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The Case of Tasbapauni, an Atlantic Coast Community

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Document Version
Final published version

Publication date:
1999

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Citation for published version (APA):
Henriksen, K. (1999). *Constructions of Identity and Place in Nicaragua: The Case of Tasbapauni, an Atlantic Coast Community*.

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Download date: 05. Oct. 2023

Constructions of identity and place in Nicaragua. The case of Tasbapauni, an Atlantic Coast community.

Ken Henriksen

Introduction

This paper sets out to explore processes of community stabilization and political autonomy in a context of political neoliberalism and cultural globalization. Few would deny the assertion that the recent past of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua can be studied as the history of the ways in which the ethnic groups have been faced with and in this way coped with different sources of instability. While the sandinista revolution in 1979 led to violent mobilization against an integrationist and omnipresent central state, the peace process and the subsequent defeat of the sandinista government in the 1990 national elections, have radically changed the conditions for the ethnic population living in the area. After a long and devastating war the ethnic communities had to start all over again - re-making a “normal” day-to-day life and re-building their homes and communities. But the circumstances of re-stabilization have been radically transformed and new sources of instability have emerged. The rural, ethnic communities now have to respond to central state directed policies of neo-liberalism, the withdrawal of state institutions and to new forms of enclosure and containment.

What kind of dynamics evolve when local subjects, engaged in re-making thier lifes, are faced with such sources of instability? And in this connection, in what ways do the effects of the global flows of ideas, information and culture inform these dynamics?

Based upon fieldwork in Tasbapauni, a small Miskitu community on Nicaragua’s Atlantic Coast, the paper aims at discussing these questions. The scrutiny is thus on the local dynamics of state interventions and globalization. I am aware that the interpenetration of national and global pressures has played a predominant role in the formation of social and cultural structures of the Atlantic Coast. But this paper stresses the importance of actor-oriented analysis in the study of development processes (Long 1992). Change, one may say, is not only imposed from the "top" it is also initiated from “below” and should therfore be conceptualized as the

outcome of the ways in which local agents and institutions respond to - and in this way mold and remold interventions and impositions "from above". An actor-oriented approach thus entails recognizing diverse forms of social practices and it attributes the notion of agency to local subjects even under the most extreme forms of coercion. In stressing the imaginative skills and the transformative capacity of social actors this study leans upon central ideas of the structuration theory elaborated by Anthony Giddens (1979 and 1984). Giddens holds that the reflexive monitoring of activity is a chronic feature of everyday action and that actors not only monitor the flow of their activities; they also monitor the social and physical aspects of the context in which they move and act (Giddens 1984:5ff).

The focal point for studying agency in the community of Tasbapauni in this piece of research, are the practices associated with the construction of identity. While identity can be constructed along a variety of markers such as gender, class or nation this paper sets out to explore the complex relationship between two identitymarkers: ethnicity and place. But instead of taking a local ethnic identity for granted or viewing ethnicity as naturally rooted in a particular place the paper seeks to re-examine the relationship by viewing identity as a social and cultural construction that is contributing to the production and re-production of the place in question. Identity we may say, borrowing from Appadurai, is just one among a wide range of techniques for the production of locality (1996:182). The idea of reviewing the relationship between place and ethnicity brings with two important implications. First, it reminds us that we have to see identity as, in part, the outcome of human agency. People are active creators of culture and identity and not passive receivers of them. Second, it also implies that the emphasis is on the projective and generative role of identity. This paper elaborates on a dual relationship between identity and practice. At one level it is conceptualized as a resource or a capital (Bourdieu) that may be invested in action. At another level the construction of an ethno-spatial identity will be analyzed as a practice in it self. This kind of identity often produces alternative forms of locality that stand outside or even counteracts the localizing consequenses of the work of wider, dominating social forces.

In line with this type of thinking the community of Tasbapauni will not be studied as a static and isolated entity surrounding human activity and interaction. The aim is, on the other hand, to "open up the field" so as to analyze interactions as embedded in a "field of relations" (Barth

1992) and in an ever changing context paying special attention to the fact that Tasbapauni is produced against various kinds of odds or under conditions that are not solely the outcome of internal creativity. On the contrary Tasbapauni shall be studied as the outcome of the ways in which "internal" creativity has faced with and in this way molded the "external" contexts of life.

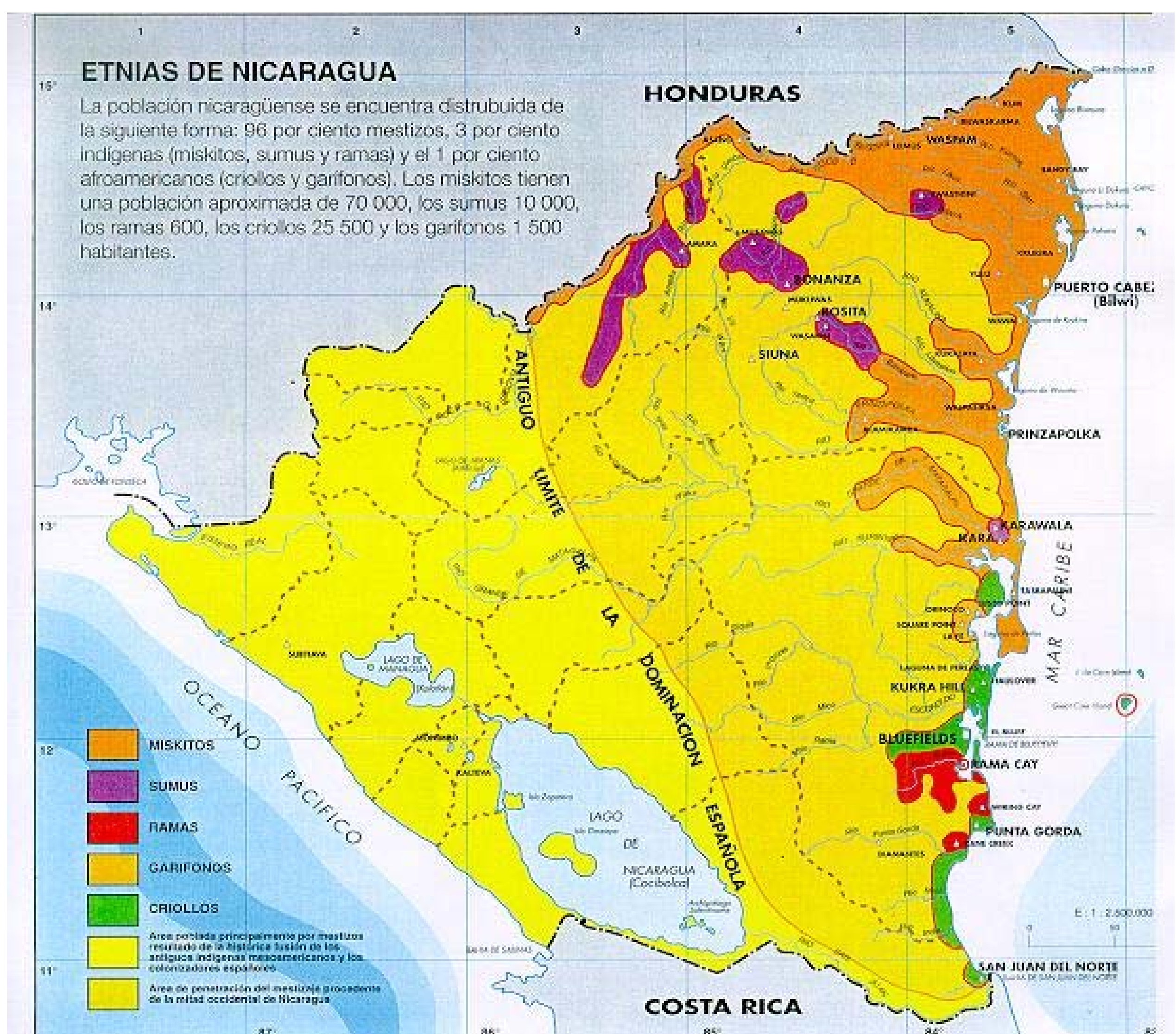
A profound elaboration of a theoretical approach which accounts for the complex relationship between the constitutive order of social systems and the day-to-day activities that unfold in the lived-in-world ventures well beyond the scope of this paper. As the emphasis is on the localizing consequenses of ethno-spatial practices in Tasbapauni the paper, nevertheless, seeks to study the ways in which the wider social context impinges on these practices and in this way constraints and enables local subjects' locality producing activities - which in themselves often have wider contextual implications.

The methodological device of this task is an elaboration of Jean Lave's distinction between *arena* and *setting* which together constitute the context of the practices under scrutiny (Lave 1988:146ff). While an arena is conceptualized as the wider social environment that exists prior to and beyond the control of human actors the setting is defined as an *"experienced, personally ordered and edited version of the arena"* (Lave 1988:151). The context is thus to be analyzed as the relation between arena and setting. Though such a dialectic notion of context guides the arguments of this paper I find reasons to review Lave's theory on two important points:

First, she leaves the historical dimensions of the context untheorized. This paper argues that a diachronic perspective on practice is needed and that the generative basis of ethno-spatial identities in part stems from inscribed and embodied dispositions (history as arena). But history does not only exist "out there" penetrating people's consciousness; the past is also subject to the imaginative skills of human beings (history as setting). Throughout the paper I shall argue that when the inhabitants of Tasbapauni engage in the re-invention of the local history they not only reinforce their ethno-spatial identity; these imaginations are often projected towards the future and they sometimes lead to social and institutional transformations.

The question of social transformations touches on my second point of critique. Though the subjective notion of setting connotes ideas of fragility and malleability and therefore points to the transformative capacity of human beings Jean Lave does not provide us with the necessary tools to study how changes of the setting sometimes alter or even damage the social and structural underpinnings, which are constituted by the arena, of people's practices.

Elaborating on a distinction between *community* - defined as the precarious outcome of the production of locality (Tasbapauni) from below - and *village* - which refers to the localizing strategies from above - I shall argue that when people engage in the construction of their *community* they not only generate the setting of their activities; the community also becomes a counterwork which brings with it alternative and counterhegemonic (Mallon 1994) ideas of the nation-state and the role of the *community* in the processes of state formation which differ from connotations associated with the notion of *village*. The construction of community as distinct from village not only constitute a transformation on the level of setting, it also becomes a re-defined arena which provides the inhabitants new place from which to speak about



Map 1. The ethnic groups of Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast. Reproduction from "Nicaragua y el mundo. Atlas básico ilustrado. Universidad Centroamericana, Managua.

rights, duties of the central state etc.

The empirical foundation of these discussions is, as mentioned above, the study of ethno-spatial practices in the community of Tasbapauni. Tasbapauni is a Creole-English speaking Miskitu community located approximately 60 miles north of the regional capital of Bluefields in the South Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAS) (see map). Due to a wretched infrastructure the transport to and from Bluefields, which is always by boat, is very irregular. If the townspeople have to go to Bluefields to consult the doctor, sell lobsters, purchase basic groceries for themselves or to sell from their local shop in Tasbapauni they often have to wait for several days for one of the cargoboats that attend the communities of the Pearl Lagoon Basin. Though starvation is rare life is hard for most of the approximately 1.500 inhabitants (local estimates). In their struggle to overcome the hardships and to repair the havocs caused by the war and subsequent hurricanes they have to rely on the benefits from slash-and-burn subsistence agriculture and artisanal fishing. Situated on a land tongue that separate the Carribean sea from the Pearl Lagoon Basin the town has excelent fishing opportunities, but because of the poor condition of the fishing equipment (e.g. dugout canoes) most of the fishermen are left to subsistence. Some of the more fortunate families do, however, profit from the proceeds stemming from the selling of lobsters to a nearby company.

The study of the production of locality in Tasbapauni should thus be viewed as an *extreme case* for the study of the transformational capacity of ethno-spatial practices. The usage of the term “extreme case” connotes the idea that the community of Tasbapauni which is - from a economic and a social point of view - relatively weak, is able to provide us very special information about the ways in which the investment of alternative forms of capital (e.g. identity) often has wider social repercussions. Let me immediately stress that the use of the word "case" does not mean that my discussions of events and practices in Tasbapauni should be read as examples of something larger than themselves. I hope instead that my findings will provide with some analytic tools that can be used in the study of the production of locality in other situations and contexts.

Map 2. The Pearl Lagoon basin and surroundings, including the community of Tasbapauni. Reproduction from "Nicaragua y el mundo. Atlas básico ilustrado". Universidad Centroamericana, Managua.

Colonial encounters

By the end of 1894 the region commonly known as the Atlantic Coast became part of Nicaraguan territory. This event, the result of a military occupation by Nicaraguan troops, led to a final stop of British sovereignty in the region. Apart from a period of withdrawal in the early 1800 the region had been under British indirect rule since the crowning of a Miskitu king around 1680. But while the local attitude towards the British and later North American influence had been that of loyalty, endorsement and mutual benefit (Hale 1994:37ff) the Nicaraguan takeover gave rise to a course of state formation in the region that can be described as a constant interplay between Nicaraguan state penetration and local, ethnic mistrust, distrust and sometimes even overt resistance. The background for these anti-Nicaraguan sentiments is multifaceted and has already been dealt with (e.g. Hale 1994, for the case of the Miskitu *"Indians"* and Gordon 1998, for the case of the Creole population). Suffice here to remind that the colonial history of the Coast has fostered an "ethnic patchwork" that is very different from the dominant Mestizo-culture that has developed in the western part of Nicaragua. Apart from the majority population, which is today the Mestizos (mixed indigenous and European), the Atlantic Coast is home to 5 ethnic minorities - 3 *"Indian"* groups (Miskitu-, Sumu-, and Rama *"Indians"*) and two African-Carribean based groups (Creoles and Garífunas).[1]

In light of the colonial relations between Mestizo Nicaraguans and Coast people, imbued with structural inequity and cultural oppression, it is not surprising that the overriding ethnic boundary construction (Barth 1969) has been based upon the repudiation of the Mestizo-Nicaraguans. But though overt conflicts have been rare the internal ethnic relations can be described as a relation often based on competition and exclusion rather than on solidarity. One of the factors giving rise to these relations has been the institutionalization of a fragile and fluid ethnic hierarchy. While the Miskitu people enjoyed the privileges of the Miskitu Kingdom under British sovereignty the Creole population has gradually gained higher status in part as an outcome of their fluency in English which has facilitated better positions on North American owned plantations and in other forms of wage-labor activities. During the anti-government mobilization in the 1980s, which the *"Indian"* organizations constructed as a defense of "the *"Indian"* way of life" and proclaimed historical rights, the Miskitu people and

the other *"Indian"* groups regained some of their lost ethnic pride (Henriksen 1994, Garcia 1996).

The ethnic identity of Tasbapauni reflects to a large extent these ethnic interactions. Though most people, especially the older generation, identify themselves as Miskitu people the predominant language in the community is the Creole English. On the other hand the majority of the younger generation mostly identify themselves as Creole often referring to their incapability in speaking the Miskitu language. This and several other factors suggest that the interactions between Miskitu and African based Creole identities have fostered the contruction of complicated ethnic identities in Tasbapauni. While still pertaining to *"Indian"* ways of life many townspeople have also adopted practices associated with the Creole culture. Former studies conducted in the region therefore agree that the ethnic identity of Tasbapauni is neither "pure" nor static. One of the more celebrated arguments adduces a procesual argument stating that Tasbapauni has gone through a process of creolization.[2] I will however argue that this brief of a unilinіary model of identity (trans)formation is too simple to understand the much more complex and paradoxical constructions of identity taking place during my stay in the community. A detailed and extended treatment of my critique is, however, beyond the scope of this paper, and I shall therefore confine myself to the arguments that will contribute to the unfolding of the idea of the paper. While the uniliniary creolization model is based on the erroneous inference that ethnicity is the only important identity marker identity is, nevertheless, deeply entangled in an assortment of other markers among which a **local** Tasbapauni identity plays a significant role. Bounded up on conceptions of rights to community land, myths of common origin and ideas of communal self-determination this local identity, entangled by ethnicity, is only one element in a wide range of other techniques used to construct and maintain Tasbapauni as a discrete and spatially, politically and culturally confined community. Throughout this paper I shall elaborate more systematically on this argument. But let us first make a brief move out of the community of Tasbapauni to see how identity and ethnic

[1] The Ethnic groups on Nicaragua s Atlantic Coast include; emigrated mestizos (approx. population 180.000), Miskitu-indians (70.000), Creoles(26.000), Sumu-indians(5.000), Rama-indians(1000) and a small group of black Caribs called Garifunos(1.500).

[2] Nietschmann (1973) as regards processes taking place in the 1960s and 1970s, Hale (1994) refers to processes taking place in the 1980s while Gordon (1998) analizes transformations accuring throughout the century.

consciousness on the Atlantic Coast have been constructed in the most recent research on the topic.

Ethnicity on the Atlantic Coast - an overview

Most of the literature meant to explain the Miskitu people's anti-government mobilization in the beginning of the 1980s has already been dealt with by Charles Hale (1994). I agree with his critique that most explanations remain confined to emphasize one side or the other of the divide between structural analysis and perspectives foregrounding the Miskitu culture. In addition to Hale's reviews I will focus on two recently published studies on ethnic identity formation in the region. Apart from Charles Hale's book I will make a brief reading of Claudia Garcia's contribution (1996).

The focus of Claudia Garcia´s research is the social construction of ethnic identity. Using the case of Miskitu people from the northern part of the Atlantic Coast she analyzes the processes that have contributed to the formation of the Miskitu identity over time.[3] Arguing for a position that highlights the situational and relational character of identity constructions she offers a thorough historical study of how encounters with the British administration, the Moravian church and the Sandinista Popular Revolution have been important factors in the shaping of a fluid and ever changing collective identity.[4] This perspective is, thus, just one amongst a wide range of other contributions that - in the case of Nicaragua as well as in other contexts - seeks to highlight the ways in which identity is being formed and re-formed in interaction with the context. But in two dimensions of her study Garcia brings new and interesting insight. First, the book offers a convincing study of the role of the Moravian church in the formation of the Miskitu-identity. Apart from bringing new knowledge on a topic that has not been sufficiently dealt with in former studies on the Atlantic Coast it reminds us that ethnicity cannot stand

[3] The northern part of the Coast, today known as the North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN) differs ethnically from the more heterogenous southern part in which Tasbapauni is located (the RAAS). The Miskitu-people forms the majority in RAAN, while the RAAS is dominated by the Mestizos and the Creolepopulation. García also inserts that the Miskitu people from the North considers themselves to be different from the Miskitupopulation living elsewhere on the Coast (1996:19). My experience from Tasbapauni somehow confirms Garcias distinction.

[4] Garcia's study stresses the ways in which Religious beliefs associated with Moravian protestantism have informed constructions of ethnic identity. Miskitu identity is thus, according to Garcia, a complex mix of religious and ethnic attributes.

alone when it comes to an understanding of how ethnic identity is often fused with other forms of markers , in this case religion. Second, and more important, her research studies how social memory - that is the collective reconstruction of historical (experienced as well as immemorial) events (Garcia 1996:32ff) - *"acts in a dynamic and creative way, relating the past to the present, and selects what is important to the individuals in a specific social moment"* (p.36). In this way the past contributes to shaping and strengthening the Miskitu peoples collective identity implying that historical interpretations are often projected towards the future. In the analysis of how the Miskitu people "remembered" the era of the Miskitu Kingdom as an ideal time it is asserted that these reconstructions were acting as a mobilization factor during the time of her fieldwork, and although it is not sufficiently explored, the implicit argument is that the Miskitu identity formed against the backdrop of social memory, in part, can explain why the Miskitu people engaged in widespread mobilization against the sandinista government (Garcia 1996:58ff).

I do recognize that Garcia carefully reminds us that the political aspects of the Sandinista-Miskitu conflict only forms the background, not the focus, of her study (p. 14). I will however point to one serious problem stemming from a framework which tends to overlook the political consequenses of identity constructions. While Garcias book offers a profound study of some of the dynamics contributing to the formation of identity it omits the much more interesting question of **what identity does**. Over the last years a spate of research studies has focused on the ways in which identity and culture provide actors with resources and transformative potentials. Within New Social Movement Theory for example, it has been argued that when subordinate social actors redefine their identity it often widens their space for action and extends the boundaries of their social and political citizenship (Foweraker 1995, Escobar and Alvarez 1992, Alvarez, Dagnino, Escobar 1998). Though identity is not necessarily constituting a platform for oppositional practices - in fact the demarcation of ethnic and social difference often leads to the reproduction of inferiority and, thus, to the strenghtening of the hierarchic structures - communities of subalterns are sometimes capable of converting negative social capital into valuable social and cultural resources that can be invested in political action (Kearney 1996:179).

Thus, identity, viewed as a form of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu), often informs projects of overt resistance or mobilization against powerful and unjust rule. Consider the Miskitu mobilization against sandinista government, for example, which was to a large extent produced by the construction of a Miskitu identity that was opposed to the sandinista project of constructing a nation-state based on the Mestizo-identity.[5]

In his pioneering study of the Miskitu people's reactions to different political and social situations in the history of Nicaragua Charles Hale (1994) provides the reader with a profound understanding of how the Miskitu consciousness guides their political orientation. Though the emphasis is on an analysis of the Miskitu mobilization against the sandinista government he also offers an explanation of their relative "passivity" under the Somoza dictatorship. The key to understanding this paradox in the Miskitu people's political practice is found in Gramsci's distinction between *""good sense""* and "*"common sense"*" which together form the basis of a "*"contradictous consciousness"*".[6] It is argued that the Miskitu people, as an outcome of their collective response to the historical subordination to British and North American powers as well as Nicaraguan authority, have adopted a complex and *"contradictous consciousness"*. While the *"common sense"* - labeled *"Anglo affinity"*[7] - results from the embracement of the hegemonic premises associated with Anglo-American culture, the *""good sense""* - constituted by an *"ethnic militancy"* - is the product of a critical stance towards Nicaraguan rule. The Miskitu consciousness, it is argued, therefore generates a political orientation which combines resistance with accommodation. The explanation of situations of quiescence must therefore seek the foundation in an analysis of how hegemonic ideas render the realities of power natural or inevitable (p. 27) while resistance is most likely to occur when the *"good sense"* , that is the ethnic militancy, prevails or deepens.

[5] While Garcia analizes how *"Indian*ness" was being reinvented as an outcome of the conflict, the book lacks a thorough study of how identity was invested as part of the mobilization. The book therefore offers a vague and superficial explanation of the mobilization.

[6] Hale's book is not restricted to studying ethnic conscoiusness alone. His explanation of Miskitu people's political orientation is rooted in a unified analysis that pays attention to structural and contextual factors as well. He also applies the notion of *"contradictous consciousness"* to the sandinista ideology. In order to unfold the argument of this paper I will however confine myself to a discussion of the Gramscian notion applied to the Miskitu-consciousness.

[7] Hale defines "anglo affinity" as a *"cultural form that Miskitu people themselves created through a complex historical process of resistance and accomodation in response to multiple axes of inequity. I t consists of ideas, values, and notions of common sense that entail understandings of past and present life conditions, which correspond closely to understandings immanent in the discourse of North American institutions that have surroun-*

This explanatory device guides Hale's analysis of the Miskitu population's responses to Somoza and Sandinista states. The fact that Somoza nurtured positive North American sentiments and left the Coast in hands of foreign economic interests thus placed the Miskitu in a dilemma: *"to oppose Somoza would mean to oppose the Americans as well"* (p. 139). In this situation the premises of Anglo-affinity, it is argued, therefore encouraged accommodation. Stemming from a nationalist, assimilationist and anti-American discourse the deep structural transformations that occurred in the wake of the sandinista revolution had exactly the opposite effect - widespread mobilization. The premises of Anglo-affinity now helped to constitute and enforce the ethnic militancy.

Though it constitutes a clear advance in the debate on ethnic mobilization Hale's theory leaves the day-to-day practices in situations of what he terms quiescence untheorized. The problem arises from the dualistic model that distinguishes rigorously between accommodation and resistance and between *"good sense"* and *"common sense"*. Consider for example the social and political conditions on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua today. Most research on the socioeconomic impact of the neo-liberal policy, that has proceeded the defeat of the Sandinista Government in the 1990 national elections, points to the marginalization of the poor, including the ethnic groups of the Coast (Acevedo 1992, Gabriel 1996); and evidence also indicates that the Autonomy process that was initiated under the sandinista government has been undermined. These and several other factors suggest that the structural and political conditions at the moment are conducive to mobilization. But does the absence of overt resistance mean that people do not engage in alternative social projects that may be at odds with the those of the central state?, or in Hale's words, does it necessarily mean that collective actions in the present situation have the effect of accommodation because the ethnic groups have embraced *"common sense"* premises *"that dampen or divert their inclination to resist"* (Hale 1994:27)?

Drawing on experiences during my fieldwork in Tasbapauni I will argue that the relationship between identity and practice is much more complex and multi-faceted than Hale's dual

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ded them" (p.83).

model suggests. One of the problems stems from the elaboration of a one way model in the relationship between history, consciousness and action, which leaves little room for maneuvering. Firstly, subaltern consciousness, by nature contradictous, is construed as the product of past hegemonic structures, and secondly, action is presented as the direct outcome of this consciousness. Subordinate ethnic groups are thus victims of the past; even ethnic mobilization is the inscription of past practices into the present.

Within such a framework the concept of context is close to be synonymous to that of *arena* (see above) and Hale's understanding of context is thus based upon a study of how dispositions and cultural behavior have been embedded in local institutions and in the history of the Miskitu consciousness. I will argue that we have to make a supplementary investigation which focuses on the *setting* of the local practices. This implies an emphasis on the ways in which people generate their own forms of self-expression, and which highlights the idea of improvisation and collective construction.

Thus, I suggest that there is involved to levels of contextual interpretation in the study of practice. On one level we will have to make a study of the unacknowledged conditions of actions and the ways in which these conditions impose on body and thought so as to shape people's everyday practices. On another level we have to recognize that the phenomena we study "*are already constituted as meaningful"* (Giddens 1984:284), and the conditions under which people live and act are therefore themselves subject to intentional, (and contingent), activities. This level of analysis, I hope, pays attention to how regulated improvisations (Bourdieu) not only disclose local subject's understanding of the wider contexts of life but also put scrutiny on how these re-inventions is often accompanied by a parallel identification of lessons for the present and a project for the future (Grueso et al. 1998:205).

In the following discussion of a few cases from Tasbapauni I shall elaborate on the idea of a two level conception of contexts. Two other insights stemming from the review of Garcia's and Hale's books should be borne in mind. First, identity should not be studied as an entity that determines action. Identity is rather connected to practice in two interrelated ways; as a

practice in itself, and as a resource or capital that may be invested in action. Third, state, nature, landscapes and communities should not only be conceived of as things unto themselves or as entities existing “out there” independently of human action and activities but rather as something which is continuously being produced and re-produced by practice. These insights enable us us to pay attention to how internal creativity shapes “external” contexts of life, not only in cases of overt resistance but also, and more important, as an integrated part of day-to-day practices.

The first case deals with the institutionalization of the position of síndico of Tasbapauni. The case suggests that the work of local subjects’ re-inventions, (or regulated improvisations), has been important an factor in shaping and transforming the institution.

The position of síndico

The position of síndico was established by a Government decree of 1919 (Decreto No. 61, 13 de marzo de 1919) in the communities on the old Miskitu Reserve, that in the years before had been granted collective land titles. The responsibility of the síndico was to represent the community in all matters concerning the communal land and he was the overseer of the land as well as the guardian of the land title documents. The imposition of collective land tenure and the subsequent inauguration of the position of síndico are both important steps in the political history of the Atlantic Coast. In the first years after the “incorporation” the state had made various unsuccessful attempts to enhance the control over the newly annexed territory.[8] Whether it was the imposition of taxes, the establishment of local political structures or the prohibition of education in native and Creole languages the government initiatives met with

[8] Knowing perfectly that it is loaded with political meaning I, nevertheless, choose to use the notion of *incorporation*. This notion, I think, is more “political correct” in a context of autonomy-process.(in spite of all the internal and external problems related to a proper implementation and reglementation of the Nicaraguan Autonomy Statute). While constructions such as *reincorporation* (the official Nicaraguan version, claiming that the coast had always been part of Nicaragua) or *overthrow* (atlantic coast version, emphasizing the military occupation) are loaded with conflictual connotations, the notion of *incorporation* somehow fits to a autonomy which recognizes self-determination under Nicaraguan rule/sovereignty. But I must immediatedly emphasize that the notion of *incorporation* does not mean neutrality. I am perfectly aware that I am moving into the political field of naming. And I do understand that many coast people prefer to interpret the 1894-incident as an *overthrow*. A quickly look in my fieldwork diary tells me that this is how many people of Tasbapauni interpret history. In a recent study Edmund Gordon interprets it as an overtrow as well. (Gordon 1998:60f).

growing opposition and even sometimes resistance on the coast (Hale 1994:45ff). Another source of growing mistrust and discontent amongst the *"Indian"* and Creole population was the government policy of granting land titles to Mestizo emigrants (Hale 1994 and Gordon 1998) which constituted a serious threat to the *"Indian"* communities, that used to define their rights by usufruct.

But properly as the outcome of the intermediary work of the British diplomat H.O. Chalkley the Land Title Commission, which was established as an outcome of the Harrison-Altamirano Treaty ratified in 1906, started to maneuver satisfactorily by the end of 1915, and by the early 1916 the commission had surveyed and granted about 30 collective titles, including one to Tasbapauni (Hale 1994:48).[9]

Though the beneficiaries must have been satisfied with the communities' new legal status they experienced the unintended and ironic consequence of being dragged further into the selfsame nation-state that they had been resisting so fiercely. It was properly the first time in the history of state formation on the Atlantic Coast that a government intervention was accepted widely and even with enthusiasm. While the state had so forth been depicted in terms of an illegal oppressor the *"Indians"* were now compelled to see themselves as, at least in part, Nicaraguan citizens with legal rights that were guaranteed by the state. Consenting to receive the titles also implied accepting further integration. This process took a new step when the Nicaraguan Government passed the decree that set up the position of the síndico (decreto no. 61 1919). This decree established that the Síndico was a **government appointee**

[9] Compare the following two accounts of the landtitle procedure on the Atlantic Coast. The first one was written by the Central Governments representative in the Land Title Commision and refers to the problems he was facing in the community of Tasbapauni (spanish: Tasbapownie), and the second, dated only 1½ months after the first one, was told by the British liaison. The contrasting narratives exemplify the distrust against Nicaraguans and the positive influence of a British representative: "*Con idéntico fin se visitó al pueblo de Tasbapownie, en donde no fué posible hacer nada, por tropezar con obstinada resistencia por parte de aquel vecindario, quien siempre se ha negado a que se les demarque zonas para sus trabajos agrícolas*" (Letter from the Governor of Bluefields to H.O. Chalkley. September 8, 1915. Crowdell files, Bluefields-archive.). And H.O. Chalkleys account: *"They* [the *"Indians"* and Creoles] *have readily agreed to the proposal of the Government that each community should be granted a zone of land to be held in common by the inhabitants"* and *"very little difficulty was experienced in securing these results after my preliminary conferences with representatives of the "Indians".* (Letter from H.O.Chalkley to Alban Young. Oktober 22, 1915. Crowdell papers, Bluefields Archive).

who *"Podrá dar poderes generales o especiales para que represente a la comunidad en los negocios judiciales o extrajudiciales que se relacionen con los terrenos"* (art.5).

People from all over the Coast, *"Indians"* as well as Creoles, continued to resist and protest against Nicaraguan interventions, but the position of síndico was widely accepted and within few years the síndico institution was established in most Miskitu communities. If we follow Hale's line of thinking these processes, we may suggest, exemplified and deepened the Miskitu *"Indians"*' contradictous political orientation of accommodation and resistance. On the one hand they continued to engage in anti-Nicaraguan protests. On the other hand they accepted the extension of state control to the rural communities of the Atlantic Coast.

But imposition from above was only one of several junctures of the síndico institution. The position of síndico soon started to enter the existing lifeworlds of the communities affected, and in this way it was formed and transformed according to the local dynamics as well. He quickly became the highest political authority in most communities and he started to function as an intermediary or a "facilitator" of communication between the community and the government. The sindicoinstitution, thus, provided the communities with a "place" from which to speak and make complaints about community- and landrights as well protests against unjust rule etc.[10]

This argument suggests that we will have to place more emphasis on the "dynamics of institutionalization". The concept, I will argue, can help us to understand how state institutions, in the longue duree, are relatively precarious and open to transformations. An institution is never a stable end point but always on the move, in a process of institutionalization. [11] Some of the fuel contributing to these processes stems from local dynamics, which are not just molded by

[10] In a letter to "la alta comision para investigar las dificultades de la Costa Atlántica "the síndico of Bilwi presented himself as *"oficialmente nombrado por el Gobierno"*. In this way he inhanced his authority vis-a vis the recipient. (letter from the síndico of Bilwi to "la alta comison para investigar las dificultades de la Costa Atlántica". August 6, 1925. Crowdell papers, Bluefields Archive).

[11] The thinking of institutions in terms of processes is a methodological device that seeks to overcome the "resistance-accomodation" dualism.

hegemonic premises, they are also the outcome of local subject's improvisations and imaginations.

In the interpretation that follows - an analysis of a short fragment from my fieldwork in Tasbapauni - I shall take up the idea of studying the context as a *setting*. During previous visits to the community townspeople had told me that the position of síndico was the most important in the community and almost everybody agreed that - in view of all the land problems the community was facing - the importance of the síndico was growing.[12] The problems have to do with the illegal exploitation of the natural resources - especially lumber, the deliberate selling of land that belongs to the community and the extension of the agricultural front implying that a huge amount of the community land has been cleared and cultivated by poor Mestizo emigrants. Confronted with my question if these problems had arisen recently or if they had taken place since the Somoza dictatorship people always made a clear distinction between now and then emphasizing the present aggravation of the land situation.[13] In order to inquire more into how the "dynamics of institutionalization" have faced with the escalating land problem I had several conversations and informal interviews with the síndico of Tasbapauni:

> *"In Somoza time there wasn't too much problem about the land. The changing of government bring these problem. Especially with this government right now, the Alemán government. he want to take away land, you see!!... First time it was not like this. The changing of government is bringing these problems. The problem is from my take over. so I received the problem. It's hard and you see what I fight for, and I win it. And right now I think I get it*

[12] From an outside view the structure of the community leadership seems to be rather complex. Apart from the síndico there are the vicemajor (the alcalde), the president of the community, the governmentdelegate (el delegado de gobierno), the president of the eldercouncil (consejo de ancianos) and a couple of members of the community Board.

[13] It is a common paractice, especially among the older generation to divide the recent history in three clearly distinct periods: "the Somozatime", "the Sandnistatime" and "today". Periodization is surely deeply political. The memory of the time under sandinista rule, for example, was thus constructed as "a time of war" repressing memories about the subsequent peace- and autonomyprocess. In this case the periods constructed by people in Tasbapauni has to do with their resentment against the sandinistas. I only met with few people in Tasbapauni who nurtured pro-sandinista attitudes - and they all prefered to keep it in secret vis-à-vis other ommunitymembers.

clear...we [bare] with the spaniards them. No more people can go in and cut no land, you see, no more cutting of these big woods there I am fighting for. You see, on the next side, the Wawashang, I have to see what I can. I have to have meeting there, talk to the people them, I will be running around there and if I capture anything I taking them out, I just tell them move out, giving them some time, maybe they have something planted to eat; when they done take that out, OK, leave out. Sorry but what to do.....Those people who are there they don't come under a good acuerdo [agreement]. Under a good position to come and situate there. Because they didn't come to aks for no land to live there. they just come in in mala fe [bad faith]. I can take them out, that my job. That is my position to fight for the land, as a síndico. In Sandinista time another kind of problem, the war".[14]

Hale writes that, during the war as well as in the subsequent autonomy process, the síndico of Sandy Bay took up the role of promoting dialogue and reconciliation between local contrapeople and the government.[15] He therefore developed close working relations with government officials (Hale 1994: 149f and 181ff). This type of cooperation is absent from the síndico's narrative above and outweighed by a discourse that stresses the síndico's (and the community's) capability and right to handle their own affairs. Consider this account about a nearby Mestizo-village (Pueblo Nuevo):

"If them [the people of Pueblo Nuevo] go to the government to aks for help the government don't have nothing to do with our community land..... They have to come here, they have to come here the Pueblo Nuevo people and the government if they want. The Central government he don't have nothing to do with us, what he is looking is war, he is dangerous, it is very delicate.....We don't want no more war".

[14] I have transribed the interviews from tape trying to be true to the Creole English orthography, grammar and its idioms, including the use of spanish expressions. For the sake of clarity I translated the spanish expressions into Standard English.

[15] Charles Hale collected his data on the Miskitu people in Sandy Bay, a Miskitu community located about

This discourse of a subaltern autogovernance, present in many townspeople's idea about Tasbapauni as a discrete and autonomous entity, had a temporal dimension as well. Projects for the future mainly focused on prosperity for the community rather than for the nation, the Atlantic Coast or an ethnic group as a hole. But the discourse of autogovernance was also rooted in images of a common past and of Tasbapauni - extended to include the community land - created by the work of their ancestors. The síndico's explanation of his duties and responsibilities - what I choose to term the discourse of autogovernance - was founded on such a moral link with the past :

> *"A síndico he elected by the community. .. (The)Alcalde [mayor] is a government man, that is a government man. The síndico no. The Síndico is from the community. The Alcalde is the one who collect in taxes. He don't have nothing to do with community property, you see….. He don't have no right to touch community land. He is for the government, you know the government business, the alcalde [mayor] is different he is not with us, he is apart. (The síndico) is the responsible one for the community property, he is the one that take caring about the hole communityland property. He have to take care of the hole community property, land, sea, and everything. The town elect you, the town, not no one else, the town elect you. That is from our ancestors time, you see. Those land our ancestors get them working for the Miskitu King. So all those land what my old ancestors have those mojones [territorial markers] put we owning them. Through that we have our land ubicated. And from our own ancestor time we have síndico in this community. That is the one who see about the welfare of this hole territory, land, water, sea and everything, The land for the community".*

This narrative contrasts on important points with my account on the processes leading to the imposition of the síndico institution. While I presented it as a state institution, imposed from above, and the outcome of the landtitles granted to the *"Indian"* communities by the state

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25 miles north of Tasbapauni.

around 1916, the síndico of Tasbapauni offers a completely different version, which constructs the síndico institution as naturally rooted in the local history and which opposes the position of síndico to positions imposed by the central state ("*government man*"). In line with this type of thinking he also redefines the notion of the communityland of which he is responsible. In his narrative the notion of communityland does not refer to what was granted to them around 1915, but to what their ancestors got during the Miskitu Kingdom, which was before the incorporation of 1894.[16] In other words the Sindico and the Communityland are reconstructed as pre-Nicaraguan phenomena.

In order to study the social dynamics of these reconstructions I shall borrow from Appadurai's distinction between *fantasy and imagination* (1996). While fantasy carries with it the connotation of thought divorced from projects and actions or as something close to "*opium for the masses*" (p. 31) or escape, the notion of imagination directs our attention to its projective role in social life. Collective imaginations shall be viewed as a form of work or a *social practice* (p. 31) which are *"able to contest and sometimes even subvert the imagined world of the official mind"* (p.33). The validity and authenticity of narratives such as those quoted above is thus assessed - not by adapting some sort of correspondence criteria - but by making a reading of the context as a *setting*; that is on how imaginations, individual as well as collective, contribute to the formation and transformation of social relations and institutions.

The above example points to the role of subaltern imaginations in the dynamics of institutionalization. The idea was to approach the concept of political practice, not as a dualistic contradiction between resistance and accommodation, but rather as an unstable process in which multiple forms of day-to-day practices are invested and which have repercussions that are often much larger than themselves. Hegemony is thus not solely about the incorporation of hegemonic premises. As argued by Mallon among others hegemony involves a processual quality as well, and at this level *"power relations are* [constantly] *contested, legitimated and redefined"* (Mallon 1994: 70). The institutionalization of the position of síndico in Tasbapauni can in this line be viewed as a hegemonic process involving the imaginary work of the

[16] Everybody in the community knows a version of this narrative. The central idea is that the founders of the community - Miskitu *"Indians"* from the north who setlled around 1820 - started to work for the Miskituking

síndico and other community members of Tasbapauni. The precarious outcome of this process has been the *indigenization* of the síndico institution fused with the exercise of *autogovernance*.

The contexts of institutionalization

What has been discussed so far needs now to be explicitly contextualized. The dynamics of indigenization and autogovernance are not restricted to take place within the realm of the position of síndico alone. They are processes that are simultaneously context-driven and context-generative. In order to take up the idea of contextproduction I shall elaborate on Appadurai's methodological innovation of analyzing locality as figure rather than ground (p.182). This perspective implies a view on practices - not solely as something *taking* place *in* a particular locality - but more important as something *creating the place* in question. More precisely this means that the processes of indigenization and autogovernance should not be conceived of as ends in themselves, but as techniques invested in the production of locality in Tasbapauni..

The subjects of Tasbapauni are, however, not the only agents possessing the capabilities of spatial production. The production of locality is always at odds with the localizing strategies of the nation-state which seeks to create national and/or compliant citizens.[17] But the technologies invested in this task vary according to the context with radically different effects. In Nicaragua the sandinista revolution led to expanded state presence and the imposition of a range of "new" state institutions in the rural communities of the Atlantic Coast including Tasbapauni (schools, health clinics, military, military service, alphabetization campaigns, nationalist discourses etc. (see Hale 1994, Gordon 1998, etc.). Based upon a discourse that categorized the ethnic groups as backwarded and uncivilized these institutions saw the solution to the problems of the Coast as a question of inclusion into a nation-state controlled and defined by Mestizos.

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who lived in a nearby community (Pearl Lagoon). The payment for this work was inmense areas of land.

[17] According to Appadurai the production of locality is affected by the context producing capabilities of the nation-state, by the disporic flows and communities, and by electronic and virtual communities. In this connection I will emphasize on the role of the nation-state in the production of Tasbapauni.

The present neoliberal policy, on the other hand, implies the partial withdrawal of many of these state institutions. The word "partial" is important in this connection, because some of the institutions are still present, but as exemplified by the position of síndico, with very little statecontrol.[18] But the decline in statecontrol has certainly not led to the complete failure of the central state to penetrate community life or to define or contain ethnic minorities. In order to grasp the new and more sophisticated techniques of containment (Kearney) we will have to take a brief look on the *exclusive effects* of the present policy on the Coast. This policy includes, as mentioned above, the by-passing of the autonomy law, the granting of concessions to national and foreign campanies and the passive acceptance of Mestizo settlements on community land. The outcome of this and other elements in the state's approach on the Coast is the marginalization and exclusion of the ethnic minorities as well as their categorization as (denigrated) "*"Indians'*" or "blacks" (negros) outside ideas about **the** national culture. In other words while the ethnic groups were doomed to respond to the policy of integration through assimilation in the 1980's they now have to face exclusion through negligence. The power of the central state today rests thus on its capability to deny or rule out certain kinds of identities.

But hegemony cannot exist without the incorporation of a counterhegemony (Mallon 1995). Though Tasbapauni, as well as other Atlantic Coast communities, through the politics of negligence is constructed as outside nationalist imaginaries of the nation-state and outside nationalist ideas about the future, the extent to which the "state" has the capacity to penetrate the countryside and in this way molding and forming local identities, is relatively reduced. The politics of exclusion and marginalization have thus the secondary effect of creating more "room" for local practices and institutionalization to unfold according to the subject's own images of the state. While the production of locality is at odds with the exclusion of the ethnic minorities and the bypassing of the autonomy law, it is therefore also facilitated by the absence of powerful state institutions.

[18] Another example: The bilingual programme, which is an addition to the autonomy law, states that schoolchildren be educated in their first language as well as spanish. But due to logistic problems (the use of Miskitu speaking teachers in Creole communities), and to the fact that many teachers can not speak spanish, the programme has not been put through in practice.

Another source of invigoration of the locality in Tasbapauni is the indigenization of the political life and the reinvention of *"Indianness*" (García 1996) that have taken place in the wake of the war (see above). Based upon discourses of *"Indian"* rights, territorial rights, and self-determination the *"Indian"* organizations, especially MISURASATA,[19] promoted a revalorization of indigenous identity. Apart from the passing of the Autonomy Law the ethnic mobilization also had the effect of converting the negative social capital associated with being an *"Indian"* into a social and cultural resource. Drawing on Mallon's idea of hegemonic processes we may say that ethnic power relations have been contested leading to a subsequent redefinition. While *"Indianness"* was before a source of perennial oppression - a categorization from above that tended to reinforce or demarcate the prevailing ethnic hierarchy, it is now also a source of identification which provides basis for political engagement.[20] In the next section I shall discuss what it means to be "ethnic" in Tasbapauni today.

The constructions of ethnic boundaries in Tasbapauni

In order to understand how constructions of *"Indianness"* are invested in the production of locality in Tasbapauni today it is necessary to recognize the polysemic nature of *"Indianness"*. In fact the notion conceals the multifaceted selfdefinitions of *"Indian"* that are often constructed in relation to specific contexts and experiences (Rønsbo) .

During the ethnic mobilization the notion of ethnicity brought with it a wider spatial focus than that of the community land. In line with the historically grounded and dominating ethnic boundary construction (Barth 1969) between the indigenous peoples of the Coast and the nation state controlled by the sandinistas and the Mestizos the ethnic organizations portrayed the Atlantic Coast as a territory in which the production and reproduction of an independent cultural identity could occur.[21] But the idea of a common regional identity was almost absent from everyday community life during my stay in Tasbapauni. If expressed, regional forms of

[19] MISURASATA: Miskitu, Sumu, Rama and Sandinistas working together.

[20] On the relation between ethnic categorization from outside and identification from within consult Jenkins 1997.

[21] I have elsewhere argued that MISURASATA, YATAMA and the other ethnic organizations - in basing the territorial strategy on the propagation of an indigenous identity - excluded the Creole and garífunas from the political discourse (Henriksen 1994). During my stay in Tasbapauni some of my informants who had been in close workingrelations with the leadership (Steadman Fagoth among others), expressed similar complaints.

indignity were always related to the recent past when Miskitu-*"Indians"* from all over the Coast took part in the anti-government (sandinista) mobilization.

Post-sandinista experiences of *"Indiann*ess" were on the other hand expressed in relatively ambiguous and paradoxical ways without ever pertaining to a fairly recognizable and stable form. Sometimes the notion of "*"Indian"*" was used as a positive self-identification *("we "Indians")* and in other situations as a negative categorization of "other *"Indian"* groups" *("them "Indians"")* of the Coast. The *"them "Indians"*"-version had the effect of asserting boundaries between themselves and the Miskitu people from surrounding communities, who were portrayed as more exploited and less developed. One of my informants, for example, made such a social differentiation of Miskituness:

> *"I am a Miskitu. But you see, we have two classes of Miskitu. We the Miskitu from Tasbapauni are descendants from Sandy Bay Tara (Big Sandy Bay) and we have self-ambition and pride. The Miskitu them from the north they come here with different clothes. We don't want to be like them. The Miskitu race is the lowest in Nicaragua. We are a little higher than them".*

How can we explain this shift from a regional version of ethnicity in the 1980s to constructions that highlights "internal" differentiations and that emphasize superiority over inferiority ? And, more important, in what ways do the new forms of identity constructions contribute to the production of locality in Tasbapauni?

In order to address these questions I will have to make a more thorough re-reading of the creolization thesis refereed to and criticized briefly above. This thesis maintains that interaction between indigenous populations and Creoles has lead to creolization through acculturation of the Miskitu people in Tasbapauni and other communities. Charles Hale's argument is based upon the assertion of a relationship between economic and ethnic change. As Tasbapauni had gone through a period of economic prosperity, he argues, the inhabitants started to identify themselves as Creoles (p. 124). In line with this argument he states that *"by the early*

1980's most Tasbapauni townspeople, especially those under the age of 30, considered themselves of mixed descent but with stronger affinities for Creole culture" and *"The great majority of Tasbapauni youth cannot speak Miskitu, and they actively assert boundaries between themselves and "Indians" in surrounding communities"* (P. 124 and note 16).

But is the practice of constructing intra-ethnic differences indicative of an one-way process of creolization? Or to put it in another way, if we choose to view ethnic identity formation as the social processes which produce and reproduce boundaries of identification and differentiation, how shall we interpret the boundaries that Tasbapauni people construct between themselves and people from surrounding Creole communities?

It is beyond the scope of this paper to question the veracity of the contention that Tasbapauni was undergoing a process of creolization in the early 1980's (and before). But if the distinction between "we *"Indians"*" and "them *"Indians"*" is an important marker of identity formation today, it is to a large extent overshadowed by the dissociation from the Creole population of the neighboring community of Pearl Lagoon. Though it was based on economic and political matters as well (people complaining that national and international development organizations favored Pearl Lagoon or that Pearl Lagoon was a municipal capital or rejecting the prosandinista feelings that were and are predominant in Pearl Lagoon) the construction of ethnic boundaries between "we *"Indians"*" and "the Creoles them" also informed perceptions of Pearl Lagoon. I often addressed this puzzle in my conversations with townspeople, but it was an incident experienced after a few months of stay in the community that finally led me a little closer to an understanding of how dissociation from the Creole population as well as intra-ethnic differentiation informed self-identification in Tasbapauni.

The work of localizing ethnicity

In March, when the dry season reduces the risks of heavy rainfalls, baseball teams from all over the Coast usually meet in one of the bigger towns to compete in a week-long tournament. This year Bluefields was in charge of the arrangements, but though the costs of transportation were relatively small, compared to the expenses of some of the more distant communities, the team of Tasbapauni was unable to take part because the equipment from Managua had not

been forwarded in time. People actively regretted the delay blaming the *"spaniards them from the Pacific"* for always neglecting the Coast.[22] But in spite of the disappointments many townspeople followed the course of the events intently for the entire week. I took the chance to learn a little about the significance of the game and passed the hot afternoons listening to radiotransmissions from Bluefields together with other townspeople. As I am unfamiliar with the rules of the game it was, however, difficult to keep up with the running radio commentaries and I therefore directed more of my attention to the townspeople's reactions to the events. The absence of a local team to support created room for people to choose their own favorite and whether people referred to their personal lifestory (that they had spent some years in the community), family relations (a member of the family living there) or stated other reasons they preferred to place their sympathy on teams from Miskitu communities, rather than on teams from neighboring Creole communities. As I was already familiar with their unsympathetic attitudes I was not surprised that the people avoided or even spurned the team of Pearl Lagoon. But I realized that some of the people, that in former situations had stated their superiority to Miskitu people of the north, now, in unambiguous terms, expressed their sympathy to the same people. The event that in most clear terms displayed the deep-rooted anti-Creole sentiments was a surprising defeat of the team of Pearl Lagoon to a disregarded team of a little, remote Miskitu community (Prinzapolka). This caused public rejoicing all around Tasbapauni leading more than one person to state that *"we the "Indians" beat Pearl Lagoon"*.

Initially the lack of continuity in ethnic identity manifestations gave rise to several conversations between my wife and I. Though having a profound knowledge of ethnicity theory, we were unable to explain the situational and highly fluctuating character of ethnic identity.[23] We were both aiming at elaborating on a theory which views identity as contextually embedded boundary constructions. But a focus on the importance of the context brings with it the idea of a certain degree of continuity which contrasts the fluid and oscillating manifestations we were confronted with. Let me immediately insert that the more stable power relations vis-à-vis the central state suggest that identity is also about cultural continuity as distinct from ruptures. Borrowing from Richard Wilson I therefore decided to view identity *as "an assortment of*

[22] The equipment had been donated by a foreign organization but should be forwarded by the Ministry of sports.

[23] My wife as a historian engaging in ethnic minority studies and I as a doctoral student making fieldwork re-

paradoxes that interact dynamically without ever being reconciled" rather than *"a bounded Aristotelian concept"* (Wilson 1995:305). While an Aristotelian concept defines ethnic categories according to necessary and sufficient markers, a paradoxical approach enables us to disregard questions of such stable properties and instead emphasize "*what people make of themselves"* (Wilson 1995:317). We may thus conclude that local meanings of identity were associated with paradoxicality and rupture which in part stemmed from the dynamics of intra- and inter-ethnic differentiation.

Though these paradoxes - in Wilsons words - never reconcile, they do unite in their social consequences - but with a more narrow spatial focus than before. While constructions of ethnicity in the war-time were related to ideas about territorial unity and thus invested in the struggle for regional autonomy, local imaginings of identity bring with them the concept of "community", which - as the case of the position of síndico told us - is expanded to include more than just the geographical village. Here it is important to distinguish between the notion of *village* and that of *community.* Townspeople never used the word village; instead they always refereed to Tasbapauni as a community. The significance of community appeared to be much thicker than just a village. Apart from the wider spatial connotations the notion of community also denotes a place within which an autonomous cultural and political production and reproduction can occur. The *community* is thus at odds with the projects and politics of the central state which have the effect of producing a *village* excluded from nationalist imaginaries of the nation-state.

In order to understand the ways in which ethnic identities seek to transform Tasbapauni from a village to a community I propose the notion of a *localizing ethnicity.* This concept allows us to point to the ways in which identity contributes to the transformation of spaces into places in which economic production as well as cultural constructions can take place. I prefer the idea of a localizing - rather than those of a local or a localized - ethnicity. First, the notion of localizing ethnicity enables us to see internal differentiations and paradoxicalities; the concept

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search on the relation between identity and political practice.

of a local identity, for example, connotes the idea of homogenization. Second, it should be clear by now that localizing ethnicity contribute to the production of locality.[24]

This dimensional aspect of ethnic identity does not mean that ethnicity should only be studied according to its creative qualities. Above I briefly pointed to the politics of exclusion and negligence which leads to the localization of the rural communities of the Atlantic Coast as outside imaginaries of the nation-state. Another source of localization is the penetration of history. As the outcome of former practices and conflicts identities also have embedded in them the sediments of the past, or to put it another way, the history tells us which identities, traditions and imaginations are possible and which are not. The meanings and images associated with being an *"Indian"* or a Creole in Tasbapauni are thus the result of constrained reinvention. Take for instance what the lost of the Miskitu-language means for ideas about being an *"Indian"* :

> *"My first language is Creole, but I speak Miskitu…. I'm a Creole but my ancestors them were Miskitu and when it comes to the historical rights to our land, Tasba (Tasbapauni) is a Miskitu community"*

This quotation indicates that "behind the surface" of rupture and situational identity referred to above, ethnicity is also about continuity and reproduction. The shared knowledge of the local history as well as the expression of a genealogical knowledge suggests that what the townspeople told me about the local history is not just imaginations *of* the past, they are also expressions of a practical knowledge which *comes from* the past. The relation between ethnicity and locality therefore also entails a taken-for-granted or *habitus* (Bourdieu) dimension. This is not to reiterate the erroneous idea that consciousness is simply and only the inscription of history. Instead we will have to look toward the political and imaginative sources of the *habitus* which are expressed with effect in local people's historical interpretations. It is through the imaginative practices and historical interpretations that localized ethnicity be-

[24] The notion of a local identity, on the oher hand, suggests that identities are naturally rooted in a particular place, while the concept of a localized ethnicity connotes the idea of an externally imposed identity (e.g. ethnic categorization (Jenkins 1997).

comes localizing ethnicity. Take for instance the genealogical knowledge expressed so often by community members during my fieldwork. Though not Miskitu to outsiders (e.g. foreign researchers or Miskitu-speaking people of other communities) the local *habitu*s provides the "space" for alternative and localizing ideas about "Miskituness" to be re-invented.[25]

But the *habitus* is not the only source of imaginations. Appadurai makes this point clear in his argumentation for how globalization has radically changed the conditions for locality production: *"[T]he force of Bourdieu's idea of the habitus can be retained, but the stress must be put on his idea of improvisation, for improvisation no longer occurs within a relatively bounded set of thinkable postures but is always skidding and taking off..[W]here once improvisation was snatched out of the glacial undertow of habitus**, habitus now has to be painstakingly reinforced**"(Appadurai 1996: 55-56, the bolds are mine)*. The "Janus Face" of a *modernity at large* (the title of his book) provides the setting for this new dimension of locality construction. While modernity, understood as the global flows of capital, culture, human beings and ideas, brings about the disjuncture between "place" and "culture" and thus leads to the fragility and vulnerability of localities, it also opens up new possibilities for localizing ethnicities to be constructed. The transnational flows of ideas, for example, can become the building blocks of the imaginary work of local subjects. Take for instance the usage of the notion of *historical right* in the above quotation.[26] As an outcome of the anti-government mobilization, which brought along with it a growing attention to the human rights situation in Nicaragua promoted by international agencies and local ethnic organizations, notions of rights form today part of everyday political discourses all over the Atlantic Coast.[27] In Tasbapauni the notion of rights is defined by referring to a close attachment to ancestral community land as well as by the presence of "customary" social and political institutions (Council of Elders, The

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[25] I prefere the notion of re-invention rather than the alternative idea of pure invention. While invention connotes "false consciousness" and dis-embeddedness, the notion of re-invention point to its *habitus* dimension.

[26] The notion of Rights were used and referred to in Tasbapauni peoples everday conversations. They appeared in different kind of connections - as *"Indian"* -, community - or historical rights - and always as something which had never been extended to Tasbapauni. Rights were thus conceptualized as unfulfilled promises.

[27] The importance of the political impact of the ethnic organizations in this process should not be underestimated. Their speeches were broadcasted from radiostations from abroad and they visited the ethnic communities whenever posible. The leaders were thus representing the link between transnational ideas and remote communities like Tasbapauni. Though ethnicity is not solely constructed by ethnic organizations alone they are important "entrepreneurs" (Barth 19??) in processes of ethnic identity constructions.

position of síndico). The notion of rights therefore reinforce the work of the localizing ethnicities already constructed on the basis of what the past has rendered possible.

Concluding remarks

In their efforts to construct and maintain Tasbapauni as a spatially and culturally coherent community the subjects respond to a material and cultural context much wider than the local, contemporary setting. But The contexts of locality production surely have “Janus Faces”.

Communities, such as Tasbapauni, are *faced* (*tic*) with the locality producing activities of “external” social forces. These forces, whether materialized in the work of the nation-state or expressed through transnationalism and Diaspora, have the effect of challenging or counteracting the production of locality “from below”. The destructive work of wider scale social forces have, however, not been taken into full consideration in this paper and should be dealt with in detail in a separate study. Suffice here to remind that on the Atlantic Coast the context producing activities of the Nicaraguan central state have the effect of constructing rural *villages,* as distinct from *communities,* conceptualized as outside nationalistic imaginaries.

The idea of hegemony as a process has been the guiding principle of this study. As Mallon reminds us *“each hegemonic impulse involves a counterhegemonic impulse”* (Mallon 1994:71). In line with this thinking the “other face of Janus” has been the target of scrutiny, and contextualization has therefore - in this paper - been conceptualized more as a setting, which implies a reading of how identities and imaginaries shape the external contexts of life, than as how hegemonic orders leave little room for maneuvering.

The objective of this methodology has been to study the transformational capacity (Giddens 1984) of subaltern practices that cannot been contained within a stable and rigorous distinction between resistance and quiescence. Recurring to Scott this study is about what subaltern subjects *“do between revolts”* (Scott 1985). Studies of subaltern practices often face a serious problem which has to do with the authenticity and validity of assertions that the practices studied have social consequences larger than themselves. The *everyday forms of peasant re-*

sistance studied by Scott (1985 and 1990) have for example been criticized for being but an aspect of perennial oppression (e.g. Gutman 1993, Kearney 1996, Henriksen and Hansen 1999).

In this paper I aimed at overcoming this problem by putting scrutiny on ethnicity as a technique for the production of locality.[28] Though an externalized *village* in nation-state imaginaries the work of the localizing ethnicities produce Tasbapauni as a *community,* which is extended to include - spatially, politically as well as culturally - more than just the *village.* Based upon discourses of indigenity and autogovernance the position of síndico - in itself the precarious outcome of the imaginary work of local subjects - plays an important role in this process of community production. As, in part, the outcome of the antigovernment mobilization in the 1980s, in which a large section of the young men and women of Tasbapauni took part, every sphere of the political life of Tasbapauni - including the síndico institution - is in a process of indiginization.

Locality and Stateformation - a final note.

In the process of indiginization the *community* becomes a *power container* (Giddens) which assumes some of the responsibilities that used to be taking care of by the state institutions that are now very distant. The indiginization of the síndico institution is only one among a wide range of similar processes. Let me conclude this paper by referring to another memory of my fieldwork in Tasbapauni, which addresses the question of state formation "from below":

A few days after my arrival I noticed two middle-aged men dressed in Nicaraguan policeuniforms walking along the beach. One of them was armed with an old, outdated Russian rifle which was obviously not an official Nicaraguan policeweapon. I had been in Tasbapauni before and I had never seen policemen patrolling there. The nearest policestation is located about 1½ hour sailing from the community and to my knowledge they only send men to Tasbapauni on very special occasions. I therefore decided to approach them for an explanation.

[28] The construction of localizing ethnicities is just one among a wide range of other techniques I experienced during fieldwork (e.g. organized community work, the selling of extractions to national lumber companies, the building of new houses, local legal practices etc.)

They responded to my question with great enthusiasm and they were obviously very proud of being the target of a foreign white mans interest. They presented themselves as townspeople and as *"freedom fighters"* - a notion they frequently used in this and later conversations referring to their functioning as locally appointed policevolunteers working in and for the community. During our talk they explained to me that the policevolunteer system had been functioning for some years and that it was the outcome of an initiative taken by the communityleaders who wanted to fill out the security vacuum that cropped up in the wake of the defeat of the sandinista government in the 1990 national elections. The change of government had resulted in the withdrawal of the Police and the Military - without ever been replaced.[29] But because of an increase in crime and disorder it had been necessary to take some steps to enhance the volunteer's authority within the community and the leaders had therefore decided to request the national police in the regional capital of Bluefields to donate a few policeuniforms.[30]

Though the central state appears to be far from present in institutional terms, this case teaches us a little about the dynamics of local institutionalization. When the central state does not fulfill what is perceived to be its obligations, new practices - rooted in local experiences - will often emerge. In this connection the volunteers' reference to themselves as *"freedom fighters"* is interesting. The expression was used as an internal definition by the members of the US sponsored counter-revolutionary movement that fought against the sandinista government in the 1980s. As such it was a counterbalance to the label "contras" - an external categorization imposed by the sandinistas - and functioned as a way to unify this heterogeneous and differentiated group. The self-identification as *"freedom fighters*" can therefore be viewed as a way to construct symbolic and political continuity between their work as police volunteers during my stay in the community and the previous mobilization for self-determination and struggle against the central state which was omnipresent in institutional, political as well as in cultural terms.[31] "freedom" was thus depicted in terms of freedom from state penetration.

[29] The use of policevolunteers in villages and towns is wellknown throughout Nicaragua and Central America because the Police often does not have the interest or the capacity to extent their service to the rural distrects.

[30] The new practice of using policeuniforms explained why I had never noticed the policevolunteers during my previous shorter stays in the community.

[31] The two men had both been "freedom fighters" in the anti-government mobilization as well. a community meeting in Tasbapauni had decided that the police volunteers should be selected among former *freedom fighters*. The notion of Freedom fighters connotes more than anti-government mobilization and self-determination. It was properly introduced by North American advisers and still brings with it ideas of anti-communism etc. In several

With the decline in the presence of the state institutions the ethnic groups of the Atlantic Coast have experienced an increase in social and cultural exclusion. In this context "freedom" is not constructed as a freedom from an omnipresent state but rather as the struggle to produce and reproduce a relatively coherent and autonomous community. Self-determination is still being addressed head-on but now practiced in a process of institutionalization.[32]

The production of locality should thus be conceptualized as a form of "stateness" which provides its inhabitants with a new "place" from which to speak about rights, justice and belonging etc. Locality production is therefore not about resisting or destroying a state living a life of its own outside the realities of everyday practices. In the process of community construction the subjects are simultaneously engaging in state formation from below.

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interviews, former *"freedom fighters"* told me about their experiences in military training camps in Costa Rica and Honduras. Their accounts suggest that apart from military training they also recieved "ideological education".

[32] This form of continuity between now and then was also created by their use of an old russian rifle - a relic of the war.

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