that they possessed a land grant for a tract near Cape Gracias a Dios from the then-deceased king Robert Charles Frederick. Notable is the backing of the project: Prince Carl of Prussia, the brother of King Frederick Wilhelm IV, and Prince Otto Victor von Schönburg-Waldenburg became active partners in this colonization company. Envoys of the land company returned to Prussia with a favorable report. Vigorous recruitment, including newspaper notices, instigated 110 emigrants in the spring of 1846. They founded on the Mosquito Shore a town Carlstadt (named in honor of Prince Carl). But the project ended in a complete disaster, with majority of emigrants either dying in less than two years and the rest resettling to other American regions.<sup>38</sup>

The interest of Prussian colonizing companies was but one more proof of the importance that Central American region acquired in the eyes of colonizing powers. The main contest, however, took place between Great Britain and the United States. For a short period of time, the until-then marginal Mosquito Shore acquired prominent place in diplomatic correspondence of both governments. Their objectives in Central America were in fact almost identical. Both were interested primarily in promoting commercial expansion as the key to economic prosperity and saw the inter-oceanic canal playing a vital role in developing world trade. Neither was interested in Central America per se, nor in any controversy or entangling alliances with the Central American states, but rather in the future waterway across Nicaragua. Both governments had misgivings about the ability of the Central Americans to govern themselves and to honor their international commitments. A compromise solution was thus reached in April 1850 with the signing of the „Clayton-Bulwer“ treaty (denominated after the two principal negotiators). The treaty provided that neither country would seek to

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<sup>37</sup> See Thomas David SCHOONOVER, *Germany in Central America: Competitive Imperialism, 1821-1929*, Tuscaloosa/London 1998; the same, *The United States in Central America, 1860 - 1911: episodes of social imperialism and imperial rivalry in the world system*, Durham 1991.

<sup>38</sup> Gavin B. HENDERSON, German Colonial Projects on the Mosquito Coast, 1844-1848, *English Historical Review* 59 (1944), pp. 257-271. The report on the geography and economic potential of the Mosquito Shore was published under the title *Bericht über die im höchsten Auftrage Seiner Königlichen Hoheit des Prinzen Carl von Preussen und seiner Durchlaucht des Herrn Schoenburg-Waldenburg bewirkte Untersuchung einiger Theile des Mosquitolandes von der dazu ernannten Commission*, Berlin 1845.

acquire exclusive control over the inter-oceanic route in Central America. It included provisions for no fortifications, no colonization, no territorial dominion, no alliances with states or people with the purpose of securing special rights or advantages, and free-port status for Greytown.<sup>39</sup> While the tone of the treaty provided for balance of interest, in fact it's signing weakened considerably the British influence in the region. Robert Naylor is convinced that the treaty was conceived by the British representatives as a chance to pull out of the Mosquito venture altogether; that the Mosquito Shore problems in subsequent decade became more incidental to other issues and objectives of British foreign policy.<sup>40</sup>

The Clayton-Bulwer Treaty changed considerably the political situation in the Miskito Kingdom. In the past centuries the king, supported by the British prestige, had considerable authority. The treaty was accorded without the consent or participation of the king – even though an expressed concern for the welfare of the Indians had always been central to the posture of the British government toward the Shore – and the British manifested their will to pull out of the region altogether. The local chiefs saw this as a proof of the weakening power of the king and struggled for greater autonomy. Some British residents reported that the inhabitants of the coast felt they could do anything and not be held responsible, from violent crimes to breaking contracts for food and labor. At the same time, the American entrepreneurs and adventurers perceived the treaty as a signal for unrestrained liberty of activity. In 1855 Greytown/San Juan del Norte was seized by the American filibuster, Colonel Kinney, who called for American colonization in Mosquitia. Even though his venture was not successful, with scores of Americans passing up and down the San Juan in the 1850s the American influence in the region increased.

With British interests in other parts of the globe, especially in Asia, demanding more financial resources and diplomatic and military activity, the British government decided to cancel its remaining responsibilities for the Miskitos. In 1860 the Treaty of Managua between Britain and Nicaragua provided for withdrawal of the British protectorate on the Shore.

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<sup>39</sup> DOZIER, *Nicaragua's Mosquito Shore*, p. 75.

<sup>40</sup> NAYLOR, *Penny Ante Imperialism*, pp. 181-186. On the other hand D. C. M Platt was convinced that British trade with the Central American Republics was insignificant and that the reasons for the interest of the Foreign Office in Central America until 1850 were strategic. „Britain, with its West Indian colonies, the settlements at Belize (British Honduras) and British Guiana, and the Panama route to Australasia and to the trade of the West Coast of South America, has as much reason before the middle of the century as the United States to regard the Caribbean as her own private lake. But as the West Indian sugar colonies went into decline, and as, after 1848, the United States actively developed the West Coast ..., it became apparent that ... the balance of interest had shifted sharply in favour of the United States.“ (D.C.M. PLATT, *Finance, Trade and Politics in British Foreign Policy, 1815-1914*, Oxford 1968, p. 324) Platt, besides, considers the British protectorate over the Miskito Kingdom as „unfortunate obligation, inherited from the previous century, ... which the British Government found irksome, embarrassing, and increasingly disagreeable. (p. 325)

Again, the Miskitos themselves were not invited to participate in the negotiations. Nicaragua agreed to create a self-governing district within the republic for the Indians and to refrain from interfering in their affairs. Therefore, instead of independent „kingdom“, a „reservation“ (*reserva*) was established under the sovereignty of Nicaragua within which the Indians would have self-government and receive a monetary compensation („annuity“) from the Nicaraguan government. Nicaraguan authorities could not collect taxes on goods exported from the Shore, and had no power to grant logging, mining, or farming rights there. But the limits of the reserve did not reach either the traditional center of Miskito territory at Cape Gracias a Dios (whose belongingness under the jurisdiction of Honduras was confirmed) or Greytown that became a free city with a free port.<sup>41</sup> The new title of “hereditary chief” replaced that of the king. However, the authority continued to be passed down through the same family line that had provided kings.

For the next thirty years the Mosquito Shore remained an isolated autonomous entity separate from the rest of Nicaragua. The British government avoided any direct involvement in its inner matters, even though some indirect influence passed through the pro-British, Creole-Jamaican factions of Mosquito political elites. The only substantial Nicaraguan-British controversy during the 1870s over what each country perceived as treaty violations by the other was resolved in 1879 by the arbitration on the Treaty of Managua by the Austrian Emperor, Franz Joseph. The resort of Britain and Nicaragua to Austrian arbitration proved the impotence of Miskito “hereditary chief”.<sup>42</sup> At the same time, the American latex and banana industry generated a certain economic boom on the Shore. The extraction of latex begun in 1869 in the area round San Juan del Norte in response to the demand for rubber needed for the shock absorbers at railways. Banana exports commenced in the 1880s. But the reserve did not appear to offer sufficient stability and protection to entice American investors; at the same time, the economic prosperity of the region prompted Nicaragua to extend its direct control over it, ultimately by using military force. The British government deferred to the USA on the Mosquito question.<sup>43</sup> The political autonomy of the Miskito was ended by their so-called *reincorporation* into the Nicaraguan state in 1894, under the Liberal administration of President Zelaya. The Nicaraguan forces pulled down the Miskito flag and stripped indigenous authorities of all their remaining legal power. Spanish-speaking mestizos from the

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<sup>41</sup> The full text of the treaty OERTZEN – ROSSBACH – WÜNDERICH, *The Nicaraguan Mosquitia*, pp. 315-317.

<sup>42</sup> G. KAHLE – Barbara POTTHAST, *Der Wiener Schiedsspruch von 1881. Eine Dokumentation zur Schlichtung des Konfliktes zwischen Großbritannien und Nicaragua um Mosquitia*, Köln/Wien 1983.

<sup>43</sup> NAYLOR, *Penny Ante Imperialism*, p. 198.



Pacific Coast, who first started to arrive after 1860, were attracted now in larger numbers by the declared intention of Zelaya to hispanicize political life and administrative structures on the coast. Thus the English-speaking Creole community that by the 1850s had risen to a position of economic and political dominance saw its position usurped first socially and economically by the North American and then politically by the mestizo Nicaraguans.

### **„Third-party“ view**

In close connection with the Prussian migration came to the Shore the missionaries of the Moravian Church (Unitas Fratrum or Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine). Religious exiles from Moravia and various Protestant dissenters from German lands, who at the beginning of the eighteenth century settled in Saxony and founded their center in Herrnhut, claimed to be direct successors of the Bohemian Protestants known as the Unity of Brethren (Brüder-Unität, Unitas Fratrum). In the 1730s, the newly formed church launched a massive expansion, founding towns in many countries. At the same time, missions began among native groups in Greenland, the Caribbean, continental North America, South Africa and India.<sup>44</sup> In spite of its territorial scattering, the Herrnhut community resisted being dissolved and absorbed by the major societies in the countries where its members settled. Moravians adhered to a specific theology that resulted from incorporating medieval reform Christianity and stressing a simple and peaceful life in the manner of Christ and his disciples; recalling the German Pietism of the late seventeenth century, with its call for the revival of evangelical simplicity, and for making the biblical truths the only criterion of a truly Christian life, conjuring feelings of exclusiveness; and the original personality of Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, the first leader of the Church, who accentuated the need for the active participation of every Christian in the process of amending the world.<sup>45</sup>

This mission and social-reform endeavor prevailed within the Moravian Church also in the nineteenth century. Therefore, they readily seized the chance, offered to them by the Prince Schönburg-Waldenburg, to take part in the colonization venture on the Mosquito

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<sup>44</sup> For the history of the renewed Unity of Brethren/Moravian Church see David CRANZ, *Alte und Neue Brüder-Historie oder kurz gefaßte Geschichte der Evangelischen Brüder-Unität in den ältern Zeiten und insonderheit in dem gegenwärtigen Jahrhundert*, Barby/Leipzig 1771 (repr. Hildesheim 1973); Joseph Theodor MÜLLER, *Geschichte der Böhmischesen Brüder*, Herrnhut 1922-31, 3 vols.; J. Taylor HAMILTON, Kenneth G. HAMILTON, *History of the Moravian Church*, Bethlehem 1967.

<sup>45</sup> For Zinzendorf, see August Gottlieb SPANGENBERG, *Leben des Herrn Nicolaus Ludwig Grafen und Herrn von Zinzendorf und Pottendorf*, Barby 1772 (repr. Hildesheim/New York 1971); Joseph Theodor MÜLLER, *Zinzendorf als Erneuerer der alten Brüderkirche*, Leipzig 1900; Otto UTTENDÖRFER, *Zinzendorfs religiöse Grundgedanken*, Herrnhut 1935; the same, *Zinzendorf und die Mystik*, Berlin 1951; and Erich BEYREUTHER, *Studien zur Theologie Zinzendorfs*, Neukirchen 1962.

Coast; and they remained in the region even after the „Carlstadt“ Prussian colony collapsed. Throughout the second half of the 19th century, the Moravians were the only effective missionary group operating among the coastal population. The evangelization of the Indians brought about profound transformations in the social, cultural, and economic structures of the Miskitos and Creoles, as well as in their relations with the outside world. The Moravians became influential in the structures of local leadership, they became mediators between the Miskitos and the outside world and promoted also new forms of economic activities, closely tied to the American ventures into the coast.

Besides these activities, the Moravian missionaries in their diaries, reports and letters amply documented the political and social developments of the Mosquito Coast between 1850-1894.<sup>46</sup> This “third party view” can be of great value both for the study of the specific history of the Mosquito Shore and of the more general, comparative analysis of colonial problem, even though of course the Moravian testimony is not „impartial“, as it responded to the specific problems, goals and ideology of the Church. Pronounced is the contrast in these documents of great political history and the general, unifying character of official documentation and of the “history from below”, the daily life and individual histories of the inhabitants of the Shore. The use of Moravian materials thus makes possible to interconnect in the analysis of colonial phenomenon the micro level – the local community – to regional problems (Central American setting, in this case) and to macro-level, the colonial empires and the world system, as they reflect for example in the documents of the British Foreign Office and Colonial Office.

The Moravian influence was one more in the novel cultural traditions experienced by the Miskitos in the modern era. The more so because Moravians entrusted much of Church administration and daily labor to native “assistants”. It served as a shield against the traditional dominance of the English culture – discredited by the agreements of 1850 and 1860 – and the mounting pressure of Spanish and Catholic Nicaraguan culture. That Miskitos interiorized the Moravian ideology and used it for their own ends was most clearly confirmed in the period of mass “Awakening” (conversion) of Miskitos in the 1880s. Under the label of Protestant Christianity the Miskito parsons and their followers tried to harness the religion to

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<sup>46</sup> These sources are mostly preserved in the Central Archive of the Church (Unitäts-Archiv) in Herrnhut, Germany. Some of the letters and diaries were published in the newsletters of the Church, such as *Periodical Accounts relating to the Missions of the Church of the United Brethren, established among the Heathen* (since 1790) or *Nachrichten aus der Brüdergemeine* (since 1817).

local goals.<sup>47</sup> By the end of the movement, church membership had tripled and the previously marginal Moravians had established themselves as a dominant force in coastal politics. The mission reports about this period are a unique source on that phenomenon. Existing mission churches were packed, new ones were erected voluntarily by the new converts. Even traditional Miskito shamans (*sukias*) presented themselves as Christians and asked ecstatically for baptism. Some writers have emphasized the pro-European aspects of the Awakening, seeing it as an example of modernizing „reform“<sup>48</sup> or as melding of already harmonious cultures.<sup>49</sup> However, the movement took place in a period of deep crisis of Miskito society and should be read in a more general context of syncretic movements in various parts of the globe.

### **Present-day interpretations of colonial processes**

The reincorporation did not mark the end of the Creoles and Miskitos as recognizable ethnic groups within the Nicaraguan population. The heritage of several centuries of informal British rule under the flag of „Miskito Kingdom“ continues in the form of specific „coastal“, Anglophone Creole and Miskito identity. The „reincorporation“ of 1894 still remains greatly resented by the peoples of the Atlantic Coast. In the first half of the 20th century, the intense exploitation of local resources and labor through gold mining, wood cutting, banana production, chicle gathering, turtle and lobster sales, and other boom-and-bust enterprises brought about numerous social and economic problems to local people. Logically the cause of these problems is sought for in various interpretations of earlier history. On the other hand, from the standpoint of official Nicaraguan nationalism the historical connection that the Mosquito Coast has had with Great Britain and the English-speaking world provoked suspicion that culminated in the 1980s, during the Contra War. With a certain grain of truth, since the leaders of the Miskito Contra factions presented their fight against the revolutionary

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<sup>47</sup> Daniel NOVECK, *With water bought from God: commodities, consciousness and religious conversion in nineteenth century Mosquitia*, Chicago 2000, p. 1.

<sup>48</sup> „The question of why the Miskito used Protestant images and rites to confront their crisis can only be explained in terms of the active roll played by the Moravian Church in the general process of change in the region. Evidently, the Mission had offered the Miskito viable visions of the future. The Protestant ban on alcohol offered a way out of the excesses many villages had fallen into through the rum trade. The Protestant work ethic helped them cope with the intensifying export economy on the Coast at the end of the 19th century. The psychological advantages to the converted Indian should also not be underestimated. The established mission church provided a self-image commensurate with the new times. And with the influx of foreigners, the beginning of a new economic upswing and the insecure future of the Reserve, it seems obvious that the Indians were subjected to wide-ranging pressures toward change. ... At the same time they also gave expression to a proud, new identity – as Christians.“ (OERTZEN – ROSSBACH – WÜNDERICH, *The Nicaraguan Mosquitia*, p. 56-57)

<sup>49</sup> HELMS, *Asang*, pp. 3-4.

Nicaraguan government as a fight for the resurrection of Miskito Kingdom and as a response to the colonial exploitation. Moreover, the present-day competitions on the international scene reflect in historical interpretations. Was Great Britain „defeated“ in the struggle for Central America by the United States? Were the Central American states “usurped” by North Americans? Of course, also these questions again can be formulated in a more general way, bringing out the shared problems of post-colonial and neo-colonial regions.