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Economic Autonomy of the Miskitu Women of the North Atlantic Autonomous Region, Nicaragua: Do Current Development Policies Apply to Matrifocal Societies?

Ariana M. Toth

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ECONOMIC AUTONOMY OF THE MISKITU WOMEN OF THE
NORTH ATLANTIC AUTONOMOUS REGION, NICARAGUA:
DO CURRENT DEVELOPMENT POLICIES APPLY
TO MATRIFOCAI SOCIETIES?

by

Ariana M. Toth

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts
Department of Geography
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Western Michigan University, 2013

This thesis provides an ethnographic investigation into the economic autonomy of Miskitu women in the North Atlantic Autonomous Region of Nicaragua. The purpose of this study is to determine whether dominant development models created by patriarchal Western powers are suited to alleviating gendered poverty disparity among the matrifocal Miskitu Indians. Surveys of Miskitu women obtained during field research, with support from relevant literature, comprise the main source of information considered. It is concluded that while dominant development models are not best suited to alleviating gendered poverty in this region, it is the overarching indigenous nature of Miskitu culture and not their practice of matrifocality that is the primary cause.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
LIST OF TABLES	vi
LIST OF FIGURES	vii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. CULTURAL HISTORY	3
Historical Background	3
The Moravian Church	7
Company Time	9
Contras	10
Autonomy	13
III. LITERATURE REVIEW	17
Introduction to Development	17
Women's Development	23
Indigenous Development	25
Economy in the RAAN	28
IV. METHODOLOGY	32
Research Design	32
The Field Site	33
Data Collection	34

Table of Contents – Continued

CHAPTER		
	Problems and Limitations	38
V.	RESULTS AND ANALYSIS	42
	Unique Culture and Economic Practices	43
	New Urban Problems	62
	Development Aid	69
	Domestic Violence	78
	Recent Gains	80
	Self-Determined Development	83
VI.	CONCLUSION	88
	Moving Forward	92
APPENDICES		
A.	HSIRB Approval Letter	95
B.	Excerpts From: <i>Nicaragua: Technical Progress Report on National Human Development Plan as of 2010</i>	96
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....		104
FIELD NOTES.....		109

LIST OF TABLES

1. Self-Identified Population, Percent Distribution and Percentage Speaking the Language by Area of Residence, According to Indigenous People or Ethnic Community to Which It Belongs, 2005 Census	21
2. Percentage Distribution of the Population Self-Identified as Indigenous People or Ethnic Community According to Municipality, 2005 Census	21
3. Percentage Distribution of the Population Aged 10 Years or More by Condition of Activity, According to Census and Municipality	22
4. Fertility rates among survey participants.....	57

LIST OF FIGURES

1. Map of the autonomous regions of Nicaragua	5
2. Aerial imagery of Bilwi from Google Earth. Imagery captured January 2006	35
3. Home communities of women surveyed	36
4. Typical Bilwi-to-Waspam transportation for locals	36
5. A man in a traditional-style house with pigs and chickens nearby, Waspam, Nicaragua.....	46
6. A group of high school students at URACCAN wearing traditional clothes made out of the bark from the tuno tree	49
7. The same group of high school students in the clothes they selected to wear to meet our study abroad group	50
8. A family in Miguel Bikan in clothes they selected to wear to meet a group of American college students	50
9. An aisle of food in Supermercado Monter, Bilwi	58
10. A container and cookware shop in Bilwi's main market	58
11. A clothing shop in Bilwi's main market	59
12. A store selling motorcycles in Bilwi	59
13. Women shelling chonchs in a seafood factory in Bilwi	61
14. A sign seen in Miguel Bikan advertising the money spent and the financing party for a specific project.....	73
15. A sign indicating that a project to supply potable water for several communities, including Kamla, was funded jointly by Nicaragua and Japan.....	74
16. A sign in Miguel Bikan listing the 42 communities that have benefited from the Eruo-Solar Program along with the program's objective and cost.....	74
17. A view of the dock in Bilwi and pilings showing how much further it used to extend.....	75

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a topical geographic regional case study of the current economic autonomy of Miskitu women in Nicaragua who are being confronted by a globalizing world economy. This line of inquiry is marked by a gendered investigation into how women from a female-centered society interact with and are treated by local power and hegemonic discourses based upon indigenous culture, regional and national government and political economies, and international aid organizations that are themselves structured by a patriarchal hierarchy. In this sense and context, it aims to provide a description of a place to answer a specific question of policy. My central theory is that patriarchal development policies will not be well suited to a matrifocal society.

To accomplish this task I will employ the ethnographic practice of storytelling to depict the economic conditions in which Miskitu women currently live. This will be done by surveying Miskitu women in the field as well as by incorporating literature relevant to their lived experiences. In order to reach a conclusion I will first need to make a subjective judgment regarding the economic situation of the women with whom I interact. For the purpose of this thesis I will determine whether they are able to exercise control over the economic resources they need or if they are dependent upon men for access to these resources. While I realize that the reality will likely fall somewhere along a continuum between these two extremes my intention is not to determine the true level of their economic autonomy but rather whether current policies are actively improving it. I suspect

to find that Miskitu women do not currently enjoy economic autonomy. However, I will seek to confirm this presumption through my surveys before addressing possible causations.

In order to ascertain whether current patriarchal development policies are suited to the Miskitu's matrifocal societal structure, I will need to establish what those development policies are. This will be done through a review of the literature. I will then explore the matrifocal structure of Miskitu society along with traditional economic practices through field research and ethnographic data collected by other researchers. I will conclude whether the current development policies are compatible with traditional Miskitu society based mainly upon the opinions of the women with whom I speak. Reasons for this suitability, or lack thereof, will be suggested based on differences and similarities discovered between the patriarchal and matrifocal structures.

Thus the thesis will unfold accordingly: in chapter two I will provide a brief history of the Miskitu people to provide context for the unacquainted reader. Chapter three will provide a comprehensive review of the literature relating to development theory and the economic practices of the Miskitu in the study area. This will also help in defining my expected outcome. Chapter four will address the methodology I employed in the field. I will then continue in chapter five with a scholarly personal narrative of my experiences and findings employing ethnographic methodologies. I will explore how these fit within the current understandings of the social and economic problems of the Miskitu by incorporating additional literature analysis relevant to my observations. I feel this will strengthen my argument by incorporating the literature review into the ethnographic detail. Chapter six will discuss my conclusions and how these changed my perceptions of the problem and my views on the prospective future of the Miskitu women I met.

CHAPTER II

CULTURAL HISTORY

This chapter will begin by providing a brief background of the Miskitu people for historical context. This will be followed by short sections addressing the English-speaking German Moravian Church, the counter-revolution of the 1980s, and autonomy as a regional power discourse. Brief discussions of the Moravian Church and the Contras are included to illustrate women's role and value in a societal context. Autonomy is addressed to explore the political dynamics between the autonomous regions and the state. This is important to acknowledge in order to understand how aid organizations operate and to whom they are accountable in the region.

In a few places in this chapter I cite information provided to me during the course of my fieldwork by my local translator, by Mirna Cunningham, the Chair of the United Nations Permanent Forum of Indigenous Issues, among many other prominent leadership roles, and by a representative of Panalaka, an organization focused on building political capacity at the local level. This is done to fill gaps in the literature that, while important for creating a context to my research, are not directly related to the line of inquiry investigated for this study. I provide these references for anecdotal observations and local context.

Historical Background

The Miskitu people live along the Caribbean coast of Honduras, called Honduran La Mosquitia, and Nicaragua, called the Nicaraguan Atlantic Coast. Due to dense subtropical forests from Black River, Honduras to just southwest of Bluefields, Nicaragua, a humid

climate, poor soils for plantation-style agriculture, lack of deepwater harbors, and interior mountains, the Spanish never colonized this remote area and it was left to its native inhabitants (Envio, 1982; Jamieson, 1999). Thus the Atlantic Coastal region was open to influence from first British and later North American interests active in the Caribbean, and the Miskitu have historically had stronger ties to these powers than to the Spanish government of what has become present day Nicaragua (Envio, 1982). The state gained its independence from Spain in 1821 and became a unified country in 1894 when President Zelaya sent troops into the Mosquito Reserve (1860-1894) and occupied it (Jamieson, 1999; Central Intelligence Agency, 2012). Political autonomy for this region was finally formally regained from the Nicaraguan Sandinista government in 1987, although it was not instituted until after the 1990 elections. At that time two pluri-ethnic autonomous regional governments were formed – one in the North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN), and one in the South Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAS) – together comprising 46 percent of the national territory (see Figure 1.)

The Miskitu did not suffer cultural genocide during the colonial period as many other indigenous groups did: “Rather, the Miskitu saw themselves as a ‘nation’ comparable with the European nations they interacted with” (Offen, Butzer, & Knapp, 1999, p. 453). The Miskitu developed a “kingdom” after encountering British colonizing perspectives in the Caribbean; “the overall form and function of Miskito society is oriented towards and adapted to successful interaction with the wider world” (Helms, 1971, p. 4). While they continued to maintain local leadership, this allowed them to establish a unified front in their dealings with Europeans. The Miskitu saw themselves as superior to other local indigenous groups, who they subordinated and taxed (Offen K. H., 2007). They also threw off the

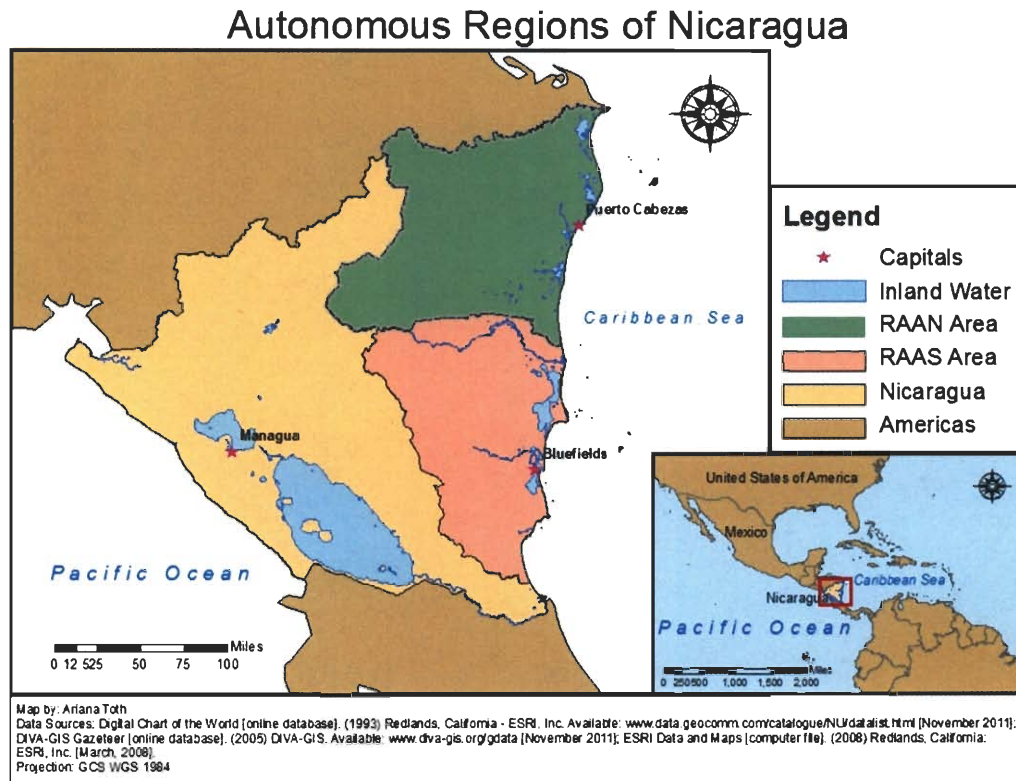


Figure 1. Map of the autonomous regions of Nicaragua. Created by author.

signifier “Indian” as being a term applied to indigenous groups who were “subject to enslavement” and began to refer to themselves as “Mosquito-men,” thus implying equality with the Englishmen, Dutchmen, and others with whom they interacted (Offen K. H., 2002, p. 323). It is only the changing conceptualization of the term “Indian” over time that has led to modern embracement of this term by Miskitu (Herlihy, 2012). This elevated status was recognized by the British. They labeled Miskitu lands on their maps in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries in contrast to “British cartographic strategies common in North America that possessively transformed placenames, or justified settlement by referring to lands as empty or to Indians as ‘savages’” (Offen K. H., 2007, p. 264).

By escaping the colonization practices of the Spanish that were inflicted upon the majority of colonial Central America, the Miskitu were “spared many of the patriarchal

ideologies that emanated from the Spanish culture of conquest, the social institution of the Catholic Church, and hegemonic colonial rule” (Herlihy, 2012, p. 154). They did not escape all forms of religious indoctrination, however. This will be further explored in a later section which will address the Moravian Church.

One characteristic that has not been lost, and which is of primary interest to this study, is the matrifocal societal organization practiced by the Miskitu. The term “matrifocal” refers to a mother-centered domestic unit in which the senior woman is the primary decision-maker about matters relating to the household; this structure is often found alongside, but is not dependent upon, a high rate of male absenteeism (Herlihy, 2012, pp. 62-63). This is distinct from the practice of matrilocality, a post-marital residence pattern in which “couples reside near the wife’s family after marriage,” which is also standard among the Miskitu (Herlihy, 2012, p. 63). It is important not to confuse either of these terms with matrilineality or matriarchy. Matrilineal refers to a method of tracing descent through the female side of the family (Herlihy, 2012, pp. 79, 81). Matriarchy refers to a female-centered power structure which pervades all major aspects of life and, to date, has not been found to exist in any societies cross culturally. The matrifocal and matrilocal practices of the Miskitu, therefore, exist within the context of the patriarchal nation-state and local economic structures. Ambiguous gender and power relations often exist in matrifocal societies, where women make all household economic and child-rearing decisions, but men maintain power as the main bread-winners.

The lands inhabited by the Miskitu population span Southeastern Nicaragua along the Atlantic Coast northward into Honduras. This paper investigates the Miskitu women of the North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN) and therefore will not draw heavily from the

scholarly research that focuses exclusively on the Honduran Miskitu. Since the Honduran Miskitu do not possess political autonomy, their situation and opportunities are fundamentally different from their kin in Nicaragua. For this reason references to Miskitu living outside of Nicaragua will be primarily used to illustrate shared cultural practices.

There has been some scholarly disagreement as to whether the Miskitu people are truly native or perhaps the result of shipwrecked African slaves intermarrying with other indigenous groups (Olien, 1998; Offen, Butzer, & Knapp, 1999; Offen K. H., 2002; Offen K. H., 2007; Offen K. H., 2003). This concept of “inauthenticity” has penetrated the national mythology and was commonly cited by the general mestizo populace as a reason for not recognizing indigenous land claims in the autonomous coastal regions (Offen K. H., 2003). However, they speak an indigenous language and the international community accepts the Miskitu as an indigenous group; therefore they will be regarded as such for the purposes of this thesis (Jamieson, 1999; Zambrano, 2008; UNHRC, 2008).

The Moravian Church

The English-speaking German Moravian Church (the Church) established its first mission station along the Atlantic Coast in Bluefields in 1849 at the invitation of the local Miskitu king (Hamilton, 1900). As mentioned in the introduction, Catholic missionaries who accompanied the Spanish colonialists did not have a colonial presence on the Caribbean coast. The Moravian church is Protestant, first established in 1722 in what is now Germany (Helms, 1971). The Miskitu population at the time of contact with the Moravians still held to their traditional faith (Schroeder & Brooks, 2011). By the twentieth century, missionaries had established Moravian missions as far north as the Río Coco (Wangki), which forms the

border with Honduras (Helms, 1971). The prevalence of the Church in the Miskitu culture is said to have increased substantially with the departure of U.S. corporations and employment opportunities in the 1960s and 1970s (Hawley, 1997).

Much existing literature “suggests that the Moravian Church played a central role in the communal development on the Atlantic Coast, in particular because it offered social services, and promoted communal development in different areas, such as education and health care” (Henricksen & Kindblad, 2011). The Church itself takes credit for promoting international interest in the Atlantic Coast,

So long as the little strip of undeveloped coast remained wilderness there was little inducement for any power to place a new interpretation on the terms of the Treaty of Managua, according to which it enjoyed independent government whilst recognizing the suzerainty of Nicaragua. But after the establishment of trade in tropical fruits and the exportation of mahogany and other valuable timber as a consequence of the civilizing effects of missionary labor, and with the influx of traders and gold-seekers and adventurers from many lands, the situation changed. (Hamilton, 1900, pp. 531-532)

The Church bases its teachings on the Bible and the life of Jesus with a focus on moral and ethical behavior (Helms, 1971). As such, the teachings of Corinthians, which states that women are inferior and should be subservient to men, are incorporated into the beliefs of the Moravian Church (Herlihy, 2011, p. 227). Teachings of the Church instruct women to stay in the home. The Church is still promoting that women should be subordinate to men and that women should look to God for a resolution to domestic

problems, including violence, despite the prevalence of this problem in Miskitu communities (Field Note 7).

Company Time

Company Time, which is the local name applied to the economic boom and bust years from 1920 until 1979, provided wage-paying jobs and a period of economic growth and personal gain, with intermittent years of economic recession (Pineda, 2006, p. 109; Helms, 1971). These jobs were mainly provided by the Standard Fruit Company and other U.S. corporations looking to profit from the wealth of natural resources on the Coast. Extractive industries have included rubber, mahogany, gold, bananas, sarsaparilla, pine, turtles, and, currently, spiny lobsters (Helms, 1971, p. 27; Herlihy, 2012, p. 39). This period was followed by a lack of wage-labor opportunities and a return to more subsistence practices (Pineda, 2006). More money began to flow into the economy again with the growth of the commercial lobster industry in the 1970s (Herlihy, 2012).

This period promoted the ideal of individual wealth and ownership which conflicts with traditional Miskitu values, as will be discussed in chapter five,

On the one hand, the penetration of capitalist modes of exchange motivated community members to exploit communal property for individual purposes. On the other hand, the continuous arrival of foreign entrepreneurs and companies constituted an external threat to the communal property regime. (Henricksen & Kindblad, 2011, pp. 192-193)

At the time of writing this thesis, the current boom phase of the economy is now at risk. The UN declared the lobster diving industry to be an act of genocide against the Miskitu in 2007

because of their near exclusive participation in the industry and the high death rate involved (Acosta, 2013). Diving was set to become illegal in 2011 but an extension was issued until 2013 to allow more time for alternative economic ventures to be created (Acosta, 2013). Another two-year extension was passed during the writing of this document which will allow lobster diving to continue until 2015 (Potosme & Garth, 2013).

Contras

This section is intended to acknowledge the importance of the U.S.-supported Contra War (1984-1987), which took place during the Revolution of 1979-1990. My main objective in this section is to highlight a couple of important factors that have had a lasting impact on social and economic conditions on the Atlantic Coast.

The Sandinista Revolution against the Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua ended in victory on July 19, 1979 (Envio, 1982). The Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) had overthrown the Somoza family that was in power for the previous forty-two years. The FSLN promised popular democratic reforms and programs to benefit the average citizen (Brunnegger, 2007). The most notorious of these was their literacy campaign. While the campaign's aim of reducing illiteracy was noble, the FSLN initially only taught Spanish literacy, which caused anger among indigenous populations and encouraged ethnic mobilization (Brunnegger, 2007). Indigenous groups, especially the Miskitu, began to organize as a political force at this time to set forth their own agenda.

During the 1960s and 1970s Costeños, a term for all people living along the Nicaraguan Atlantic Coast, had mobilized and begun to form formal organizations to promote their demands (Baracco, 2011). In 1979, MISURASATA, Miskitu, Sumu, Rama, and

Sandinistas Working Together, was formed as the primary political organization on the Coast (Baracco, 2011). *General Directions* (1980), MISURASATA's founding document, highlights indigenous values even while claiming to support the Sandinista movement, "The celebration of subsistence production, coupled with a disdain for 'making a profit,' suggests a model of production inimitable to the growth-oriented developmentalism so central to the Sandinistas' project of national modernization" (Baracco, 2011, p. 123). This statement foreshadows not only the conflict that is to come between MISURASATA and the FSLN but also between Miskitu identity and Western development goals in general. The Miskitu indigenous values of subsistence production and no profit or accumulation are in direct conflict with any development project aimed at increasing wealth or consumerism.

Likewise, the Sandinistas believed that the Miskitu were not more actively anti-imperialist due to their lack of a class consciousness (Baracco, 2011). They attributed this to "the enclave nature of the extractive economic activities of US companies that had operated in the region," allowing the majority of the indigenous population to maintain their traditional economic system (Baracco, 2011, p. 32). Because their traditional economy did not allow for great disparities in prosperity, the Miskitu did develop the social distinction of economic classes. This fact, according to the FSLN, made them more susceptible to imperialist economic oppression.

MISURASTA's support for the FSLN did not last long. The aim of the Sandinistas was ultimately to assimilate the indigenous ethnicities of the Coast into a homogenous mestizo nation (Baracco, 2011). This was incompatible with the Miskitu goal of autonomy and it was this ideological conflict that eventually led to the Contra-Sandinista war (Baracco, 2011). The coastal region was also a target of the Sandinistas as a refuge for Somoza's fallen army

(Brunnegger, 2007). The FSLN and MISURASTA entered into armed conflict in 1981, at which point MISURASTA split into factions (Brunnegger, 2007). It is important to note that the Miskitu were one of many armed groups comprising the counter-revolutionary forces, many of whom were fighting for different reasons (Baracco, 2011).

The unrest during the revolution caused division in Miskitu communities. The national government forced the evacuation of communities along the Wangki and destroyed the villages to prevent an uprising they believed was in the works (Baracco, 2011). Some people chose to leave the country, moving to either Honduras or Costa Rica. Among those who stayed there was also a division in alliance between the Sandinistas and the Contras (Field Note 7). These divisions led to the devolution of the traditional community structure and elders are still in the process of reorganizing traditional leadership at the community level (Field Note 7). Mirna Cunningham said, "The traditional structure of the community doesn't exist anymore. It is in a process of rebuilding a different type of structure" (Field Note 7).

During the war women had to take on more responsibilities while the men were gone fighting. In most communities women had not previously been involved in political leadership so this was a new role they were forced to take on in the absence of male leaders. When the men returned from the war and resumed political leadership this created new conflicts (Field Note 7). Women had effectively entered into a new space that had previously been occupied solely by men. Spaces are frequently segregated according to conceptions of gender roles. Women tend more frequently to occupy private spaces, such as the home, with limited access to public spaces, including economic and political spheres

(Rose, 1993). Once Miskitu women crossed over into the male-dominated space of political leadership they realized their competence in that field and began to resist their exclusion.

Autonomy

Even though Nicaragua is the second poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere and the RAAN is one of the poorest parts of Nicaragua, the Miskitu people are much better off than many other indigenous groups in Central America. This is because of their autonomy¹. Within the global indigenous community, the two autonomous regions are often held up as an example of what to aim for in terms of indigenous rights.

Other Latin American countries interact with their indigenous populations through a structural framework termed *indigenismo*: “A review of these [*indigenismo*] institutes revealed that the strategies made were top-down, paternalistic, fostered assimilation of indigenous cultures into the dominant western culture, and regarded traditional culture and small-scale subsistence economy as obstacles to modern development” (Tebtebba Foundation, 2010, p. 14).

The autonomy statute passed by the Sandinista government in 1987 did not take effect until after the selection of the first regional council in the 1990 democratic national elections (Henricksen & Kindblad, 2011; González, 2011). The autonomy law was ratified in 2003 (Herlihy, 2011). It was this ratification of regulations that finally set the terms of the statute (Brunnegger, 2007). This autonomy grants the two Atlantic regions the right to self-government and therefore the state does not have control over the development of specific

¹ Indigenous peoples in Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, and Venezuela are the only other groups in Latin America who also have some level of legal autonomy constitutionally recognized by the state (Van Cott, 2001).

aid programs in the region. I was told the federal government is only responsible for aiding in the development of infrastructure such as the construction of roads and building of utilities (Field Note 6). The literature states that “Health, education, cultural, transport and community services are run in coordination with central government” (Brunnegger, 2007, p. 8). However, “This spending is dependent on central government goodwill” (Brunnegger, 2007, p. 6).

The 1987 Autonomy Law and the 1995 Nicaraguan Constitution both guarantee communal land rights for indigenous populations (Offen K. H., 2003). However, the national government continued to exploit the natural resources on the Atlantic Coast throughout the 1990s and Mestizos from the Pacific coast migrated eastward into the autonomous regions and claimed ownership of vacant lands (Arghiris, 2010a). It was not until 2001 with the Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruling in *Awes-Tingni v. The State of Nicaragua* that the national government was finally forced to demarcate and title indigenous lands (Arghiris, 2010b). This led to the passing of Law 445 in 2003, also known as the Demarcation Law. This law demanded immediate action by the national government to allow for the demarcation and titling of indigenous lands within the autonomous regions (Arghiris, 2010b). The actual process of mapping indigenous land claims had started years earlier with the help of NGOs in cooperation with indigenous leaders. The result was a patchwork of territories comprised of several communities. This method was implemented in order to allow the incorporation of lands traditionally shared by individuals and communities but not occupied in a way that would be recognized by the national government. There are a total of 22 territorial blocs in the autonomous regions, eighteen in the north and four in the south; the number of communities in each territory varies from one to twenty-seven in the north

(Field Note 16). Land titles have since been issued to eleven territories in the RAAN and two in the RAAS (CRAAN, 2013). Combined with the remaining territories still awaiting land titles while resolving local disputes, these territories intentionally include all of the land area in the autonomous region, including greenspaces between communities, making it impossible for the government to claim any “unoccupied” areas as federal land. However, individual land titles from the 1980s were grandfathered into law 445 with the result that some land in the autonomous regions is privately owned (Field Note 6). I was told that this land will most likely continue to be owned privately, even if it changes hands, because no community will want to buy land that is only large enough to support one family with money that is meant to be used for the betterment of everyone in the community (Field Note 6).

The autonomous region has five levels of government: national, regional, municipal, territorial, and communal (Field Note 16). One of the male leaders of Miguel Bikan told me that their community is one of 114 comprising their territorial bloc. He said that each community used to have its own government but now they must all work together. While these communities may have a history of interaction the official formation of the bloc has created a level of government that did not exist among these communities before the demarcation process. This means that communities that have intentionally protected their resources might now find themselves outnumbered in their territorial government by communities that prefer to exploit their resources for profit. If that is the case, those resources will be depleted and the 25% share of the profit that goes to the community will actually be split among the full territorial block, even though the extracted resources might have been located in only one or two communities. While the creation of this intermediate-

scale region has a purpose in the titling of indigenous lands, its continued usage as a level of governance raises questions of authenticity.

CHAPTER III

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will explore the basics of current development theory along with specific information related to development aimed at women and indigenous groups. This information will be used to determine whether such policies, developed by a patriarchal system of Western powers, are compatible with the matrifocal structure of Miskitu society. Following this, I present some contextual recent history for the North Atlantic Autonomous Region of Nicaragua regarding their local economy. This is done to establish how the traditional economy of the Miskitu has changed in recent decades. The work of other researchers on the Atlantic Coast will be incorporated into the next chapter to strengthen the context of my own field research.

Introduction to Development

On January 20, 1949 the world got divided into developed and underdeveloped countries by the United States President Harry Truman when he rallied the US and the rest of the industrialized North to make the benefits of their scientific, technological and industrial progress available for 'the growth and improvement of underdeveloped areas' (Tebtebba Foundation, 2010, p. 8).

Gustavo Esteva, a leading critic of development, said of Truman's speech:

On that day two billion people became underdeveloped. In a real sense, from that time on, they ceased being what they were, in all their diversity, and were transmogrified into an inverted mirror of the others' reality, a mirror that belittles them and sends them to the end of the queue, a mirror that defines their identity,

which is really that of a heterogeneous and diverse majority, simply in the terms of a homogenizing and narrow minority. (Tebtebba Foundation, 2010, p. 9)

I am not arguing against development in this thesis. The question I wish to address is a matter of whether the current Western concept of development is culturally applicable to the Miskitu women living in the RAAN. Additionally, does the matrifocal and matrilineal history of the Miskitu come into conflict with the patriarchal perspectives of local, regional, national, and global realities of a neo-liberal, capitalist world view. Patriarchy is a societal structure in which all aspects of life are dominated by males (Moghadam, 1996). In order to fully address this issue it is vital to represent Miskitu culture as the unique manifestation that it is. Therefore, it is necessary to first recognize that “underdeveloped” regions have historically been portrayed as simply the inverse of developed.

Building on Truman’s speech, United Nations (UN) Resolution 34/46, passed by the General Assembly in 1979, stated that “the right to development is a human right and that equality of opportunity is as much a prerogative of nations and of individuals within nations” (UN. General Assembly (34th sess.: 1979-1980), Dec. 7, 1979). The Secretary General of the UN also came out with a report in 1979 on the “international aspects of the right to development” (Tebtebba Foundation, 2010). The Tebtebba Foundation quotes this report as stating:

The central purpose of development is the realization of the potentialities of the human person in harmony with the community; the human person is the subject not the object of development; both material and non-material needs must be satisfied; respect for human rights is fundamental; the opportunity for full participation must be accorded; the principles of equality and non-discrimination

must be respected; and a degree of individual and collective self-reliance must be accorded. (p. 22)

This was strengthened in 1986 when the UN adopted the Declaration on the Right to Development (Tebtebba Foundation, 2010). However, the Declaration on the Right to Development “referred to (indigenous peoples) only in terms of our vulnerabilities and not the positive contributions we can offer to make development more socially just and culturally appropriate” (Tebtebba Foundation, 2010, p. 25).

This raises the question of what, exactly, constitutes development. Entire books have been written deconstructing the history and evolution of the concept of development. While it is far too complex a topic to discuss at length here, it has generally been agreed upon by researchers that,

Development was – and continues to be for the most part – a top-down, ethnocentric, and technocratic approach, which treated people and cultures as abstract concepts, statistical figures to be moved up and down in the charts of ‘progress.’ Development was conceived not as a cultural process (culture was a residual variable, and to disappear with the advance of modernization) but instead as a system of more or less universally applicable technical interventions intended to deliver some ‘badly needed’ goods to a ‘target’ population. (Escobar, 1995)

Development, by definition, has aimed at producing a Western notion of modernity in markedly non-Western locations (Escobar, 1995; Mehmet, 1999). This is because it was the industrialized north that decided to develop the south. Therefore, it was the industrialized nations that determined what constituted development.

Indigenous peoples are consistently overlooked in national policies as well,

In spite of the abundance of literature available on Indigenous Peoples, especially in the social science and environmental fields, there is no information. The existing information, including census socio-demographic information on Indigenous Peoples. States do not have policies that understand the multicultural nature of collecting statistical information, surveys, and sampling, shows conceptual limitations. (Center for Indigenous Peoples' Autonomy and Development, 2007)

This holds true in Nicaragua's case. Not until the national census of 2005 are ethnicities reported for the RAAN. Even then, other socio-demographic and economic information is reported only in relation to municipality and not ethnicity (see Tables 1-3 below). The economic information reported in this census relates only to the percentage of the population either economically active or inactive, employed or unemployed, whether employment is permanent or temporary, and whether the individual works outside his or her own municipality (El Instituto Nacional de Información de Desarrollo (INIDE), 2013). Income and poverty statistics are not presented in this census. The regional government of the RAAN also collects census data and I was able to access population statistics from 2007 that listed the total number of men, women, and families living in each community within six municipalities. However, if data was collected regarding indigenous identity it was not included in the charts I was provided.

During the 1980s, Nicaragua instituted a neo-liberal economic development program (Bradshaw & Linneker, Challenging Poverty, 2001). Neo-liberalist policies and programs criticize protectionist government actions. Instead they prescribe trade liberalization for developing countries as a baseline for integration into global market economies. Trade liberalization ultimately benefits transnational corporations more than

any country's economy (Tribe, Nixon, & Sumner, 2010). Such a focus on exports and production of material goods may not be compatible with indigenous values.

Table 1. Self-Identified Population, Percent Distribution and Percentage Speaking the Language by Area of Residence, According to Indigenous People or Ethnic Community to Which it Belongs, 2005 Census.

Indigenous People or Ethnic Community	Total			Urban			Rural		
	Population	%	% Speak the Language	Population	%	% Speak the Language	Population	%	% Speak the Language
The Republic	443,847		55.0	191,682		55.3	252,165		54.8
R.A.A.N.	179,376	100.0	92.4	62,446	100.0	92.9	116,930	100.0	92.1
Rama	208	0.1	59.1	37	0.1	62.2	171	0.1	58.5
Garífuna	89	0.0	29.2	25	0.0	56.0	64	0.1	18.8
Mayangna-Sumu	6786	3.8	95.6	594	1	91.9	6192	5.3	96
Miskitu	102,806	57.3	95.2	37,856	60.6	94.4	64,950	55.5	95.6
Ulwa	49	0	67.3	22	0	77.3	27	0	59.3
Creole (Kriol)	1,711	1.0	92.6	1,568	2.5	93.0	143	0.1	88.1
Mestizo of the Caribbean Coast	63,999	35.7	93.1	21,368	34.2	94.6	42,631	36.5	92.3
Xiu-Sutiava	16	0.0	-	9	0.0	-	7	0.0	-
Nahoa-Nicarao	31	0.0	-	13	0.0	-	18	0.0	-
Chorotega_Nahua-Mange	85	0.0	-	16	0.0	-	69	0.1	-
Cacaopera-Matagalpa	238	0.1	-	13	0.0	-	225	0.2	-
Other	539	0.3	-	242	0.4	-	297	0.3	-
Don't Know	1,006	0.6	-	176	0.3	-	830	0.7	-
Ignored Question	1,813	1.0	-	507	0.8	-	1,306	1.1	-

(El Instituto Nacional de Información de Desarrollo (INIDE), 2013)

Table 2. Percentage Distribution of the Population Self-Identified as Indigenous People or Ethnic Community According to Municipality, 2005 Census.

Municipality	Total	% Indigenous People or Ethnic Community								
		Rama	Garífuna	Sumu	Miskitu	Creole	Mestizo of the Caribbean Coast	Other	Don't Know	Ignored Question
The Republic	443,847	0.9	0.7	2.2	27.2	4.5	25.3	3.1	10.7	4.4
R.A.A.N.	179,376	0.1	0.0	3.8	57.3	1.0	35.7	0.3	0.6	1.0
Waspán	45,770	0.1	0.0	0.7	96.3	0.1	1.1	0.1	0.0	1.4
Puerto Cabezas	61,721	0.1	0.0	0.2	75.5	2.5	20.8	0.3	0.1	0.3
Rosita	12,303	0.1	0.1	12.0	10.6	0.5	73.8	0.2	0.2	2.5
Bonanza	17,754	0.0	0.0	23.9	9.4	0.1	64.8	0.0	0.5	1.3
Waslala	884	4.3	2.7	0.7	6.9	0.7	17.4	10.5	33.5	8.5
Mulukukú	1,596	0.4	0.9	0.3	0.4	-	86.8	0.8	8.2	2.0
Siuna	27,418	0.1	0.1	2.0	1.0	0.2	93.5	0.3	1.3	1.1
Prinzapolka	11,930	0.1	0.0	0.2	74.0	0.1	24.0	0.7	0.3	0.5

*Some ethnicities reporting small percentages have been excluded to conserve space.

(El Instituto Nacional de Información de Desarrollo (INIDE), 2013)

Table 3. Percentage Distribution of the Population Aged 10 Years or More by Condition of Activity, According to Census and Municipality.

Census & Municipality	Total	Population Economically Active			Population Economically Inactive							
		Total	Employed	Unemployed	Total	Housewife	Student	Old	Pensioner/ Retired	Permanently Incapacitated	Other	
Census 1995												
The Republic	3,012,348	48.1	83.1	16.9	51.9	42.9	44.1	-	1.6	2.4	9.0	
R.A.A.N.	121,157	46.0	80.0	20.0	54.0	49.7	36.6	-	1.1	1.6	10.9	
Waspán	21,035	43.7	70.0	30.0	56.3	43.2	51.0	-	0.7	2.0	3.1	
Puerto Cabezas	26,225	42.1	65.5	34.5	57.9	37.1	53.5	-	1.6	2.1	5.7	
Rosita	9,185	43.2	84.7	15.3	56.8	54.3	34.9	-	1.3	2.0	7.6	
Bonanza	7,494	45.7	90.0	10.0	54.3	48.7	42.6	-	2.3	1.2	5.3	
Waslala	20,254	48.8	91.4	8.6	51.2	62.4	18.3	-	0.2	1.2	17.8	
Mulukukú	9,420	54.6	87.9	12.1	45.4	57.5	12.4	-	0.4	1.1	28.6	
Siuna	24,324	48.6	85.3	14.7	51.4	56.8	24.3	-	1.3	1.0	16.6	
Prinzapolka	3,220	39.7	69.5	30.5	60.3	47.8	39.5	-	1.4	3.8	7.5	
Census 2005												
The Republic	3,895,447	44.9	95.8	4.2	55.1	41.3	37.7	4.2	1.8	1.3	13.7	
R.A.A.N.	211,391	40.0	93.7	6.3	60.0	47.2	31.3	3.6	0.7	0.8	16.4	
Waspán	30,887	35.9	86.0	14.0	64.1	34.9	40.2	4.5	0.3	0.8	19.3	
Puerto Cabezas	46,774	32.6	92.7	7.3	67.4	33.3	40.0	4.8	0.6	0.6	20.6	
Rosita	15,424	39.1	94.6	5.4	60.9	49.1	29.4	3.5	1.2	0.8	16.1	
Bonanza	12,544	40.9	97.5	2.5	59.1	44.3	33.3	2.2	3.8	1.1	15.3	
Waslala	32,666	43.4	92.3	7.7	56.6	59.2	25.8	2.8	0.1	0.8	11.4	
Mulukukú	20,084	45.9	94.7	5.3	54.1	61.0	20.6	2.6	0.3	0.8	14.7	
Siuna	42,593	44.8	97.6	2.4	55.2	57.6	24.2	2.7	0.7	0.8	14.1	
Prinzapolka	10,419	43.6	96.1	3.9	56.4	59.0	21.7	3.7	0.2	0.7	14.9	

(El Instituto Nacional de Información de Desarrollo (INIDE), 2013)

Nicaragua, as a requirement for international financial aid, has had to develop a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) "in consultation with stakeholders and development partners, including the staffs of the World Bank and the IMF" (Government of Reconciliation and National Unity, 2011). The first full (not interim) strategy paper was published in 2001 and provided a very basic overview of the economic situation in Nicaragua. This version only provided poverty statistics for three geographic regions, "Pacific", "Central", and "Atlantic", with further breakdowns into "urban" and "rural" areas (Government of Nicaragua, 2001). The most recent revision of this document that is publically available was published in 2011 and reports on progress made as of 2010. This

progress report contains two short sections both titled “Caribbean Coast Development Strategy,” which describe measures taken to reduce poverty in the autonomous regions (Government of Reconciliation and National Unity, 2011). However, this geographic breakdown of the population has not been improved. Also, budgetary tables in this report only indicate spending on a national level without indicating where that money was spent geographically. Likewise, the strategy matrix, illustrating goals achieved only depicts four goals specific to the Caribbean Coast. (Excerpts relevant to the autonomous regions are provided in Appendix B.) While research is now being conducted into the economic status of the entire population, including indigenous people, this data is aggregated to an extent that it is hardly meaningful. Further, the NHDP has been criticized for “inadequate provision for including the Atlantic region in Nicaragua’s development plan” (Brunnegger, 2007, p. 6).

As part of Nicaragua’s National Human Development Plan (NHDP), “The State will pursue the goal of full and productive employment for all Nicaraguans” (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2009, p. 11). As I will illustrate, full employment for women is not always in their best interest. While this is an honorable goal, it does not take into account indigenous ideas of employment nor alternatives to employment such as subsistence activities. As such, this particular policy, if fully implemented, could potentially have negative effects for Miskitu women.

Women’s Development

In no region of the developing world are women equal to men in legal, social, and economic rights. Gender gaps are widespread in access to and control of resources, in economic opportunities, in power, and political voice (World Bank, 2001, p. 1).

Along with ethnocentricity, patriarchy has long been a dominant theme in development praxis (Escobar, 1995). Women have more recently become a major focus in most development projects because of their disproportionate impoverishment, especially when contrasted to neoliberal male achievement goals. This is to ensure that their economic status is elevated, not only in concert with men's, but at a rate designed to decrease the gender disparity. As a result, economic theory has evolved from the traditional focus on scarcity to include feminist perspectives such as provisioning and childcare (Bakker, 1999). This new perspective incorporates both production and reproduction – the support work of maintaining the domestic sphere which allows others to engage in paid labor (Bakker, 1999).

However, most development literature on female economy focuses either on the integration of “non-working” women into a capitalist work force or the recognition of their contributions through the informal economic sector. This is because, while it has been recognized that women are fairly universally more impoverished than men, men still control the system and choose to continue to place a higher value on paid labor, forcing women to conform to this system in order to improve their economic status. The informal sector is constructed in two ways: as small-scale self-employment with unreported earnings or as contributions to a household's well-being without economic compensation. This second form is discussed in the literature in terms of how to find a way to monetize this work or to at least record a value-added contribution for statistical purposes. Unpaid labor can have a value assigned to it through one of three methods: the opportunity cost of unrealized paid labor; the replacement cost of what would have to be paid for a third party to complete the same household tasks; and input/output costs which measures the market costs of raw materials, production, and the labor provided for the household (Luxton, 1997). This can be

accomplished through statistical time-use data or “policies that attempt to provide economic and social recognition for unpaid work through such policy tools as government transfers, tax credits and actual valuation in National Income Accounts of unpaid work” (Bakker, 1999, p. 87; Luxton, 1997). Other methods of determining women’s economic status involve analyzing gendered “household expenditure patterns” and measuring “deprivation indicators” (Cantillon, 2001).

The literature reviewed for this thesis on the topic of unpaid labor and the care economy provided by women focuses on the hegemony of the neoliberal market economy and the need to either integrate women into the formal sector or record an economic value associated with their domestic labor. The reason placing a monetary value on women’s work is said to be so crucial is to illustrate their value to the household and by extension society. This recorded value is necessary in order for public policies and aid programs to take women’s needs into account (Luxton, 1997). Another complication is how to record the economic value of indigenous women in a mixed capitalist and subsistence economy.

Indigenous Development

Despite the ideologies being put forth by indigenous communities, “a widely held view in the economics profession is that economic principles and theory are essentially universal, and that they are equally applicable to advanced industrial and developing countries” (Tribe, Nixon, & Sumner, 2010, p. 11).

Locations said to be lacking in development are often also poorly ranked in terms of equality, “In fact, culture has been regarded not only as an obstacle to development and modernity, but in the human rights discourse, also as an obstacle to human rights”

(Tebtebba Foundation, 2010, p. 31). Therefore, policies have frequently attempted to *change* the cultural and economic context in which they operate to incorporate Western values (Mehmet, 1999). According to the Maya Leader Demetrio Cojti Cuxil:

As far back as 1821, the original plan for the Guatemalan nation devised by the architects of independence suggested the necessity of eliminating racial and ethnic differences to make the country viable or feasible; later orthodox Marxism-Leninism demanded that ethnic dissent be minimized or ignored in order to make the revolution or class struggle viable or feasible; then the liberal philosophy taught that progress and material development could only be achieved through a *mestizo* or *ladino* culture (according to the liberals, in order to lift the indigenous people out of poverty, one first had to lift them out of the culture and language: “the Indian has to be killed to be saved;” or to put it another way, one had to take the Indian out of the Indian, i.e., to save the indigenous people from poverty their ethnic identity had to be wiped out) (italics in original). (Tebtebba Foundation, 2010, p. 1)

In many instances declarations and resolutions regarding culture and development have failed to make specific mention of indigenous populations at all. Involvement of indigenous leaders as stakeholders in the drafting of these measures was also absent.

In the current dominant development model, subsistence communities are not experiencing any development because they do not provide a significant contribution to their countries’ gross national product (GNP) (Tebtebba Foundation, 2010). However, the United Nations Development Program’s (UNDP) “Policy of Engagement with Indigenous Peoples” (2001) states that,

Indigenous peoples' continued existence is a testimony to the sustainability and viability of indigenous economic production systems, and social and governance practices that should be supported and enhanced, and most importantly, incorporated into mainstream development practices. (Tebtebba Foundation, 2010, p. 55)

This report illustrates that democracy and market capitalism are not the only viable options for producing a vital society despite their continued hegemony in development policies.

Indigenous people changed from being the *object* of to the *subject* of development through the drafting of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP.) This work began in 1985 and the final draft of the declaration was adopted by the General Assembly in September 2007.

[Indigenous] participation in the drafting of the Declaration text allowed for substantial dialogues between (indigenous people), the experts, and the States. This became the global forum where we discussed extensively our worldviews, our concepts of rights and development which includes the controversial right of self-determination. (Tebtebba Foundation, 2010, pp. 45-46)

This process marked the first time that indigenous leaders played an active role in shaping international development policy. Unfortunately, it seems that standard practice on the international level is for “developed” Westerners to tell others how to achieve development. It was only when it could no longer be denied that indigenous people around the world were not equally benefiting from Western development strategies that they were allowed to join in the conversation: “The UNDRIP is an acknowledgement that indigenous

peoples have not and still do not enjoy the rights afforded to them by International Human Rights Law on an equal and nondiscriminatory basis” (Tebtebba Foundation, 2010, p. 50).

Active participation is a critical part of the development process (Tebtebba Foundation, 2010, p. 51). Indigenous leaders had previously been excluded from participation. This was not due to a lack of voice on their part, but rather to a failure to listen on the part of the international development community.

Economy in the RAAN

A previous examination of economic conditions conducted by the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs in 2011 revealed that Nicaragua is the second poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, making it a location in great need of development assistance. According to the Center for Studies and Information on Multiethnic Women (CEIMM, 2008), only 20% of households in the RAAN are headed by a female. This likely represents a failure to incorporate indigenous cultural practices of matrilocality into statistical reporting. Often, women are only listed as the head of the household in the permanent absence of an adult male (Bradshaw, 1995).

Dr. Sarah Bradshaw of Middlesex University, UK has done extensive economic research in Nicaragua and has written on topics that include indigenous populations. While they have not been the central focus of her research, according to her data from 1998, 72% of the total population in the RAAN was living below the poverty level, making it tied as the district with the third highest proportion of residents who are living in poverty (Bradshaw, 2002). She claims that one of the reasons poverty has been increasing in Nicaragua is due to the neo-liberal policies of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (Bradshaw &

Linneker, 2001). Her recommendations include “further elaboration of longer term sustainable human development systems which reduce poverty, inequality, vulnerability and social exclusion” (Bradshaw & Linneker, 2001, p. 25).

This is representative of a problem with the vast majority of literature written about Nicaragua: it is written either exclusively about the Pacific half of the country or, if it does address the entire state, it fails to distinguish between indigenous and non-indigenous populations. The paramount work on the Miskitu Indians is still Mary Helms’ *Asang* from 1971, now over 40 years old. While this is still a valuable reference for Miskitu cultural practices, it was written before the Contra war, autonomy and neo-liberal economic policies, and therefore is out of date. There are scholars who are writing about the present situation for the Miskitus, most notably Laura Herlihy, Mary Finley-Brook, Charles Hale, Bernard Nietschmann, Philip Dennis, Luciano Baracco, Ken Henriksen, and Christopher Kindblad. However, the full body of literature is still limited in the sense that it focuses mainly on cultural or political aspects of Miskitu life. It was for this reason that not only was it desirable but necessary for me to conduct my own field research into current economic conditions for this thesis.

Some historical context regarding the integration of subsistence and market economies by the Miskitu is available in the literature and relevant to this study. However, since next to nothing is known for certain about the pre-contact economic or cultural practices of the Miskitu, much of the accepted knowledge about this evolution is informed conjecture (Nietschmann, 1973). It is believed that the Miskitu had a subsistence and barter-based economy prior to contact with Europeans (Nietschmann, 1973, pp. 29-30). From the post-contact period we know that trade was established early on with buccaneers and the

British, and that this eventually turned into a cash-based system which also allowed for the exchange of labor for wages (Nietschmann, 1973, pp. 35-40). Eventually, Miskitu people became dependent upon foreign manufactured goods, at which point Helms labels theirs a purchase economy (Helms, 1971). Nietschmann ties this back into the underlying adaptability of Miskitu culture, which I address in chapter five,

Throughout their long period of intimate market contact with outsiders, it has been mainly the adaptability of the Miskito's traditional subsistence system which has enabled them to participate in two worlds: their own kin-based, reciprocal exchange, subsistence society, and the foreign wage labor and money market economy. (Nietschmann, 1973, p. 24)

Despite this long history with market-based trade, wage labor, and export of natural resources, cash-based transactions were primarily limited to exchanges with foreigners while economic transactions within villages remained based on reciprocity and barter (Nietschmann, 1973, p. 196). Even when cash was first integrated into the exchange of resources between members of a community, the new market economy was not independent of social ties and kinship (Nietschmann, 1973, p. 197).

Due to the boom and bust nature of foreign trade in the region, as described in chapter two, there were lengthy periods when money was scarce and people had to rely mainly on subsistence practices. A result of this is the realization of poverty and the attending psychological effects of deprivation (Helms, 1971, p. 156).

Nietschmann predicted that,

If village economic organization continues to change toward monetary-based market transactions at the expense of reciprocal exchange, then its social

complement will be the increased individualization of households, the fragmentation of community structure, and possible rearrangement or termination of subsistence economy-embedded social relationships. (1973, p. 194)

The current state of these issues will be explored further in chapter five.

CHAPTER IV
METHODOLOGY

Research Design

To facilitate the ethnographic perspectives I am writing from for this thesis, I conducted anonymous surveys with Miskitu women in Bilwi, Nicaragua and the surrounding vicinity. My questions focused on the women's current economic status, their access to credit, and personal interactions with aid organizations.

I felt this process was necessary to obtain adequate insider knowledge regarding women's lived experiences in the RAAN. To this end I enrolled in a study abroad program offered by The University of Kansas and led by Dr. Laura Herlihy of the Center of Latin American and Caribbean Studies there. For full disclosure, Dr. Herlihy is a member of my thesis committee. During May, June, and July of 2012, I took six credits in Miskitu, a Misumalpan, Macro-Chibchan language of South American origins, over six weeks in Nicaragua, spending approximately ten days in Granada and the rest of my time in Bilwi. While this program was critical to my research, my reasons for enrolling in this program were two-fold. First, I felt it would be beneficial to the quality of my research to learn the basics of the primary language of my future ethnographic "subjects," and second, it provided me with a means of procuring additional funding for my research.

I have no illusions about my fluency in the Miskitu language as a result of these six weeks of instruction. My goal was to be able to introduce myself and be able to pronounce my questions such that I could be understood in the event that I spoke with any women who did not speak Creole English or Spanish and who were unable to read my survey in

Miskitu. As it happens, I was able to engage the help of a local tri-lingual young man in conducting most of my surveys so this was never a problem. However, I feel that learning the basics of the language was useful, not only for verbal communication, but also for the communication of ideas and as an entry point based upon trust from my efforts. Knowing a language provides insight into the way native speakers of that language think. This linguistic theory, known as the Whorfian hypothesis, “claims that language is not just a neutral vessel for conveying thoughts but is an invisible mold that actually shapes the way people think and perceive” (Rheingold, 1988, p. 6). I believe that my introduction to the Miskitu language provided me with additional insight into how the Miskitu people structure their worldview. My hope is that this knowledge has aided me in arriving at conclusions that incorporate the Miskitu perspective.

My study was vetted through Western Michigan University’s Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) and the survey questions were approved for use. Informed consent forms were provided in Miskitu or Spanish and signed by each participant. HSIRB approval documents are provided in Appendix A.

The Field Site

After spending approximately ten days in Granada getting acquainted with the Nicaraguan culture of the Pacific coast and beginning instruction in the Miskitu language, our study abroad group of eleven students flew out to Puerto Cabezas/Bilwi/Port. Puerto Cabezas is the Spanish name for the city; Bilwi is the Miskitu name; Port is the Creole English name. To prevent confusion I will use Bilwi to refer to the city and Puerto Cabezas to refer to the municipality in which it is located. We continued our instruction in the language there

and during this time frame, I began conducting my surveys. However, the majority of my research was collected during the four weeks I spent on the Atlantic Coast after the study abroad ended. I stayed at the bed and breakfast “Casa Museo Judith Kain” for the full length of my stay in Bilwi, which amounted to about eight weeks (see Figure 2.) My accommodations there were luxurious compared to the living conditions of many of the residents in Bilwi. I had a private bathroom attached to my room which usually had hot water. I also had a TV and wireless internet in my room. The internet was spotty and would sometimes go out for most of a day but it also worked at least part of, if not most of, every day. There were scheduled power outages due to the limited power supply in the city; at least I was told they were announced ahead of time on the radio. I did not have a radio and so was never aware of when these outages were scheduled to occur. The primary luxury, though, at least as far as I was concerned, was the air conditioning unit in my room. These were a bit temperamental and I had to change rooms a couple of times during my stay when my unit stopped working since they could not be repaired quickly, but this was still much better than the local accommodations in the rest of Bilwi. During the initial study abroad our instructor, Dr. Laura Herlihy, stayed downtown about a mile away at Hotel Liwa Mairin, which is also where our classes were held.

Data Collection

While in the RAAN I conducted eight anonymous surveys with Miskitu women and one anonymous survey with a Mayangna/Sumu woman² living in a Miskitu community who

² My original intention was to only interview Miskitu women. However, I found this particular interview to be relevant since the woman was living in a Miskitu community and it provided me with insight into how access to property and natural resources differ when a Miskitu man marries a non-Miskitu woman.

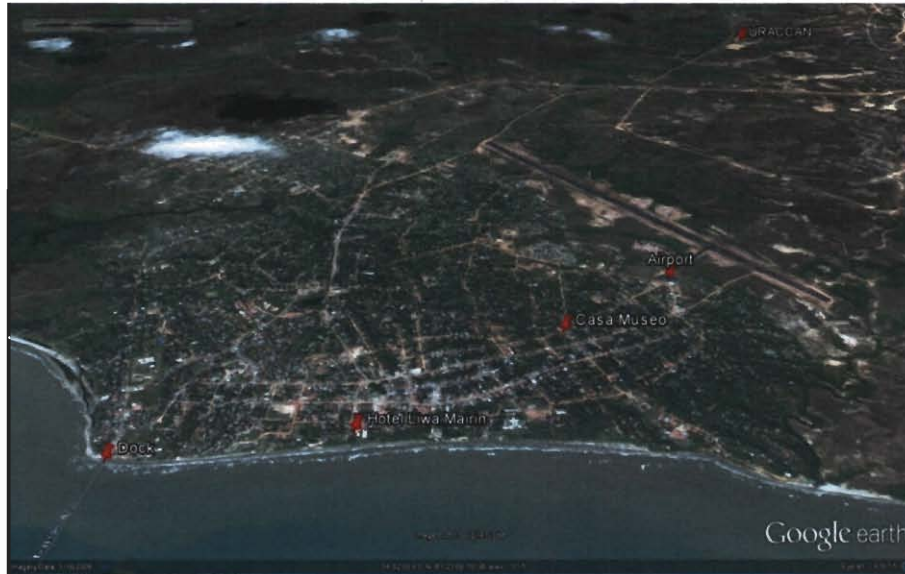


Figure 2. Aerial imagery of Bilwi from Google Earth. Imagery captured January 2006. Placemarkers located by author.

is married to a Miskitu man. Most of these surveys took place in or near Bilwi and were mainly conducted in the homes of the women surveyed. The map in Figure 3 shows the communities where the women I surveyed are originally from or currently reside; I did not visit all of these locations during my time in the field. I relied on taxis or walking for most of my travels but these modes severely limited my travel to a small geographic area (see Figure 4.)

Dr. Herlihy taught some of our classes and she also brought in native speakers to help us learn proper pronunciation and idioms. This is how I was introduced to Marlon Dalvez Cassanova, who became pivotal to my research. Marlon is fluent in Miskitu, Spanish, and Creole English and he taught an afternoon class in Miskitu for the four of us Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS)-funded students enrolled in six credits of intensive language instruction (as opposed to three credits of language and three credits of cultural research.) Marlon is a graduate of the University of the Autonomous Regions of the

RAAN Communities of Interest

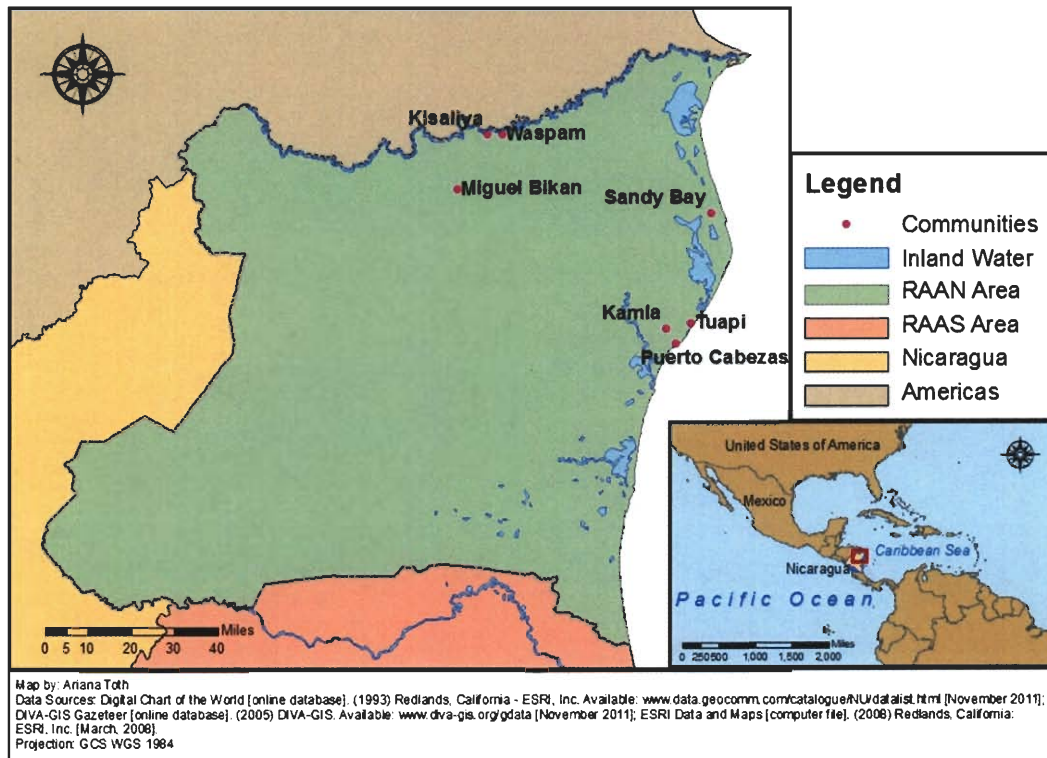


Figure 3. Home communities of women surveyed.



Figure 4. Typical Bilwi-to-Waspam transportation for locals. Photo by author.

Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua (URACCAN) and works for the forest service in the RAAN. Laura and Marlon helped arrange several of my surveys. Marlon also served as a translator for six of my surveys, which were unable to be conducted in English. I spent one afternoon asking Marlon several questions about Miskitu culture and government structure, which I have recorded in my field notes. However, I continued to learn from Marlon on an almost daily basis throughout my stay. For reference purposes I have listed only one field note associated with information I gained from my conversations with Marlon but it should be known that those conversations took place over approximately six weeks.

During the period of my study abroad our group rented three trucks to make the four and a half hour drive over bumpy, half washed-out dirt roads north to Waspam on the Wangki/Río Coco/Coco River, which forms the Nicaraguan-Honduran border. We stayed in Waspam for two nights with a day trip to the small rural community of Miguel Bikan. I conducted one of my surveys in Waspam. While I did not survey any of the women in Miguel Bikan I did listen to the male leaders of the community discuss the history of their village and effects of the recent land demarcation, which were discussed in chapter two. I realize that my research would be more representative of Miskitu women had I been able to include ethnographies from more geographically dispersed women, such as those in Miguel Bikan, however, conditions in the field are unpredictable. As it happened, the only day our group was there I was recovering from a severe lack of sleep caused by being up all night with food poisoning two nights prior. Due to our group schedule I was unable to make up this sleep during the previous day and so I was not properly prepared to survey anyone. This is a loss to my research but an unfortunate reality of learning *in situ* while conducting field work.

In addition to these surveys I was also able to attend two informal lectures as part of my study abroad experience. The first of these was an evening our group spent with a North American man who works in the lobster industry. He is a local resident who, at the time, had lived in Bilwi for nearly twenty-one years, sixteen of which he was married (off and on) to a Miskitu woman. The second lecture was with Avelino Cox Molina, an expert on traditional Miskitu folklore and religion. I was also privileged to be able to conduct a short but invaluable interview with Mirna Cunningham Kain, currently the Chair of the United Nations (UN) Permanent Forum of Indigenous Issues (2011-2013), the President of the Center for Autonomy and Development of Indigenous Peoples (CADPI), on the Board of Directors of the Global Fund for Women, and an Advisor to the Alliance of Indigenous Women of Mexico and Central America, the Continental Network of Indigenous Women, and the International Indigenous Women's Forum (FIMI) (Cunningham, 2012).

I took written notes for all of these surveys and was able to record most of them with a small digital audio recorder as well. Most of the anonymous surveys were conducted in either Miskitu or Spanish with the help of Marlon who translated these into English for me in the field.

Problems and Limitations

Since I propose to provide insight through a feminist investigation into the current economic autonomy of Miskitu women, it is important to be aware of the biases that I possess. As a female it is likely that it is easier for me to relate to women I research than it would be for a man to do the same. But gender is not the only important distinction to be made. Creating a 'situated knowledge' is key to feminist methodology and therefore

“adequate theorizing about women’s position must simultaneously include racial, class, ethnic and other differences” (McDowell, 1992, p. 412).

In this case the researcher is a white female from a middle-class upbringing in an economically developed country studying a group of indigenous Latin American women in a poor, semi-rural area of a developing country. My personal experience has been one of great privilege compared to the women with whom I spoke. I am aware that this causes them to view me as an outsider. Since this is a region where most white visitors are either affiliated with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) or are ethnographic chroniclers of histories or scientific researchers, I must be particularly careful not to give the impression that I am capable of improving their situation. Additionally, I must be careful that they understand that the Nicaraguan Government of National Unity and Reconciliation has no interest in or knowledge of this study. Further, it was necessary for me to be cognizant of these distinctions when formulating my survey questions, when asking these questions, and when forming the conclusions that foundation my thesis. While this proved to be a difficult process I believe I was careful to incorporate their unique perspective into this research.

Another important aspect of providing a situated knowledge is to acknowledge the agency of the object of study (Haraway, 1988). Therefore, both the geographic region of the RAAN and the women who reside there must be considered dynamic. As such, this research can, at most, only hope to accurately portray the situations investigated during my brief moment on site. And that accuracy is limited not only by my own perspective, but also by the words of the women with whom I spoke, which in many cases were filtered through my translator.

The ultimate limitation in almost any field research project is the limited amount of time spent in the field. In this case, due largely to the expense related to traveling to and procuring accommodations while in Bilwi, extending my time in the field was not a realistic option. A consequence of this is the small number of women I was able to survey. Also, since I did not have any contacts in the field site prior to my arrival, the women included in my survey do not represent a random sample of the population. I was introduced to all of the women surveyed by either Dr. Herlihy or Marlon. The contacts I made through Dr. Herlihy were with highly educated women, which is not typical of the general population. Marlon introduced me to some college educated women as well but also made an effort to take me to women with more diverse backgrounds.

While being able to rely on Marlon and Dr. Herlihy for contacts in the field certainly led to a larger sample size than I could have achieved on my own, it also made that sample less random. However, this is not necessarily an entirely negative consequence. Speaking with highly educated women allowed me to gather more nuanced answers. And because they knew so much about the problem I was investigating, these educated women frequently went on to discuss other related issues to help me better understand the complexity of their situation. Their openness and willingness to share their knowledge provided me with much more information than I could have collected through my surveys alone.

Ideally, the field research for this study would have been conducted over two summers. Much of my understanding of the complexities of the Miskitu economy was gained as a result of my field work and from new sources of literature I was exposed to during and after my time there. I feel that, were I able to return to the Nicaraguan Atlantic

Coast to continue this line of inquiry, this expanded knowledge would allow for a more thorough investigation of the topic. Unfortunately, neither life nor the conditions under which this research was undertaken are ideal.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

In this chapter I will present the results of my research into the current economic status of Miskitu women in narrative form. I will also continue to include relevant literature to strengthen or corroborate the views of the women I surveyed. I do this to allow the reader a more precise and detailed idea of the research. Because my findings cannot be measured quantitatively, I simply report what was revealed to me through my research. Since some women openly spoke at length about particular issues tangentially related to my research problem of which they were particularly knowledgeable, I have included that information here in order to weave a more thoroughly contextualized image for the reader.

This chapter is broken down into the following subsections: Unique Culture and Economic Practices, New Urban Problems, Development Aid, Domestic Violence, Recent Gains, and Self-Determined Development. Under the heading Unique Culture and Economic Practices, I will present my main findings regarding the cultural and economic practices of the Miskitu. New Urban Problems will discuss issues the Miskitu are facing as a result of urban migration. The section titled Development Aid addresses access to microcredit, gendered differences in spending patterns, general cultural effects of market-based development on indigenous societies, and the difficulty of addressing women's issues on a budget. I have included a short section, Domestic Violence, on its relationship to earnings and as a signifier of women's oppression. The chapter concludes with a short summary of recent gains in favor of women's rights followed by the section Self-Determined

Development, which describes current efforts within local leadership to promote self-determined development at a global level.

Unique Culture and Economic Practices

The main reason I was initially interested in the Miskitu people as a case study for this research was their matrifocal residence patterns. One of the defining characteristics of Miskitu social structure is their tradition of matrifocality, or female-based residence patterns (Herlihy, 2007). Herlihy explains that “Mothers, daughters, and sisters form the core of the matrigrup, living near each other throughout their lives, and share in the reproductive work of raising the children” (Herlihy, 2012, p. 64). As women reach adulthood and marry, their new husband moves into his wife’s village and is expected to build a house for her near her mother’s (Herlihy, 2012). Mary Helms explained this practice as a response to male-absenteeism during economic boom years when men would leave their villages for long periods of time to work for wages provided by foreign corporations (Helms, 1971). Although men still maintain power and leadership roles within the community, Herlihy states that “women’s power comes from their roles as maintainers of tradition, spiritual advisers, and healers, none of which yields economic power in capitalism” (Herlihy, 2007, p. 146).

Thus, Western values do not apply to these traditional roles. Mirna Cunningham told me that “Theirs (women’s) is a very important responsibility from the point of view of the community” (Field Note 7). This is despite their lack of recorded income that is so important to capitalists.

The heart of the Miskitu community is the concept of reciprocity, solidarity, and benefit sharing, which the Miskitu call *pana-pana*; “this principle is the one that ensures the

concept of collectivity” (Field Note 7). When I asked Mirna what aspects of the culture were being lost due to Westernizing influences it was this fundamental principal that she cited, “That concept of collective wellness is something that people are losing. They don’t care anymore if somebody doesn’t have, if the other one doesn’t have, as long as they have” (Field Note 7). What’s more, she told me that “this whole concept of *pana-pana*, of sharing, is a responsibility of women; and that is part of the indigenous economy” (Field Note 7). This could mean that Westernization is actually eroding women’s economic role and authority within the community. This perspective of the diminishing observation of *pana-pana* is corroborated by the women of Tuapi (Fenly, IWF, & CADPI, 2011).

I was told by one of the women I surveyed that the Miskitu people are very adaptable to change (Field Note 1). This fact is also represented in the existing literature, “Miskitu culture has always been heterogeneous, malleable, and subject to change” (Henricksen & Kindblad, 2011, p. 192), also, “In key respects the Miskitu survived their encounters with modernity by selectively adopting foreign customs, symbols, and resources that fit their needs” (Schroeder & Brooks, 2011, p. 56). Global climate change is another force which has caused Miskitu women to rely on their adaptability to create new livelihoods as their old practices become unreliable or unfeasible with the changing landscape (Fenly, IWF, & CADPI, 2011).

Within Miskitu gender ideology, men should provide financially for the women. Many Miskitu women seek out men to provide for them (Field Note 5). A possibly slanted view of how this actually operates was provided to me by the U.S. expat man I spoke to. He said that “women send their daughters out to earn money by selling sex” (Field Note 3). He explained further that locals do not view them as professional prostitutes but rather they

“target men who they think will be good providers and pursue them” (Field Note 3). Prostitution is legal in the RAAN but these women are not the ones to whom he was referring. Professional prostitutes have a set price for services, do not form emotional relationships with their clients, and use birth control (Herlihy, 2012, p. 129). Transactional sexual relationships in which the man gives the woman a “present” of money as a symbol of his love are one method women use to gain access to cash resources (Herlihy, 2012, pp. 127-128). In Kuri, Honduras, Herlihy indeed found that “Grandmothers may arrange for these relationships to develop between their grown daughters and their suitors, often suggesting the amount of an adequate donation. In this way, senior women maintain control of the cash-based resources in the matrigroup” (Herlihy, 2012, p. 128). This finding is in agreement with the man’s more crude observation. My informant explained that, because there are so few jobs in the urban area of Bilwi the men turn to drink and the women are commonly forced to find small jobs to provide for the family (Field Note 5). So this practice of “targeting” men, or forming loving relationships with a transactional component, might be just a case of a larger population of women competing for a smaller population of suitable (non-drunkard) men with economic prospects.

Rural men often work as migrant wage-laborers while the women stay home and raise the children and manage the household (Herlihy, 2012). However, migrant wage-labor was more common during Company Time than now. Presently, people living in rural communities are reverting to a more subsistence lifestyle (Nietschmann, 1973).

A woman I surveyed told me that the attitude of many men conforms with the concept of *chamba*, that you’re not sure about the future but today you have enough (Field Note 5). These men do not feel compelled to plan for the future because they are not faced

with immediate want. I was also told that single women must provide for themselves and therefore have control over their own money, unlike married women who must rely upon their husbands (Field Notes 8, 10).

Rural communities are called *tawan sirpis*³, small towns, in the Miskitu language. The *tawan sirpi* is comprised of a grouping of houses, sometimes with small medicinal gardens. The arrangement is matrilocal in that married daughters typically live in a house constructed near that of their mother (Herlihy, 2012). A family's livestock is kept near the house (see Figure 5). Cattle are kept almost exclusively for meat and butter is considered a luxury many only dream of tasting (Field Notes 6, 5). The *tawan sirpi* is surrounded by forest



Figure 5. A man in a traditional-style house with pigs and chickens nearby, Waspam, Nicaragua.

Photo by author.

³ The plural of *tawan sirpi* in Miskitu is actually *tawan sirpi nani*. I will use the conventional English form of pluralization by adding an 's' to Miskitu words for ease of comprehension.

or agricultural land (*insla*) that is worked by members of the community. This land is owned communally by everyone but individuals are granted rights to parcels of this land, usually when they marry, which they can use to support their families (Field Note 6). According to traditional laws, individuals never lose their right to a piece of land or *insla* near the *tawan sirpi* of their ancestors. This is true even if they have never lived there themselves (Field Note 6). As long as they still have a relative in the community who will claim them as a relation they can exercise their rights to the land.

I was also informed that the Miskitu economy is very dependent upon natural resources (Field Note 1). This statement agrees with the literature such that since “the main economic asset in this community, land, has for many years also been a main ingredient in local constructions of ethnicity and ethno-political identities... the study of economic and cultural aspects must be inseparable” (Henricksen & Kindblad, 2011, p. 193). A focus group of women in Tuapi revealed the following uses of the land,

The indigenous women of the Tuapi community perceive the forest as their main means of subsistence since the forest is the site of agricultural land that they use for their plantations, the source of wood to construct their homes, firewood and medicinal plants to cure illnesses. They also depend on the forest for wild animals that they hunt according to the season. Aside from hunting, they gather wild fruits which they sell at the local market in the town of Bilwi. (Fenly, IIWF, & CADPI, 2011, p. 52)

The younger generations do not have the same connection to nature and *Yapti Tasba*, Mother Earth, as did their ancestors (Cunningham Kain, 2011). Due to the large-scale abandonment of traditional spiritual beliefs, many also no longer same level of respect for

the trees and fear of the spirits who were said to live in the forests (Cunningham Kain, 2011). This change in attitude has allowed logging and other capitalist enterprises to destroy parts of the environment that used to be revered by the ancestors (Cunningham Kain, 2011). A key distinction here is that indigenous people, including the Miskitu, view nature as a living thing in which humans must live in harmony, as opposed to the Western view of the environment as a resource that exists for human use (Tebtebba Foundation, 2010; Escobar, 1995).

Since many people still rely on subsistence practices, the resources provided by the land are essential to their livelihood. One of the women I spoke to estimated that about half the Miskitu people have a subsistence lifestyle while the other half are professionals (Field Note 11). She said the lifestyle is part of what makes Miskitu culture unique, indicating that it is being lost as younger generations tend towards professionalism. As is the case with many indigenous peoples, the Miskitu believe the forests “were once dense and filled with animals, with many sections known as the places inhabited by beings (spirits, sprites, *liwa mairin*⁴, *unta dukia*⁵, and others) who are the care-takers of the forest and waters” (Cunningham Kain, 2011, p. 9). Today however, resources are more scarce due to both overuse and climate change (Cunningham Kain, 2011). In the Miskitu language the word for natural resources, *rits*, is the same word used to indicate wealth. This is an indication of the value placed on the sustenance that the land provides.

Another woman I spoke to told me that it is mainly the language that currently makes the Miskitu unique: the culture and the traditional dress are now going away as is the traditional food, although that is hanging on a little longer (Field Note 10). She thought for a

⁴ “Mermaid”.

⁵ Literally, “forest thing”; the owner of the forest.

moment and then added that the spirits and the *sukia*, or traditional healer, also make their culture unique (Field Note 10). (Photos showing traditional and modern dress are shown in Figures 6-8.) I asked her if she felt these losses were worth the economic or other benefits that might be gained from Westernization. She said, “No, because we can say we are indigenous people but another people can’t see us as indigenous because we lost our culture” (Field Note 10).



Figure 6. A group of high school students at URACCAN wearing traditional clothes made out of bark from the tuno tree. Photo by author.

I was informed by a young woman in Bilwi that land within the communities is usually distributed to women by their mothers (Field Note 1).⁶ However, this is not always the case. One middle-aged woman I spoke to in Wangki told me that she inherited her land from her father; she said that most of the time land is passed on to men, not women (Field Note 2). This woman also articulated that this only applies to land within the *tawan sirpi*.

⁶ This woman told me that she supposedly has the right to land in her mother’s community but cannot say for certain as she has never requested land there.



Figure 7. The same group of high school students in the clothes they selected to wear to meet our study abroad group. Photo by author.



Figure 8. A family in Miguel Bikan in clothes they selected to wear to meet a group of American college students. Photo by author.

Forest lands are not inherited, rather they revert to the community upon the “owner’s” death; this land is granted by community leaders and rights are usually given out at the time of marriage (Field Note 2).

I was also told that women want more input in how the natural resources on their land are used (Field Note 2). Currently, only men have a say in whether resources will be sold off the land according to two of the women with whom I spoke (Field Notes 2, 8). A third woman from the *tawan sirpi* of Kamla told me that the *sindico*, theirs happens to be a woman, decides about the *rits* in their community (Field Note 9.) A fourth woman who used to work in rural communities teaching women how to administer natural resources said that women have more control over the natural resources than the men because women are more likely to plan for the future whereas men are primarily concerned with how to make a profit from the resources currently available (Field Note 10). This statement reinforces the prevalence of the *chamba* attitude among Miskitu men. (I believe this woman’s answer likely indicates her opinion of who *should* have more control over natural resources rather than who actually *does*. This could be due to a flaw in the translation of the question, since her survey was conducted in Spanish, or it could be a due to her own misinterpretation of the question.) Other women surveyed did not have first-hand knowledge pertaining to how much control women have over the use of community resources. According to Mirna Cunningham, on the whole, women do not have any say over how natural resources are used (Field Note 7). It is important to note again that this is only in reference to *commercial* use of natural resources. Women as well as men have the ability to gather any resources they need for their own homes from their lands, but they do have to pay a tax for that use, according to one of the women I surveyed in Kamla (Field Note 9).

Communities can lease their land to outside parties or individuals, but they cannot sell it. Likewise, individuals in a community cannot sell or lease their land because it is owned by the community but they may share it with family members. When a lease expires, usually every five years, communities can only take back the land if they can afford to pay compensation for any buildings that have been constructed (Field Note 6). Because of this stipulation, land is rarely able to be reclaimed by cash-poor communities.

The regional government used to have the power to decide how natural resources were used throughout the RAAN (Field Note 1). Now those decisions are made by the territories and if the regional government wants access to the resources of a given community they must have party members influence local leaders to allow that access (Field Note 1). This change was made to protect the communities from exploitation at the regional level. This, though, has led to political corruption as a common theme in many of the problems that the RAAN faces.

Mirna Cunningham stressed that when talking about a matrifocal society, “we’re talking about economical and maybe social and cultural responsibility of women, but political responsibility of women was not something that was discussed much in the community” (Field Note 7). Another of the women I surveyed corroborated this, “(the) culture of masculinity is very deep” she said (Field Note 1). This is an important point. While residential patterns are matrifocal in Miskitu societies the power structure is still patriarchal.

As in most societies, Miskitu women are restricted by a gendered division of space. Tradition dictates that the woman’s place is in the home (Field Notes 6, 7, 10; Helms, 1971; Herlihy, 2006). In Kuri, Herlihy found that, “Women head households, make all child rearing and economic decisions, and eventually gain control of the men’s winnings” (Herlihy, 2006,

p. 145). I was told by Mirna that, “Theirs is a very important responsibility from the point of view of the community. They are the ones in the community who has to maintain education, to maintain health, and have to maintain the economy in the homes” (Field Note 7). In the village of Kuri, Herlihy also found that women were the primary educators concerning “village histories, genealogies, and local folklore” (Herlihy, 2007, p. 141) due to the fact that they typically married men from outside their village who did not possess this knowledge. In my conversations I found that elders within the family, both men and women, were said to transmit this cultural knowledge to their descendants (Field Note 13, 14).

In relation to agricultural practices men typically break or plow the land through the use of slash and burn clearing and assist with some aspects of the harvest; women typically are in charge of planting, maintaining the crops, and harvesting (Field Notes 1, 6, 7; Helms, 1971). I witnessed this when I went to Miguel Bikan. Our group was late arriving to the *tawan sirpi* and so the women had gone back into the fields to work while the men waited for us. When we arrived the children ran to the fields to retrieve their mothers. I was told by Marlon that,

Women in the communities do not do much work. They stay at home and cook and do laundry and help with planting and harvesting. Men go out every day to hunt or fish and they do the harder labor of breaking the ground to prepare for planting.

Children see this and learn that the men are the providers and therefore the women do not get as much respect. Girls stay home to help their moms. (Field Note 6)

This comment contradicts Mirna’s claim that women’s roles within the home are recognized for their importance in sustaining the family. Both scenarios seem plausible to me but I cannot say which is more accurate.

One of the women I surveyed, who was 59 years old, said that while women experienced more respect prior to the war they did not enjoy more economic rights than they do now (Field Note 2). Another woman I surveyed told me that her community of Kamla currently has a woman *Sindico*, the official responsible for the administration of natural resources and land, who is serving her second two-year term. Kamla has also had a female *Whita*, the individual in a community responsible for the administration of justice, since the war; she said these advances in leadership would not have been possible prior to the war (Field Note 11).

One woman from Kamla informed me that she was a widow. She said that she was lucky to already be working when her husband died and that her son is still alive; she said she could have had problems if she had not already been working (Field Note 11). However, she also told me that widows who are not employed are provided for by their community. This is because they have a “very good” *Sindico* in Kamla, who happens to be a woman; she helps widows by providing them with money every month (Field Note 11). This *Sindico* will also help widows construct a house or pay for their children’s schooling if necessary (Field Note 11). I was told that widows in Sandy Bay are also helped by their full community (Field Note 14). However, the woman from a *tawan sirpi* near Wangki told me that her community does not do anything to help widows (Field Note 13.) So it seems that not only does women’s access to positions of political leadership vary by location but so does their economic autonomy. These two features are likely correlated since the woman who told me her community does not help widows also said that the community leadership is all male (Field Note 13). Since only three of the women I surveyed informed me about the level of support widows receive in their communities the sample size of my informants is far too

small to draw any conclusions other than that their treatment varies. Although this potential correlation between male leadership and lack of community support for widows would seem to indicate that caring for them is a recent development that has occurred alongside the advancement of women within the community, that is not the case. According to several *kukas* who were interviewed about life in the old days, before much of their traditional culture was lost, widows and single women were provided for by the entire community (Cunningham Kain, 2011).

Laura Herlihy found in Kuri, Honduras that women “are adapting to the market economy by incorporating modern resources into their reciprocity networks” (Herlihy, 2012, p. 95). This conflicts somewhat with Kindblad’s description of the *replacement* of the traditional economy with a new cash-based economy in Tasbapauni, RAAS, Nicaragua. In Bilwi, I witnessed a lot of cash-based commerce. However, this is the largest city in the RAAN and therefore not very representative of the overall economy. Unfortunately I was unable to spend enough time in rural communities to get a good first-hand account of how much the market economy has penetrated everyday life there.

The existing literature presents conflicting views of women’s access to money, “Oppressive patriarchal ideologies revolving around perceptions of men as resource providers also arise at the local and regional level, discouraging women from entering the labor force” (Herlihy, 2012, p. 156). In Tasbapauni, in the RAAS, men are said to hand money over to women for consumption, implying that women do not need to enter the workforce themselves in order to access cash (Henricksen & Kindblad, 2011).

According to Herlihy’s research in Honduras, “Miskitu women do not want equal work opportunities but instead put their energies into becoming mothers and heads of

households and accessing cash salaries of men” (Herlihy, 2012, p. 15). This does not match the sentiment I observed among Miskitu women in the RAAN. However, I interacted mainly with more urbanized women than did Herlihy so I cannot say for certain whether what I discovered is due more to the location of the women with whom I spoke in a large town in Nicaragua versus a more rural setting in Honduras. Another possible cause for this difference in findings could be due to a higher level of education obtained by the women questioned, which likely correlates with an urban setting. The Mayangna woman I spoke to told me that she would like to work; she has land but no crops to grow (Field Note 8).

Despite an apparent inclination to work among young women, there is still also a desire for large families (Field Note 13). However, five of the women I surveyed were between the ages of twenty-three and thirty-six; three of these women had one child and two did not have any (see Table 4) (Field Notes 1, 8, 10, 13, 14). While they may indeed desire to have a large family someday, it seems that younger women may be at least delaying childbirth. It is also possible the low number of children among these young women could be related to their education or proximity to a city among other factors. The four older women I surveyed had two, three, six, and seven children (Field Notes 2, 5, 9, 11).

I was told by one woman that contraceptives are not available in her *tawan sirpi* but that most women do not want to use them anyway; the one or two who do have to travel to the nearest *tawan* to get them (Field Note 13). While in Bilwi I went to a pharmacy and noticed a couple of boxes of oral contraceptives in a glass case. My own prescription was going to run out the day after I returned to the States and so I asked the woman behind the counter if she had “la pilladora,” or “the pill.” She told me “no” and abruptly turned away. It is possible she denied my request based on the assumption that I was going to use it so I

Table 4. Fertility rates among survey participants.

Age	Children	Location
23	1	Bilwi
25	1	Kamla
29	0	Bilwi/Wangki
32	0	Bilwi
36	1	Bilwi/Sandy Bay
40s	3	Bilwi
50	2	Wangki
53	7	Kamla
61	6	Kamla

could have sex with local men, which was not the case. I cannot say whether she would have responded differently to a local woman. However, the fact that contraceptives are available in some pharmacies does not mean they are accessible to all women. But again, if women do not want to use them that may not be a problem.

A woman I surveyed said that men might hand earnings to women but since only men travel to *tawans*, like Bilwi or Waspam, to spend the money they have ultimate control over household spending (Field Note 10). This is because most *tawan sirpis* do not have stores and so people have to travel to the larger *tawans* to purchase items they are unable to produce themselves, such as clothes and some food goods, including cooking oil, salt, and sugar (Field Note 6). *Tawan sirpis* also lack banks. Women's limited movement therefore usurps their household economic authority. However, I was told by the one Mayangna woman I surveyed that she administers the money for the family even though only her husband (a Miskitu man) has an income (Field Note 8). Examples of stores in Bilwi are shown in Figures 9-12.



Figure 9. An aisle of food in Supermercado Monter, Bilwi. Photo by author.



Figure 10. A container and cookware shop in Bilwi's main market. Photo by author.



Figure 11. A clothing shop in Bilwi's main market. Photo by author.



Figure 12. A store selling motorcycles in Bilwi. Photo by author.

Regardless of who handles the money for the family, it should only be spent for basic needs. Mirna Cunningham told me that one of “the elements of indigenous economy is no accumulation – if you accumulate you have to share, even if it’s with a party” (Field Note 7). This might still be the norm in most *tawan sirpis* but judging by what I was told from the women I surveyed in Bilwi it seems that the community structure there is less cohesive. This seems to lead to more income disparity within the city.

Of the nine women I surveyed, six of them were employed at least part-time; one was an unemployed student at URACCAN and one was employed as a teaching assistant at the university she attends in the United States. The ninth woman told me that she does not have a job; she only has temporary vocational work. She believes she was fired from her job for political reasons so she now cares for therapy patients in her home when she is able to find any and also does some volunteer work as therapist on the radio. I was told by one woman that “My people like to work” (Field Note 5). She identified many problems that limit this ability: “most women don’t have a good education;” “there is no employment for anyone;” “There is good land here, lots of natural resources, including the sea. There is good land for planting plus woods, but the government does not have an initiative for this” (Field Note 5). She went on to say that “now the indigenous people can’t hunt in the bush because it’s being cut down, which causes the river to close up and makes people more poor” (Field Note 5). So according to her, not only are there no job opportunities but traditional subsistence livelihoods are also at stake due to the capitalist exploitation of their natural resources. However, she does not blame outsiders for these conditions, “indigenous people do this to each other,” she said (Field Note 5). She blames current conditions on corrupt politicians in the regional government. It is her opinion that poverty is a problem because

the government does not look for ways for people to be employed nor do they attempt to establish negotiations or contracts with foreign companies (Field Note 5).

Marlon informed me that the main occupations available in Bilwi are teachers, nurses, fishing, lobster diving, police; government jobs, reverend/minister, or as students (Field Note 6). He believes that about 40% of the population in Bilwi live in the *tawan* but have families in a *tawan sirpi* and go back home to work their *insla* (Field Note 6). Some of these jobs, such as lobster diving, are only available to men. I was told that while there are some women who are working in the fishing industry they are more susceptible to acts of violence since coastal fishing is viewed as the domain of men (Field Note 1). This seems to apply solely to the act of fishing, though and not the industry in general, as I saw many women shelling conchs at the seafood factory I was able to tour (see Figure 13.) Marlon said there are also a lot of people who move to Bilwi to study and go to school since there is a university in the town (BICU) and another nearby (URACCAN) (Field Note 6).



Figure 13. Women shelling conchs in a seafood factory in Bilwi. Photo by author.

Marlon also told me a little about economic practices. He said that the community economy is based on a barter system; people usually produce about 20% more of whatever crops they grow than they need and then barter or sell the rest (Field Note 6). The men usually pay to take a boat to Bilwi or Waspam where they can sell or trade their excess goods, however, sometimes men from the coastal communities will take fish into the inland *tawan sirpis* to trade for beans, rice, and plantains (Field Note 6).

Another practice that little is known about in the academic world involves the use of sexual magic (*praidi saihka*) for economic gain (Herlihy, 2012). Laura Herlihy learned about this practice while conducting field research in Kuri, Honduras. Miskitu women are said to use traditional knowledge to extort monetary wages from the men in their lives. Through this process they both assert their own authority over traditional knowledge and reaffirm men's role as the rightful wage-earner (Herlihy, 2006). However, this is a private subject that is not usually openly discussed with outsiders. As such I was unable to corroborate Herlihy's research during my time in the field.

New Urban Problems

The problems faced by people living in Bilwi are not the same as those facing people living in rural *tawan sirpis*. However, increased migration from rural communities to the larger *tawans*, such as Bilwi, is both compounding the problems in the city and linking them back to the *tawan sirpis*. The municipality of Puerto Cabezas has seen the largest increase in population in the RAAN. Between 1995 and 2005, population grew 29.5% (North Atlantic Regional Council, 2012).

Two of the women I surveyed had moved to Bilwi as single adults to obtain a wage-paying job so they could send either goods or money back to their families. The fact that they are both single is significant since married women do not have the same freedom of movement or control over their own income that single women possess. These particular women moved from Sandy Bay and from Wangki⁷. The woman from Wangki said she uses the money she earns to send clothes and food products that her family is unable to grow back home; she does not send cash since there is no store in their community (Field Note 13). The woman from Sandy Bay said that she sends money back to her grandparents since there is a store in their community where they can purchase items they are unable to produce themselves (Field Note 14). They both told me they work eleven hours a day, six days a week as a helper in another family's home. Their work entails washing clothes, cleaning the house, cooking meals, and watching the family's children (Field Notes 13, 14). Both of these women told me that there is no work for women in their home communities and as a result a lot of people, mostly women, are moving to cities for wage labor (Field Notes 13, 14).

The woman from Sandy Bay told me that there is no work available for women in her community and therefore the women there are not economically independent (Field Note 14). She also said that the women there need all kinds of outside help because they have a lot of problems there, including a lack of food (Field Note 14). However, the woman from a Wangki riverine community, where there is no store, told me that a lot of women in her community *are* economically independent and that they work the lands planting beans

⁷ Even though this woman said that Wangki is the "*tawan*" she is from I believe it is more likely the territory and that she is actually from a smaller *tawan sirpi*. This assumption is due to the fact that she said her home community does not have stores and I saw stores in the *tawan* of Wangki when I was there.

(Field Note 13). She further told me that the men there clear the lands and sometimes work mining gold (Field Note 13). She said that the women in her community do not require any outside help due to these conditions (Field Note 13). This information supports the theory that creating opportunities to obtain paid work does not always lead to more gender equality.

I was told toward the end of my time in Nicaragua that there had been more incidents of violence in the previous six months than in the past three years and that it was getting more dangerous in Bilwi by the week (Field Note 12.) This information was provided by a Canadian woman and her husband who have been living in Bilwi for multiple years. I had heard the word “gangs” used before when being told which parts of town to avoid so I asked if it was mostly gang-related violence. She said she thinks it is mostly four or five men who are responsible for the majority of the violence and she did not think they were organized enough yet to be considered gangs – but they were getting there (Field Note 12).

Unfortunately, during my time in Bilwi I had to go to the police to report a crime. While I was out taking pictures one day a man asked me to take his picture. This is not an uncommon request in town but I was in the town’s cemetery and there were not many people around, plus I did not like the man’s tone so I ignored him at first. He started to follow me and became harshly insistent. I believe his intent was to get me to come close to him. I turned and snapped a picture of him from a safe distance before continuing on my way. I did not notice that he continued to follow me until he suddenly cut me off, pulling a machete from inside his pants, and demanded “la camera.” I was indignant and determined that not only was I going to keep my nice digital camera but also that I was not about to lose the dozens of pictures I had taken that day that had not yet been uploaded to my computer.

I flatly refused. He was holding the machete out towards me and I did not like the fact that he was armed and I was not. I transferred my camera to my left hand and held it behind my back. I quickly reached for the handle of his machete with my right. He moved his arm back, nicking my finger with the blade and grabbed my wrist in his left hand. My move had backfired. He again demanded “la camera.” My mind raced. I attempted to knee him in the groin. He blocked with his left leg and my knee ended up striking the side of his. While I missed my target I did get him to let go of my wrist and I ran for the exit of the cemetery and then jogged most of the way back to Casa Museo.

Although I was not acquainted with the legal system in Bilwi I felt justified in reporting his crime to the police. This incident had transpired on a Saturday and so on Monday, when I had my next meeting with Marlon, I had him accompany me to the police station, which is operated by the national government. I presented the officer there with the photo I had taken of the man and I was informed that he is a known criminal – a thief (Field Note 15). His name and address were recorded in a log book, suggesting he had been arrested before. After taking my statement, an officer went to his house to arrest him.

During our walk back to Casa Museo I asked Marlon what would happen to this man. He said that after I went to the *clinic de medico-forense* the next day to have a doctor document my bruised knee and paper-cut size nick on my finger from the machete, that along with my statement the police would have enough of a case to lock him up for eight or nine months. They would not even need to take him before a judge. I was surprised that a judge would not be involved since that conflicts with the concept of due process in the U.S. It was not my country, though, and I was still a little shaken up from the whole experience so I neglected to follow up on why this was the case.

Instead, I asked Marlon about the conditions in the jail. He told me that the beds are hard, like the cement sidewalk we were walking on. I commented that at least inmates are fed and so some of the extremely poor might actually be better off behind bars. I was quickly corrected. Nicaragua's government is strapped for cash and there are so many more important things to spend their resources on, such as education and HIV/AIDS programs. Prisoners are not provided for by the state. No, they have to rely on their families (Field Note 6.) Economically, this made sense to me. But then I thought about the social implications. What this system means in practice is that women – mothers and wives – have to continue to provide for their male relatives who are locked up and unable to produce any income. These women must either produce or purchase the food, prepare it, and then either they or a child will have to travel to the jail to deliver it to their incarcerated relative. This requires either a long walk to the outskirts of town or paying for a taxi, as most people do not own their own vehicles. In this way the entire family is punished for one man's crime, especially the women.

Marlon had previously told me about the justice system in the rural communities. Laws sometimes differ between communities but many are the same. Most laws are also not written down and are known only through oral traditions, though this is in the process of being changed (Field Note 16). Most *tawan sirpis* do not have jails either. Their system of justice is based upon *pana-pana*. An example Marlon gave me is that if you steal a chicken the usual penalty is that you have to give two chickens back to the person you stole from. If you commit murder the usual punishment is that you are forced to leave your *tawan sirpi*. If you refuse to leave, or if you return, any member of the community can kill you without retribution. Another common punishment for many crimes is to have to clean the entire

community. This way everyone who lives there will benefit and they will also all see what you are doing and know why you are doing it. I was told this acts as a particularly good deterrent (Field Note 6.)

This form of justice works better for these communities than would a system of incarceration. Putting a criminal in jail means that not only is he/she unable to contribute to the well-being of their family and community, but someone must be assigned to work at the jail, which removes another member from productive society. In small, subsistence communities where every member is needed for production of sustenance, a jail just does not make sense.

Another problem along the Coast deals with the use of cocaine. While not directly related to the topic at hand I feel it would be an oversight not to mention its presence. There is a major narco-trafficking highway that runs from Colombia northward along the Caribbean coastline, passing Nicaragua. When these boats encounter police enforcement on the water they throw their drugs overboard to avoid arrest and then recollect them later when they wash up on shore (Field Note 3). At least that is usually how it happens. While I was in Bilwi our study abroad group had to cancel a weekend trip to the community of Wawa Bar because of cocaine that had washed up on shore there. The local people know the value of the drug and this time they decided to keep the profit. When the traffickers showed up looking for their product, they were murdered. Our group was told by people we interacted with regularly in Bilwi that it would not be safe for outsiders to visit Wawa Bar until the cocaine had all been sold.

Due to the presence of cocaine on the Coast, its use has become prevalent among the lobster divers (Dennis, 2003). The American man I spoke to, who works in the lobster

industry, said that narco-trafficking is actually slowing down now (Field Note 3). However, this man also told of an incident when someone once put cocaine in an offering dish at church; the congregation was asked on the following Sunday to please sell their coke and then put the *money* in the basket (Field Note 3). So while the trafficking may be slowing down, the attitude in the community seems to be one of acceptance, if not of use then at least of the integration into the economy. Indeed, a Creole taxi driver in Bilwi informed me that many of the newer cement-walled homes in town had been paid for with drug money. He told me that they probably cost around \$40,000 USD compared to a typical wooden, stilted house that most people live in, which would cost several hundred dollars.

I was informed by my source in Wangki that Honduran drug traffickers on the other side of the river often cross the border into northern Nicaragua (Field Note 2). Due to historical land claims that span both countries, indigenous people are not subject to the international border inspections and crossing regulations that apply to non-indigenous individuals (Field Note 2). While this seems like a logical practice to allow greater connectivity throughout indigenous-held lands it has also allowed for nefarious actions to go undetected. My source told me that the drug traffickers are known to violate women sexually and to engage in sex trafficking as well (Field Note 2). Since none of my other sources mentioned sex trafficking as an issue I believe it is likely restricted to the communities along the Wangki and that it is mainly an international crime. Of course this does not make the occurrence, even if it is geographically limited, any less heinous. However, due to my limited time near the border my information on this issue is minimal. The extent of this drug and sex trafficking operation certainly affects the local economy and women's freedom but researching this issue in depth was beyond my capabilities during my

short time in the field. I do not know whether an outsider would be capable of conducting any meaningful investigation into this situation or if it will ultimately need to be resolved internally by members of the affected communities, but I suspect the later.

Development Aid

Microfinance is increasingly being used in development programs to help individuals acquire the capital they need to start small businesses. However, the concept of debt is not compatible with traditional Miskitu culture and as a result it has only become culturally acceptable to take out loans within the past fifteen to twenty years (Field Note 1). That being said, even though it is now considered acceptable many individuals are still uncomfortable with the idea of incurring debt themselves (Field Notes 1, 5, 10). Due to communal land ownership, property cannot be used as collateral to secure a loan. If a person owns a house that has a significant value, that can be used as collateral (Field Note 1). I was informed that in Bilwi most microcredit loans are given to women as they are considered to be more likely to repay the loan (Field Note 1). This is because women are viewed as more financially responsible than men, who are much more likely to engage in drinking and womanizing.

For example, another woman with whom I spoke, who lives in Waspam, has used microcredit to obtain a loan. She used the money to build a hotel, which she runs. She told me she would like to take out another loan now that the hotel is older and in need of repair, but available funds are very limited and interest rates are high (Field Note 2). According to her, not many people in the Waspam area use loans. She acknowledges that she has directly benefited from microcredit and is grateful but says that help came at a high price. The loan

she received was made available through an NGO working in the area, not the government. It is conceivable that if her hotel was more profitable that she would not be in need of another loan to make repairs. However, she told me that she is not “an enterprise woman” and does not make a large profit off her guests because she always throws in extras for free (Field Note 2). This generosity might be a personal trait or could possibly be a sign of cultural values that are inconsistent with capitalism. More research would need to be conducted into the profitability of Miskitu-owned businesses to discover if this low profitability is a trend.

As stated earlier, a common goal of Western development policies is to increase female employment rates. According to one of my sources in Bilwi who has worked helping families deal with issues involving domestic violence, it does help to reduce incidents of violence when the woman has an income (Field Note 5). However, how husbands and wives spend their incomes is vastly different. My source claims that when men are the sole providers, about 30 percent of their income is for the family and the other 70% is for him to drink and run around; when women work 100 percent of their income is for the family (Field Note 5). She said that women want to show that they have the same rights as men and are equally able to earn money and so they end up paying all the bills; the husband’s income is then spent entirely on himself (Field Note 5). The American man I spoke with gave me a similar percentage. He estimated that lobster divers probably bring home about a quarter of their earnings from each dive trip⁸; the rest of the money is spent on “drink, drugs, and wild women” (Field Note 3).

⁸ The estimate he gave was \$100 out of \$400 USD going to the diver’s family. This is assuming a trip that pays well. A trip resulting in a low catch and thus low pay may cause the distribution of funds to change. Lobster diving is one of the best paid occupations in Bilwi, despite the continuing drop in lobster prices paid per pound of catch.

While this disparity in how men and women spend their income is not an inherent flaw of capitalism, it illustrates a flaw in development priorities. Policies currently focus on “empowering women” by providing them with their own income. In reality these policies result in taking women out of the home, a sphere where they traditionally do enjoy a level of authority, and forcing them into a marketplace where their work is not equally valued. This results in lower incomes for women in the workplace and lower respect for women’s spending rights at home. And since there are still gender divisions applied to the “work” that is done domestically, women still have to accomplish the same tasks of managing the home whether their spouse is employed or not. While such a policy may result in income generation and a higher GNP, it can also lead to a cultural devaluation of women’s contributions. It would make more sense to start with a policy initiative to educate both men and women about the value of women’s contributions to the family, regardless of the space they occupy. Only when women and their contributions are valued equally with men does it benefit the *woman* to earn a monetary income.

Aside from the positive impacts of development aid on women, the entire indigenous community has been found to suffer. An article written specifically about the effects of foreign aid in indigenous communities states,

While there is recognition that ‘it is unethical to forfeit the viability of Indigenous cultures for the benefit of industrial resource extraction’ (Lertzman and Vredenburg 2005, 251), it is considered ethical to encourage Indigenous populations to sell resources based on corporate structures that are vastly different from their traditional organizations. Enhanced market integration influences cultural change as the fulfillment of demands becomes premised on economic criteria and incentives...

Material or cultural change may be particularly strong for Indigenous Peoples with collective or subsistence economies. (Finley-Brook, 2011, p. 336)

Therefore, despite the cultural changes required in order to adapt to global market integration, as long as indigenous communities share in the profit from the extraction of their natural resources they are deemed viable according to outside powers, which value currency above culture. This allows for corporations to participate in the continued extraction of resources without the burden of their activities being labeled unethical. Mirna Cunningham also expressed concerns about the cultural losses taking place due to outside influences. She told me that it is not simply a matter of indigenous people adopting a monetary-based economy, “there’re also social relations that change. There are also spiritual relations, religious relations that change with this whole advance of colonizers into the communities” (Field Note 7).

Market-oriented development can also have a negative impact on the environment. The same study by Finley-Brook quoted above in a more general indigenous context, found that such programs “may also contribute to ecological degradation or encourage the erosion of customary Indigenous practices” (Finley-Brook, 2011, p. 335). One of the women I surveyed was familiar with these effects, “Some communities make bad decisions with their natural resources because they are being taken advantage of by NGOs. It’s just a different way of colonization to take control of natural resources” (Field Note 2). Mirna Cunningham described the concept of ‘colonizer’ as “all of the external actors that have something to do in the community that change the traditional way in which economy used to function in the community” (Field Note 7). This sentiment is also expressed in a work written by indigenous peoples calling for self-determined development, suggesting that “Development is

essentially a dominating process where destinies of peoples are shaped according to a Eurocentric perception of the world” (Tebtebba Foundation, 2010, p. 10).

This brings up the very important issue of institutional violence. One woman referred to the presence of international companies as creating a local “slave economy” (Field Note 1). Whether in the form of for-profit corporations or NGOs, institutions create new power relations with their very presence. Institutions are able to influence how governments structure policy to meet their goals, obfuscating democracy in the process. As a result, local people, who are often labeled “beneficiaries”, are turned into slave labor for foreign economic growth at the expense of their own culture and self-determination. This is beneficial to the organizations involved in delivering aid. And of course donors want to make sure that they receive credit for their humanitarian works. Towards this end, signs promoting development projects and their funders are ubiquitous in the RAAN (see Figures 14-16).



Figure 14. A sign seen in Miguel Bikan advertising the money spent and the financing party for a specific project. Photo by author.



Figure 25. Figure 15. A sign indicating that a project to supply potable water for several communities, including Kamla, was funded jointly by Nicaragua and Japan. Photo by author.



Figure 16. A sign in Miguel Bikan listing the 42 communities that have benefited from the Euro-Solar Program along with the program's objective and cost. Photo by author.

It is not only the culture at the community level that is being affected. The regional government is widely viewed as being corrupt (Field Notes 1, 3, 6). Perhaps this is a result of learning to be capitalists a little too well. The American man I spoke to told me that it is not uncommon for foreigners to be charged multiple times for the same service or for access to land and natural resources (Field Note 3). This is the primary reason the dock in Bilwi has still not been rebuilt since Hurricane Felix in 2007. I was told that several companies and aid organizations have offered to rebuild the dock for free but then the local people try to take advantage of them by overcharging and charging them multiple times for the same wood and labor (Field Note 3). As of August 2012, when I left Nicaragua, the dock was still only half of its original length with no indication of any upcoming efforts to further rebuild (see Figure 17.)



Figure 17. A view of the dock in Bilwi and pilings showing how much further it used to extend. Photo by author.

While in Bilwi, Marlon took me to speak to the “boss” of Panalaka, a project of the regional government for strengthening communal and territorial governments (CRAAN, 2012). She told me about the organization’s work to help territories develop written constitutions. Panalaka also helps territories develop a strategic five-year plan to determine their needs and priorities so that when aid funding becomes available, they have a plan in place for how to best use that money (Field Note 16). This seems like an ideal set-up to have the communities and territories receiving the aid to determine how those funds should be spent. However, it seems this is only done when aid organizations approach a particular territory with funds that have not already been earmarked by donors in terms of how they must be spent. And I was informed that with the current global economic recession, those funds are becoming more limited all the time (Field Note 16).

Panalaka’s funds are limited as well for the same reason. They get their operating money from Catalonia, Spain, which has an interest in funding empowerment projects in the RAAN but does not have its own work plan (Field Note 16). Due to the limited amount of money available separate initiatives are not always able to receive separate funding. For example, this woman told me that a territorial president had recently asked her if Panalaka could finance a meeting regarding women’s issues in their territory. She had to tell this man no, not because it was not a worthy cause, but because they cannot afford to finance separate meetings for separate topics (Field Note 16). The solution she suggested was to organize one annual meeting for the territory that would last several days and cover multiple topics simultaneously (Field Note 16). The problem with this however, is that since there are so many complex issues to address it typically requires a meeting on women’s issues to take place in one room while one or more topics just as important to women are

being discussed in other locations (Field Note 16). When this is the case it not only excludes women who participate in that meeting from having their voices heard on other important issues but it also removes men from the conversation who might feel that other issues are more important. If men are not brought into the conversation of women's rights then progress will be limited by men who are not enlightened to the importance of the issue (Field Note 2).

Geography has a lot to do with who has access to NGOs – some communities have 10-15, others that are farther out from the coast have none (Field Note 1). I was told that the regional government of the RAAN is who decides where each NGO will be able to operate (Field Note 16). I do not know *how* those decisions are made. One woman I spoke to from Kamla told me that there are some conflicts in the community because some people do not get studied while others do (Field Note 11). She said that it is up to each individual whether to participate in a study and in her opinion studies are “good for making development” (Field Note 11). She seemed upset that there were not enough studies being conducted for everyone who would like to be involved.

Despite all the conflicts and incompatibilities between Miskitu culture and Western development aid, Miskitu women do still want assistance (Field Notes 1, 2, 5, 9). One woman told me that the women in her community need many things, “mostly projects for women's work, such as how to make dresses, how to grow plants, flowers, and fruit” (Field Note 5). Another woman told me that they only have one clinic in her community with only one nurse and that not all communities have even that; she would like to see more aid organizations providing health care in rural communities (Field Note 9). One woman who has had more interaction with the development community noted that NGOs can provide

more financial support than government programs because government funds are so limited (Field Note 2).

This is a key problem. The Miskitu people are impoverished. It is not just a matter of cultural difference and a dichotomy between Westernizing and remaining a “noble savage”. While I appreciate several Miskitu cultural values, especially the concept of *pana-pana*, I do not want to falsely glorify their way of life. Bigotry, racism, and sexism are all problems that they face in their communities. And their poverty is very real. If the outside world does not provide some form of financial assistance their situation will be worse. The entire country of Nicaragua is impoverished. There simply is not enough money in the country to provide assistance for everyone who needs it.

Domestic Violence

Another problem that many NGOs in the RAAN attempt to address is that of violence towards women, especially domestic violence. I was told by a woman who used to work for one of these organizations that there might be some that are doing things correctly, but that most organizations with which she is familiar just “use the name of gender but do not teach anything; they act as women are always right and men do not exist” (Field Note 5). She worked for nearly two years as a psychotherapist, traveling throughout the entire RAAN to help women with their problems and to encourage them not to permit violence in their homes. She said that if there was “too much violence in a relationship” she would advise the women to leave and “denounce” their husbands, which means to file charges against them (Field Note 5). When a man is denounced to the police for domestic violence the man is taken to jail and the woman is helped to obtain a divorce if

she wants one (Field Note 5). I was informed that there is a lot of domestic violence and that the jailhouse is full of men convicted of violence.

This woman also told me that “violence is part of the culture, like religion” (Field Note 5). She said that the problem with the current policies for women’s liberation is that it only serves to make men want to leave liberal women because men do not recognize women’s rights (Field Note 5). She told me that most men will seek a divorce if women speak up about violence (Field Note 5). Since the cultural norm is also for women to rely on men to provide for them, reporting instances of domestic violence could put their economic security in jeopardy.

However, I was also told that the NGO this woman worked for only wanted her, and their other employees, to help women file charges against their husbands and not to help them actually work through their problems and stay together. She ran into this own problem herself once when she went to the police to “denounce” her own husband. She told me that he used to “run around with girls” and “hurt me emotionally with words” (Field Note 5). She loved her husband and wanted someone to talk to him about his actions but the police only offered to arrest him and help her file for divorce. She did not want a divorce so she was forced to act as his therapist even though she was also his victim (Field Note 5). Fortunately, for her, it seems to have worked; she told me that they are still married and that he respects her now.

Another aspect of violence being part of the culture is that it becomes not only accepted but also expected. During my study abroad, Dr. Herlihy arranged for a North American man who has been living in Bilwi for twenty-one years to talk to us about his experiences with and impressions of the Miskitu culture. He told us he has been married to

a Miskitu woman off and on for sixteen years; at the time of our conversation he was living with her but not married to her (Field Note 3). He told us that a lot of Miskitu women are violent (Field Note 3). He said that his wife thought he wasn't a man because he wouldn't hit her and so she asked to be hit. When he still refused she came at him with a knife and threatened to cut herself and tell the police he did it. After he eventually got the knife away from her she set the curtains on fire with their kids still inside the house (Field Note 3).

However, domestic violence was not always prevalent in Miskitu culture. In a series of interviews with *kukas*, or grandmothers, the storehouses of traditional knowledge, one *kuka* said that "In my day, indigenous women married, had their houses and were respected. There was no maltreatment. Couples stayed loving and affectionate" (Cunningham Kain, 2011).

Recent Gains

Despite these negative conditions that were reported to me during my time in Bilwi, some significant recent gains have also been made. I was told that reporting of domestic violence incidents is up due to recognition of violence as a problem (Field Note 1). It was stressed that incidents of violence have not gone up, just the reporting of those incidents. Also, men are becoming more aware that violence is bad and so it is believed incidents of domestic violence may actually be down, despite statistical trends (Field Note 1). This woman also told me that there are a lot of NGOs in the area working on issues related to violence and building capacity with women. While the psychologist I spoke with was not satisfied with the quality of the services provided, at least people are being informed that domestic violence is something that should not be tolerated (Field Note 3). Also, the

presence of NGOs in the RAAN helps to connect local women to a global support network. I was told that simply having this contact with women in the rest of the world and being aware of advances made elsewhere has taught Miskitu women the importance of working together as a community of women in order to make greater progress for themselves (Field Note 1). This has also helped Miskitu women to see themselves as able to improve their own conditions and more are taking proactive measures, such as attending university, to attempt to do just that (Field Note 1). However, this optimism must still be placed in the context of the local economy and the lack of diverse career opportunities that are available for women (Field Note 1). About eighty women in the village of Kisalaya have been running an organic vegetable farm for nine years. According to my source in Waspam, there is less violence to women during crop sales when the women have an income (Field Note 2). Since this income is controlled by the women, it also reduces their dependency on male providers.

The Church is one place where women assume leadership roles that are denied to them in other aspects of their lives (Field Notes 8, 13, 14). This seemed counterintuitive to me at first considering the fact that it is a major cause of women's repression in other aspects of their lives. However, I was told by three women I surveyed who did not have any female leadership in their communities that women did possess leadership roles in their churches. This access to leadership within the Church has also been documented by Laura Herlihy (Herlihy, 2011).

Another important aspect of the Church is that it represents essentially the only nongovernmental institution at the community level. Mirna Cunningham informed me that with a communal government, everyone in the community is part of the government and

therefore there is no real civil society (Field Note 7). This absence results in government and the Church being the only institutions present in most people's lives.

More women are attending universities and seeking professional careers, especially in the city. In an interview with Herlihy, Mirna said that "The main accomplishment of women in the last twenty-five years is that they have become more visible" (Herlihy, 2011, p. 221). This trend will allow upcoming generations of women to be more financially autonomous. However, gender inequality in education is still a problem. If families can only afford to send one child to school, it is still a boy who is sent while girls are kept home to help raise the other children (Field Note 1). A problem concerning higher education for women relates more to social issues. Currently scholarships are available to both men and women for the purpose of attending university. However, the scholarships are not tailored to fit the needs of women (Field Note 7). Mirna told me that by the age of fourteen or fifteen many young women already have babies. Scholarships that do not provide these women with the ability to bring their young children to school with them or hire someone to care for them at home preclude them being able to continue their education (Field Note 7). This opens more opportunities to men who then become providers, placing them in a position of power within their family, and thus continuing the cycle of male dominance and female subordination. This power structure also plays a role in the continued perpetuation of domestic violence (Field Note 1).

Women have recently gained a right to DNA testing to confirm paternity, allowing them to sue for child support (Field Note 1). This promises to be a significant benefit for single mothers who may be excluded from certain job opportunities due to continuing

gender discrimination. However, this only results in actual financial assistance if the father has a recorded monetary income.

Not all advances are without setbacks. My source in Waspam informed me that not long ago a nearby village elected a woman judge and on the next day all the women in the village were beaten by their husbands as punishment (Field Note 2). In this instance a record of elected officials would indicate progress in this village since a woman had been elected to an important position within the community. However, such documentation would not reveal the true attitude towards women in the community. This example thus highlights the importance of local knowledge as a complement to scholarly research.

Self-Determined Development

The most significant gains for indigenous people on a global scale have been the establishment of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), both of which came due to their own persistent insistence (Tebtebba Foundation, 2010). The World Bank Operational Policy 4.10 on Indigenous Peoples (2005), the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) Operational Policy on Indigenous Peoples and Strategy for Indigenous Development (2006), and the Asian Development Bank Policy on Indigenous Peoples (1998) also all provide protections for indigenous communities regarding development practices (Tebtebba Foundation, 2010). The IADB Strategy Paper states that development with identity:

...refers to a process that includes strengthening of indigenous peoples, harmony and sustained interaction with their environment, sound management of natural resources and territories, the creation and exercise of authority, and respect for the

rights and values of indigenous peoples, including cultural, economic, social and institutional rights, in accordance with their worldview and governance. This is a concept based on interconnectedness, reciprocity and solidarity. It seeks to consolidate the conditions in which indigenous peoples can thrive and grow in harmony with their surroundings by capitalizing on the potential of their cultural, natural, and social assets, according to their priorities. (Tebtebba Foundation, 2010, p.56)

According to a publication by the Tebtebba Foundation, a group formed by indigenous people to promote indigenous rights, self-determined development consists of the following:

- Promote principles of equity, interconnectedness, reciprocity, collectivity and community solidarity.
- Strengthen, protect and enhance distinct cultural institutions, indigenous philosophies and worldviews, customary laws and governance systems and protect traditional knowledge.
- Respect and promote right to self-determination (right to determine political status and pursue freely economic, social and cultural development.)
- Start from the indigenous concepts and indicators of wellbeing.
- Strengthen indigenous practices which are in harmony with nature and which aim for conservation of resources for future generations.
- Respect and protect right to lands, territories and resources, and ensure control, ownership and access to these.

- Equality, non-discrimination and right to political participation in all decision making bodies underpin all laws, policies, programmes (sic) and projects.
- Respect and promote cultural rights, right to identity and right to development.
- Promote indigenous peoples' political participation in governance structures and other decision-making processes.
- Reinforce traditional livelihoods of indigenous peoples which are ecologically sustainable and more equitable.
- Demand-driven: fully involve indigenous peoples in identifying, designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating development programs, policies or projects.
- Enhance economic, social, political, cultural and spiritual wellbeing and diversity and develop indicators for monitoring progress.
- Promote use of mother tongue, establish bilingual and intercultural education.
- Revitalize cultural traditions and customs consistent with international human rights.
- Promote and support integrated local development projects that ensure the leadership role played by indigenous organizations and communities in project conceptualization, participatory planning, decentralized execution and local capacity building.
- Protect indigenous peoples' intellectual, cultural, religious and spiritual property and provide redress for misappropriation.

- Provide adequate social services adapted to the socio-cultural and linguistic characteristics of indigenous peoples.
- Respect and operationalize free, prior and informed consent.
- Ensure the balance between subsistence economies, market economy and the interface between these.
- Develop and use culturally appropriate and environmentally sustainable technologies.
- Reinforce resilience and adaptation processes of indigenous peoples.

(Tebtebba Foundation, 2010, pp. 66-68)

While in Bilwi I was made aware of recent local publications on this very topic.

Indigenous leaders have been involved in a lengthy process with the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues to modify the UN Millennium Development Goals. They set up meetings of experts and finally made recommendations of appropriate indicators of indigenous development to the UN in 2008. I had found earlier reports published by the UN before I left the country to conduct my field work. While in Nicaragua I was given a book published by the Tebtebba Foundation discussing the entire process and also the results, including culturally relevant development indicators for indigenous peoples. The research and even publication of results has already been completed by indigenous people themselves. They have been ignored long enough to know that they are the ones who have to fight to conserve their culture. And they are doing it.

Such indigenous publications, which were valuable to this research, include the Center for Indigenous Peoples' Autonomy and Development's *Latin American and Caribbean Regional Expert Meeting on Indicators of Wellbeing and Indigenous Peoples* (2007),

Tebtebba's *Indigenous Women, Climate Change and Forests* (2011), *Towards an Alternative Development Paradigm: Indigenous People's Self-Determined Development* (2010), *Indicators Relevant for Indigenous Peoples: A Resource Book* (2008), and Wangki Tangni's *Memoria: Foro de Mujeres Indigenas del Wangki (2008-2009)* (2010).

Programs are even beginning to be carried out at a local level. In the Wangki municipality, women from 114 villages get together in annual forums called Foro de Mujeres Indigenas del Wangki to discuss women's rights (Field Note 2). The first year the forum met, 2009, they established an agenda; the second year they created an action plan; the third year they invited men to attend the forum and improved the action plan since they realized that they could not improve their situation without training men in gender issues as well; the fourth year, the year I was there, they were slated to discuss violence against women and women's voice in local governments (Field Note 2).

Mirna told me that this forum is very important because it promotes the visibility of women's needs, aims to change the attitudes and conditions that they face at home by including men, and provides a sense of a larger female community (Field Note 7). She said that "In a way autonomy is like a tricky set-up because it gives back the responsibility to the communities. But in the communities women have a very weak position" (Field Note 7). She believes that the best way to create change is by incorporating the measures stated above (Field Note 7).

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

During my time in the field, I found that the matrifocal, or mother-centered, nature of the Miskitu people did not seem to have nearly the amount of impact on the lack of cultural compatibility with Western development structures that I thought it would. While it is an uncommon practice in most of the world and therefore intriguing to Western scholars, I found it to be irrelevant to my research question regarding economic autonomy. While women in this system are in charge of making several important economic decisions for the household, such as how much food is surplus and able to be sold along with how much remains for household consumption, this is not the same as economic autonomy. Therefore, I am comfortable stating that a woman's access to economic resources does not increase as a direct result of matrifocal domestic organization.

This is not to say that matrifocality does not have any effects on Miskitu societal structure. It is suggested in the literature that female-centered social organization strengthens female kinship groups and while this was not my topic of investigation, I found nothing to refute that claim (Herlihy, 2012). An argument could be put forth that strong female kinship groups could be used to bolster women's confidence and thus position within society. I would not disagree that such groups could be used as a tool to help empower women but I did not find that to be a natural occurrence during the course of my research.

Despite this finding, which goes against my central theory, I found that the overall indigenous nature of Miskitu culture had a very substantial impact on their cultural compatibility with Western development. Indigenous values of reciprocity and no

accumulation are especially incompatible with Western economic values of profit and consumption. Therefore, while matrilocality is not the cause of this incompatibility, I do believe that Western development strategies are fundamentally incompatible with Miskitu culture.

One of the most important aspects of Miskitu laws and traditions that I noticed is their variability over space. While there are many similarities between the laws and traditions of Miskitu people from different *tawans* and *tawan sirpis*, enough to provide a clear cultural homogeneity, there is enough differentiation that generalizations about the economic and political status of women cannot be made regarding the entire region at this point in time.

One clear example of the difference in how women are treated by location relates to widows. There is no official policy at any level of governance stating that widows should be cared for or assisted as suits their needs. Many communities do ensure that widows' fields continue to be prepared for planting and that other tasks designated as 'male' are done for them. However, these actions are decided upon at the community level, leaving widows with various levels of ability to maintain an independent household depending on their location.

While the economic conditions are very poor in the RAAN, I was told that the unequal status of women has more to do with the social institutions than with the overall economic situation (Field Note 1). Simply stated, women cannot achieve economic equality when they do not enjoy social equality. This is a result of the patriarchal power system that prevails in Miskitu society despite their matrilocality social structure. However, with the help of NGOs, women's issues are being discussed more openly and initiatives are being taken to

connect women on a large scale to help them address the challenges they face. The ability of Miskitu women to relate to other women on a global scale reinforces Doreen Massey's expanded conception of the local based on social relations and not restricted by geographic borders (Massey, 2005).

The current economic situation has been caused by outside disturbance through the imposition of wage labor practices by foreign corporations. The practice of *pana-pana* has thus deteriorated with the continued promotion of a market economy by outside actors. The Western concept of Progress is synonymous with increased capital production through neoliberal policies implemented by Western agencies. While the Miskitu have historically managed to balance a market-based exchange with foreigners and the protection of their cultural values and practices by limiting their integration of free-market-based monetary transactions into interpersonal economic relationships, this has been rapidly changing in recent years. A consequence of this change is the increasing decline in reciprocity networks accompanied by heightened individualism.

All cultures change and adapt over time. Indigenous cultures are often viewed as vestiges of the past; for them to change is seen as becoming less indigenous. However, I do not believe that wearing Western clothes, driving cars, and using the internet makes the Miskitu any less indigenous. If they were to abandon their language along with their core values and beliefs, then I think their indigenous culture would be lost. To me, a key part of indigenous identity is perspective or world view. For instance, on several occasions Marlon tried to make me more aware of how the Miskitu people use and interact with their natural resources. At first I thought this was mainly due to his own interest in the topic, considering his job with the forest service, and I did not express much interest since I considered it to be

a topic separate from my own. I realized later that mine had been a very limited view, constructed by my Western upbringing. For the Miskitu, like many indigenous people, nature and natural resources are vital to their perspective. I had begun my research with a Western focus on the cash economy and it took some time in the field before I realized the full importance of “raw” resources to the economic system of the Miskitu and that these goods represented more than just a means to access cash.

One of the women I surveyed commented on this topic as well, stating that Westernizing programs erode their culture and change how they are perceived by outsiders. She realized that continued development aid is contingent upon outsiders’ perception of the Miskitu as an indigenous group and is concerned that the effects of current programs will prevent, or at least decrease, future funding. The point she made is quite poignant. In our globalized world which continues to become more homogeneous there have been recent efforts to protect pockets of indigenous cultures. These efforts often come with monetary aid. However, this only benefits groups who are recognized as indigenous by those outsiders in power.

My interpretation of this situation is that indigenous societies are caught in a catch-22. The only way for them to attract foreign aid is to be recognized by the outside world (namely such Westernized bodies as the UN, World Bank, and the IMF) as groups possessing a unique indigenous heritage those entities feel is worthy of preservation. However, their concept of “preservation” is one which prioritizes static historical processes and is incompatible with the dynamic nature of culture.

This means that indigenous communities are currently the targets of two main types of foreign monetary aid. One type is labeled “developmental” and aims at Westernizing

their culture and economic practices, thus jeopardizing their way of life. The other type, “preservation”, limits all growth and adaptation as foreign influences and therefore incompatible with the indigenous culture they aim to protect. These policies can sometimes lead a group to develop a capitalist tourism economy based on a caricaturization of their own culture. However, it is important to realize that the protection and conservation of culture does not require stagnation. Indigenous perspectives can be protected while allowing societies to adapt to globalization as they see fit.

Through my experiences I have come to view culture as a non-static *thought process* that centers more on core values than any particular outward expression. The introduction of new political or economic systems which prioritize different values, such as individual wealth and power versus community well-being, can pose a serious threat to the values, and thus culture, of indigenous peoples. When these policies are taken up with the express intent of obliterating a culture, we call it ethnocide. While that may not be the intent of current development policies we must ask ourselves if the result is the same.

Moving Forward

Historically, the view of the “native” researcher has been one of an insider who has the connections and knowledge required to provide outside, First World researchers with local insight and perspective. It was then the Western researcher who would publish and earn credit for developing new theories (Association of Black Anthropologists, 1997). This neocolonial attitude rejects the abilities of native people to speak on their own behalf (Spivak, 1995). And this neocolonial culture is not limited to Western researchers but indeed is prevalent in the politics of development as well. What needs to be done is for developed

governments and economies to act as a reservoir of information to assist other cultures in learning what approaches might work best for them. However, this information should be made available on-demand and not be pre-filtered and forced upon developing nations.

Considering that statement, my writing of this document may seem hypocritical, being as I am a Western researcher relying upon the knowledge and perspective of my indigenous research “subjects”. However, I believe that I still have a valuable point to make: I feel I have confirmed one aspect of my central theory, that Western development policies structured largely by white people from a patriarchal, Eurocentric mindset are not best-suited for development on the Nicaraguan Atlantic Coast. As it turns out, this is not a new thought. Global indigenous leaders have known for some time that the best and most effective way to alleviate poverty in indigenous societies while maintaining their identity requires direct collaboration with the communities themselves and they have been attempting to change the system presented to them by Western powers.

While I went into this endeavor with altruistic intent, I have learned that as an outsider I am ultimately unfit to decide what the best policies are for the Miskitu in the RAAN. I came to the above conclusion based not so much on my perceptions of the situations I encountered but on the words of the women with whom I spoke and the indigenous-authored texts to which I became exposed while in the field. However, it is impossible to entirely remove myself from the equation. Therefore, it must be acknowledged that all conclusions in this document are mine alone. While a number of these indigenous texts are available online I did not discover any of them on my own prior to traveling to Nicaragua, despite what I considered to be a thorough search of the available literature. This is because the works are not published in academic journals or as books

available for sale outside the local area and are typically only found on the website of the publishing company. For this reason I also hope that my contribution to the literature easily available to Western readers will make others more aware of the wealth of indigenous literature in existence.

I found the problem is not that the indigenous communities of the world are not speaking, it is that we in the West need to learn how to listen. Since my time in the field was limited there are many complicating factors that I discovered but was unable to explore in depth. If I continue with this line of inquiry in the future the best method would be for me to assist a local Miskitu woman who would ideally become the primary researcher. This practice of teaching research techniques to locals who are better suited to conduct the research themselves is lauded by feminist investigators and should be incorporated in all fields of study. While participatory research may yield similar findings, only truly collaborative research also empowers the members of the community and elevates them from research subject to researcher.

APPENDIX A

HSIRB Approval Letter

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY



Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Date: February 15, 2012

To: Lucius Hallett, Principal Investigator
Ariana Toth, Student Investigator for thesisFrom: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair 

Re: HSIRB Project Number 12-02-08

This letter will serve as confirmation that the change to your research project titled "Economic Autonomy of the Miskitu Women of the North Atlantic Autonomous Region, Nicaragua: Do Current Development Policies Apply to Matrifocal Societies" requested in your memo dated February 14, 2012 (to modify consent document to be more accessible to target population) has been approved by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board.

The conditions and the duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: February 2, 2013

Walwood Hall, Kalamazoo, MI 49008-5456
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APPENDIX B

Excerpts from: *Nicaragua: Technical Progress Report on National Human Development Plan as of 2010*

Table 1
Nicaragua: Change in the Incidence of Poverty by Area and Region of Residence

Geographic Area	General Poor		Extreme Poor		Change 2009-05	
	2005	2009	2005	2009	GP	EP
National	48.3	42.5	17.2	14.6	-5.8	-2.6
Urban	30.9	26.8	6.7	5.6	-4.1	-1.1
Rural	70.3	63.3	30.6	26.6	-7.0	-3.9
Managua	21.2	22.5	3.6	3.7	1.3	0.1
Urban Pacific	37.7	28.7	6.4	6.8	-9.0	0.4
Rural Pacific	61.5	54.8	20.8	21.8	-6.7	1.0
Urban Center	39.3	29.8	12.8	7.0	-9.5	-5.8
Rural Center	76.8	68.8	37.1	29.3	-8.0	-7.8
Urban Atlantic	37.8	36.3	9.8	8.6	-1.5	-1.2
Rural Atlantic	76.6	68.8	34.2	30.7	-7.8	-3.5

Source: EMNV 2005 and 2009

This notable reduction in poverty, particularly in rural areas, is due in great part first to programs intended to provide financial resources and resources in kind to micro, small, and medium-sized producers, such as the Zero Hunger³ and the Zero Usury⁴ programs, and second to the increase in international prices for raw materials (p. 33).

During the period 2001-2005, general poverty by gender increased for both males and females, by 2.4 percent and 2.6 percent, respectively. Similarly, extreme poverty grew by 2.1 and 2.3 percent for males and females, respectively (p. 33).

Severity of poverty: The extreme poverty severity indexⁱ for the entire country was 1.34 in 2009. It was 0.35 in urban areas but 6.5 times higher in rural areas (2.64), indicating that the rural extreme poor are much farther from reaching the poverty line than the urban extreme poor.

ⁱ This index indicates the inequality of average consumption among the poor or extreme poor, meaning that it measures the distance between the general or extreme poverty line and individual consumption.

The severity of poverty fell during the period 2005-2009, reducing the gap in all areas and more obviously in rural areas (Table 4) (p.37).

Table 5
Nicaragua: Change in Depth and Severity of Poverty

Area of Study	Depth Index		Change	Severity Index		Change
	2005	2009	2009-05	2005	2009	2009-05
General Poverty						
National	17.20	14.06	-3.14	8.20	6.33	-1.87
Urban area	8.76	7.14	-1.62	3.50	2.75	-0.75
Rural area	28.07	23.22	-4.85	14.08	11.06	-3.02
Managua	5.35	5.49	0.14	2.00	1.96	-0.04
Urban Pacific	10.00	7.93	-2.07	3.75	3.21	-0.53
Rural Pacific	21.27	19.04	-2.23	9.59	8.82	-0.77
Urban Central	13.50	8.39	-5.11	6.28	3.35	-2.93
Rural Central	32.60	25.46	-7.14	17.00	12.16	-4.84
Urban Atlantic	11.20	10.40	-0.80	4.50	4.00	-0.50
Rural Atlantic	31.30	26.62	-4.69	15.98	13.05	-2.93
Extreme Poverty						
National	4.16	3.60	-0.56	1.46	1.34	-0.12
Urban area	1.33	1.16	-0.17	0.41	0.35	-0.06
Rural area	7.70	6.82	-0.88	2.78	2.64	-0.14
Managua	0.63	0.70	0.07	0.14	0.21	0.07
Urban Pacific	1.10	1.57	0.47	0.28	0.55	0.27
Rural Pacific	3.99	5.52	1.53	1.15	2.02	0.87
Urban Central	3.13	1.45	-1.68	1.17	0.39	-0.78
Rural Central	9.91	7.32	-2.59	3.69	2.91	-0.78
Urban Atlantic	1.65	1.58	-0.07	0.41	0.39	-0.02
Rural Atlantic	9.33	8.41	-0.92	3.52	3.26	-0.26

Source: EMNV 2005 and 2009

Perspective / Strategic Objective	Results Indicator	Baseline 2007	2008	2009			2010			Institution Responsible
				Goal	Obs.	% achieved	Goal	Obs. 1	% achieved	
				DEVELOPMENT OF THE CARIBBEAN COAST						
1) Reduce illiteracy	Illiteracy rate for people that are 10 years of age or older	28.6	20.4	6.4	12.15	52.67	3.8	7.83	48.53	MINED
2) Assure the right to property	Number of indigenous and Afro-descendant territories and complementary areas demarcated and titled	5	2	3	3	100	5	5	100	Property Administration Office SDCC
3) Develop economic transformation that is equitable, sustainable and harmonious between humans and nature	% increase in access to electricity services Number of families productively rehabilitated living in indigenous and Afro-descendant territories and the most impoverished municipalities	8,698	6,080	4,310.0	4,310	100	8,236	8,236		SDCC
4) Strengthen autonomous institutional development	Formulation and implementation of expanded multi-year planning and budget that is 80% aligned and in harmony with the Development Plan of the Caribbean Coast by 2011	Allocation of task by MHCP-AN	Regional MPMM Formulated	Regional MPMM formulated that integrates at least two sectors to be regionalized	Regional MPMM formulated that integrates at least two sectors to be regionalized	100	Regional MPMM formulated that integrates at least two sectors to be regionalized	Regional MPMM formulated that integrates at least two sectors to be regionalized	100	SDCC

CARIBBEAN COAST DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Progress made during the period 2007-10 to improve the socio-economic well-being of the Caribbean population is reflected in the demarcation and titling of 15 indigenous and afrodescendant territories, covering a land area of 22,478.99 km² and benefiting 103,790 inhabitants in 215 communities. More than 114,000 producers have participated in production programs: the Food Production Program (Zero Hunger) has delivered 11,394 production bonds to women heads of family and the basic grain seeds program has benefited 3,000 families. The Zero Usury program is active in eight communities (Bluefields, Kukra Hill, Waslala, Puerto Cabezas, Waspan, Rosita, Bonanza, and Siuna). In 2010, the School Meals Program delivered production packages to 1,068 families in Miskito and Mayangna communities in the municipalities of Prinzapolka, Bonanza, Rosita, and Siuna.

In education, the right to intercultural bilingual education in original languages (miskita, manangna and creole English languages) up to the fourth grade and progress has been made in the process of regionalizing education.

With the restoration of the right to free healthcare, the Caribbean population has received more than 1.5 million medical consultations, with laboratory examinations performed and medications provided. Maternal mortality fell by 34 percent and deaths in children under the age of one fell by 16 percent. Forty-five new health units and four maternity centers began to operate and four new primary hospitals were built. In water and sanitation, more than 148,000 people have access to water and/or sanitation services. However, although there have been some solutions, a definitive solution is still needed for the problem of water and sanitation on the Caribbean coast.

Improvements were made to land transportation in the trunk routes of Waspam-Bilwi-Las MinasRío Blanco. Ongoing maintenance was assured for the Waslala-Siuna and Rama-Laguna de Perlas trunk routes and the Nueva Guinea-Bluefields road was rehabilitated. In air transport, the airfield in Bilwi was completed and the construction phase began on the new air terminals in Bluefields and Corn Island. Electrification was brought to Kukra Hill, Laguna de Perlas, La Desembocadura, Mulukukú, Siuna, Alamikamba, Bonanza, Rosita, and Tasba Pri, benefiting 54,000 Caribbean households. In addition, Eurosolar hybrid photovoltaic systems were installed in isolated communities of Bonanza, Prinzapolka, Bilwi, Siuna, Rosita, and Waslala.

In agroindustry, the sowing of cacao and cocoa has been promoted in addition to a milk storage center in Layasiksa. Some 1,800 families have benefited from the strengthening of the production and harvesting of basic grains, eggs, pork, tubers, and fruits.

Fishing has been promoted through support for small-scale fisherman, with financing of US\$1.8 million, with materials and tools, benefiting 1,405 families of fishermen in the Southern Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAS) and 2,150 families in the Northern Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN). In addition, 50 fishermen received outboard motors as part of the Emergency Recovery Project following Hurricane Felix.

Seventy-five forest communities have been organized into 14 community forestry companies that received technical and financial assistance for their formation, training, and equipping for the exploitation and processing of timber. In addition, the forests in the RAAN have been protected with a forest surveillance system.

The autonomous institutional status of the Caribbean coast has been strengthened through training for institutional representatives in management and proactive follow-up for implementing the Caribbean Coast Development Plan; regionalizing health, education, and forestry; and providing training for regional, municipal, and territorial governments in productive plans and strategies for the Caribbean coast. An historical milestone was reached during this period with the declaration of a Special Development Zone for the communities of Alto Coco and Bocay, which allows the indigenous population to be included in development plans and programs. The institutional strengthening of the territories entails a redefinition of the autonomy process, culminating in reform of an autonomy statute with the institutional and legal adjustments required for self-government (p. 24-25).

CARIBBEAN COAST DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The Caribbean Coast Development Strategy has three main thrusts:

- To increase the socio-economic well-being of the population;
- To achieve an economic, equitable, sustainable and harmonious transformation between human beings and nature;
- To strengthen the autonomy of institutions in leading human development in the Caribbean.

Progress made in 2007-2010 with respect to improving the socio-economic well-being of the Caribbean population is reflected in:

- The demarcation and titling of 15 indigenous territories and lands pertaining to Afrodescendants covering 22,478.99 km², to the benefit of 103,790 inhabitants of 215 communities.
- More than 114,000 producers have taken part in productive programs: (1) The Food Production (Zero Hunger) Program has delivered 11,394 production vouchers to female heads of household; (2) The basic grains seeds program has benefited 3,000 families.
- The Zero Usury Program is present in eight municipalities (Bluefields, Kukra Hill, Waslala, Puerto Cabezas, Waspan, Rosita, Bonanza and Siuna) and received financing totaling C\$5,751,100 in 2010.
- In 2010 the School Feeding Program delivered production packages to 1,068 families in Miskito and Mayangna communities in the municipalities of Prinzapolka, Bonanza, Rosita and Siuna.
- The Sectoral Rural Development Program supporting small and medium-sized farmers in the municipalities of Bonanza and Waspam in the RAAN delivered 312 technological input packages, each worth US\$500 and established 240 plots of land to grow diversified crops and 422 hectares for agroforestry.
- The Compassion Program (Programa Corazón) promoted and financed 92 projects in indigenous communities in the Bosawas Reservation in food production, traditional medicine and community ecotourism.

Social infrastructure for sports and cultural events was improved and expanded with the construction of 50 municipal and community sports facilities.

In education, the authorities have restored the right to an intercultural bilingual education in native languages (Miskito, Mayagna, and English-based Creole) through 4th grade; and progress has been made with the regionalization of education. As a result of the "From Martí to Fidel" national literacy campaign, Bonanza and Siuna in the RAAN and Bocana de Paiwas, Corn Island and the mouth of the Río Grande in the RAAS were declared free of illiteracy. The "De Sandino a Fonseca" literacy campaign in 2010 resulted in the following localities also being declared free of illiteracy: Rosita, Mulukukú and Waspam in the RAAN and Muelle de los Bueyes, Laguna de Perlas and La Cruz de Río Grande in the RAAS.

Over 120 schools and institutes were repaired, expanded, or built.

With the restitution of the right to free health care, the Caribbean population benefited from 1.5 million medical consultations, as well as laboratory tests and medicines. The maternal mortality rate was cut by 34 percent and the rate for children dying under one year of age fell by 16 percent. Forty-five health units and four maternity homes started functioning and four new primary hospitals were built. Improvements were also made to the Regional Hospitals in Bilwi and Bluefields. A challenge still pending, however, is child

nutrition, which needs to be addressed on an inter-agency basis, with programs run jointly by central government and regional government institutions.

As regards water and sanitation, more than 148,000 people have access to water and/or sanitation services. However, this, too, is a major challenge for the development of the Caribbean coast and one that needs to be resolved in the short and medium term.

Progress made in economic infrastructure can be seen in land, water and air transportation.

With respect to overland transportation, work was done to improve the main roads between

Waspam-Bilwi, Las Minas and Río Blanco, which now include 20 km of hydraulic cement concrete on critical stretches and 13 all-weather bridges. Ongoing maintenance is provided for the roads between Waslala and Siuna and between Rama and Laguna de Perlas, and rehabilitation work was done on the road from Nueva Guinea to Bluefields.

In air transportation, the main improvement was completion of the runway in Bilwi and the beginning of the construction phase for the new meteorological air terminals in Bluefields and Corn Island.

Electricity was brought to Kukra Hill, Laguna de Perlas, La Desembocadura, Mulukuku, Siuna, Alamikamban, Bonanza, Rosita and Tasba Pri, benefiting 54,000 Caribbean households.

Hybrid Eurosolar photovoltaic power systems were also installed in remote communities in Bonanza, Prinzapolka, Bilwi, Siuna, Rosita and Waslala.

Northern and southern tourism development poles were established, with a series of initiatives undertaken in various municipalities for an international clean-up of coasts and river banks and to implement the program called "Cultural Revival and Creative Productive Development of the Nicaraguan Caribbean Coast." This program encouraged the participation of local tourism enterprises in the First International Tourism Fair (FENITUR) in 2010.

Developments in agroindustry include the sowing of cocoa beans and coconut (the latter helping to revive the black farmers' organization called "Black Farmers back to the land"). A collection and storage center for milk was also built in Layasika and 1,800 families have benefited from improved production and collection of basic grains, eggs, pork, tubers and fruit.

Fishing has been encouraged by supporting artisanal fishermen, providing US\$1.8 million in finance, and by the provision of materials and tools, benefiting 1,405 families of fishermen in the RAAS and 2,150 families in the RAAN. In addition, 50 fishermen received outboard motors as part of the Emergency Recovery Project following Hurricane Felix.

Seventy-five forestry communities have been organized into 14 community forestry enterprises, which receive technical and financial assistance at start-up and for training and the equipment they need to exploit and process the timber. In the RAAN, a forestry surveillance system has also been set up to protect the forests.

The autonomous institutions of the Caribbean Coast have been strengthened by providing training for representatives of the institutions in management and proactive monitoring of implementation of the Caribbean Coast Development Plan, the regionalization of health care, education and forestry; and by training regional, municipal and provincial governments in plans and productive strategies for the Caribbean Coast. A historical milestone in this period was the Declaration of the Alto Coco and Bocay communities as a Special Development Zone, as that enables the indigenous population to participate in development plans and programs.

Institutional strengthening of the territories will involve redefining their autonomy in a process that culminates in a reform of the autonomy statute that includes institutional and legal adjustments required for self-government (p. 142-144).

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FIELD NOTES

1. Survey one. Conducted June 14, 2012, in Bilwi, in English.
2. Survey two. Conducted June 17, 2012, in Waspam, in English.
3. Informal lecture by American man on June 20, 2012, in Bilwi, in English.
4. Avelino Cox Molina. Lecture on June 30, 2012, in Bilwi, in Spanish and translated by a fluent speaker among the study abroad students.
5. Survey three. Conducted July 9, 2012, in Bilwi, in English.
6. Marlon Dalvez Cassanova. Multiple conversations taking place over six weeks with one interview session on July 13, 2012, in English.
7. Interview with Mirna Cunningham Kain. Conducted July 16, 2012, in Bilwi, in English.
8. Survey four. Conducted July 16, 2012, in Kamla, primarily conducted in Miskitu with translations by Marlon Dalvez Cassanova.
9. Survey five. Conducted July 16, 2012, in Kamla, in Miskitu with translations by Marlon Dalvez Cassanova.
10. Survey six. Conducted July 18, 2012, in a barrio of Bilwi, in Spanish with translations by Marlon Dalvez Cassanova.
11. Survey seven. Conducted July 21, 2012, at URACCAN, in Miskitu with translations by Marlon Dalvez Cassanova.
12. Conversation with minister of Creole Moravian Church in Puerto Cabeza, July 22, 2012, in English.
13. Survey eight. Conducted July 24, 2012, in Bilwi, in Spanish with translations by Marlon Dalvez Cassanova.

14. Survey nine. Conducted July 24, 2012, in Bilwi, with introductory questions conducted in Spanish by author and complex questions in Miskitu with translations by Marlon Dalvez Cassanova.
15. Police. Report of attempted mugging to police on July 30, 2012 at the police station in Bilwi, in Spanish with translations by Marlon Dalvez Cassanova.
16. Conversation with head of Panalaka at the regional government offices in Bilwi, in English.
17. Conversation with employee for el Nuevo FISE. July 31, 2012 in Bilwi, with translations by Marlon Dalvez Cassanova.