

**Hale, Charles W.** *Resistance and Contradiction: Miskitu Indians and the Nicaraguan State, 1894-1987*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994.

Anthropologist Charles Hale lived and did fieldwork among the Miskitu people of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua for over three years during the 1980s. During this period Miskitu resistance groups were engaged in bitter conflict with the Sandinista government. Hale achieved remarkable fluency in the Miskito language and interviewed people in the community of Little Sandy Bay about their perceptions of the conflict. At the same time he maintained close relations with Sandinista personnel on the Coast, and had strong sympathies with the revolution. As a result, Hale says his work tries to balance and explain the conflict between "two radically different versions of reality." (p. 10) This book reports a remarkable piece of fieldwork, and struggles to put the opposing points of view into analytical perspective.

Hale describes the positive relationship between the Miskitu and the British (and later North Americans) with his own term, "Anglo affinity." This affinity, developed through positive experiences with missionaries and company officials and others, implied seeing North Americans as senior partners or even relatives, who had the best interests of their Miskitu friends at heart. The North American companies, which cut the pine forests and worked the gold mines, were not interpreted as exploitative, but rather appreciated for the steady work they provided and the consumer goods their presence made available. Simply for being *meriki*, Hale was welcomed warmly by Miskitu people, and he notes that it would have been nearly impossible for a mestizo Nicaraguan to do such fieldwork.

The Sandinista perspective was quite different. Although they talked about the Indian past in idealistic terms, the Sandinistas disparaged the reality of Miskitu Indian life in the present. In their thinking, the Miskitu needed to be brought out of their backward cultural condition and integrated into the revolutionary framework, along with mestizo peasants and workers. They felt a sense of betrayal at Miskitu resistance. Anglo affinity, in Sandinista terms, was simply a form of false consciousness promoted by US imperialism.

In 1980, armed conflict broke out between Miskitu resistance groups and the Sandinista military. A number of people Hale knew were killed in the bloody fighting of the early 1980s. The Miskitu soldiers of MISURASATA and its later splinter groups were usually young men who lived in the bush and were supported by their relatives in the communities, and who received US guns and supplies through Costa Rica.

However, by the late 1980s, the government sponsored autonomy project had brought about "an impressive chronicle of convergence." (p. 218) Hostility and opposition on the part of Little Sandy Bay townspeople had changed to cautious acceptance of the Sandinista government. People were returning to the community and economic production had been revived. Miskitu community leaders played an important role in the peace process, pushing hard for an end to the fighting that had been so destructive. The autonomy agreement guaranteed Miskitu communal land rights and created an Atlantic Coast political council. Hale reports that Miskitu people did not abandon their own more radical demands, but had been drawn into a political accommodation process through

which they could pursue their goals. Sandinista military and development workers had also made strong efforts at positive interaction with local people. However, in 1990 the national elections brought to power a government opposed to the autonomy project, and we have little information on Miskitu ethnic militancy in the 1990s.

Hale struggles with the concepts of Anglo affinity and ethnic militancy throughout the book. However, there is a disappointing lack of convergence between the rich ethnographic information collected in the field and the theorizing that attempts to tie it all together. Unfortunately, the theoretical chapters are involuted and seem to complicate rather than elucidate the conflict process. The richest parts of the book are those that deal with local people, both Miskitu villagers and Sandinistas, and bring forth their points of view, often in their own words. Hale's sympathy and warm relations with both sides are apparent and his fieldwork abilities are clearly extraordinary. The book contains a useful Appendix which discusses the fieldwork process and also presents the text of the 1985 autonomy law.

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